

**Public statement
February 12: Red Hand Day**

PAREN! (STOP!): Pact for the prevention for the non-repetition of violations against girls, boys and adolescents in the Colombian armed conflict and conflict-related violence

Colombia, February 12, 2021

Today on the 12th of February, 2021, on the worldwide initiative "Red Hand Day" to eliminate recruitment and use of children and adolescents in war, commemorating 19 years of the enforcement of The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), civil society organizations and government entities agreed to issue this statement to draw attention to the situation of violations of children's and adolescents' rights in Colombia; especially due to the continuity of the effects against this population as a consequence of the armed conflict and conflict-related violence in the midst of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, which causes the disease known as COVID19.

Approaches to the Reality of Boys, Girls and Adolescents in Colombia

The closure of education institutions, the intensity of the actions of the different armed groups with operations in the country and the serious humanitarian crisis inflicted on the general population, provide ideal conditions for human rights violations and serious infractions of international humanitarian laws against children and adolescents. According to the records of the Observatory of Children and Armed Conflict of COALICO (Observatorio de Niñez y Conflicto Armado - ONCA), during 2020 there were at least 79 events affecting approximately 222 girls, boys and adolescents who were victims or at risk of being victims due to the use and recruitment by the illegal armed groups.

These events occurred even though last year the Ombudsman's Office (Defensoría del Pueblo) had issued an average of 23 early warnings that revealed the persistence of the risk of recruitment and use of girls, boys and adolescents in areas such as: Antioquia, Caquetá, Cauca, Chocó, Meta, Nariño, Valle del Cauca and Putumayo, and despite that the national government launched in the end of last July the National Plan for the prevention of recruitment, and the implementation of the program "Súmate por Mí" (Join me for me) led by the Presidential Council for Human Rights and International Affairs, in 86 municipalities prioritized for the prevention of recruitment. With these programs it is hoped that it will be an opportunity to identify and strengthen the routes or actions provided for in the national plan and local plans for the prevention of these violations and effectively reduce the risk and recruitment of children, and the use of girls, boys and adolescents by the different armed actors.

According to 2020 records from the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, at least 24 girls and boys were killed in the different massacres perpetrated in the country by the armed groups.

On the other hand, forced displacement, confinement, and denial of humanitarian access became part of the effects that continued during the last year, thus at least 25,366 Colombians were victims of forced displacement in at least 94 events registered by the Office of United Nations for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the UN (OCHA). Information registered by the ONCA observatory of COALICO reports that at least 5,742 children and adolescents were victims of these situations in 45 monitored events. The departments where this situation occurred most strongly were Antioquia, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño and Valle del Cauca.

We draw particular attention to the aforementioned affectations that victimize children and adolescents from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, and we emphasize the need to actions especially of a comprehensive nature and often with a community focus, attending to the particularities of this population to address the risks they face while avoiding actions with damage.

The COVID-19 pandemic and confinement situations derived from the Coronavirus limit the humanitarian response in areas with conflict contexts, increase risks for children such as recruitment, the events generated by antipersonnel mines and the probability of sexual violence, around schools, affecting these references as safe spaces in the communities. The fear caused by the use of these spaces by non-educational actors, plus damage to school infrastructure, can go against a safe return to school and maintain the learning disruption.

With this complex panorama, and returning to the spirit and obligations contained in the OPAC, which not only calls states to comply, recognize and take actions to guarantee the rights of girls, boys and adolescents in their territory, but also insists on the need to eliminate and prohibit all actions related to recruitment and/or involvement in any action related to armed conflicts. We consider it imperative that the Colombian State reaffirm its commitment to promote all actions that are within its scope to protect children and adolescents in Colombia from the consequences derived from their participation in the armed conflict. Finally, by preventing these situations from continuing to occur, they will contribute to stop these violations and we will achieve the non-repetition of these actions in the country.

A proposal

Therefore, our *red hands* this year join the **"PAREN!" (Stop)** and we urge all co-responsible actors, in particular the Colombian State, to work with the purpose that the *Pact for the non-repetition of violations against girls, boys and adolescents in the armed conflict and related violence* to become a common goal and a constant commitment to the validity of the rights of children and adolescence in the following steps:

Protegiendo - Protecting children and adolescents from armed conflict and all kinds of violence.

Aprendiendo - Learning from their knowledge

Respetando - Respecting their interests

Escuchando - Listening to their concerns and attending to their proposals

Niñas, niños y adolescentes - Girls, boys and adolescents out of the war!

The following civil organizations and government entities subscribe to this public statement and join the **PAREN! (Stop!)** initiative:

National organizations and entities

1. Coalición contra la vinculación de niños, niñas y jóvenes al conflicto armado en Colombia (COALICO), conformada por: Asociación Centro de Desarrollo y Consultoría Psicosocial Taller de Vida; Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta (Justapaz); Benposta Nación de Muchach@s; Corporación Vínculos; Defensa de Niñas y Niños Internacional (DNI Colombia); Fundación Creciendo Unidos (FCU) y Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados Colombia (JRS Colombia)
2. Fundación Save the Children Colombia
3. Subdirección para la Infancia de la Secretaria Distrital de Integración Social de la Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá
4. Terre des Hommes Lausanne (tdhL)
5. Alianza por la niñez colombiana, conformada por: Agencia PAND; Aldeas Infantiles SOS; Bethany Global; Centro Internacional de Educación y Desarrollo Humano (Cinde); Children International; Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo; Corporación Somos Más; Fondo Acción; Fundación Ama la Vida Aliwen Servicios Sociales Integrales; Fundación Apego; Fundación Operación Sonrisa; Fundación PLAN; Fundación Antonio Restrepo Barco; Fundación Saldarriaga Concha; Fundación Save The Children; Jerez & Sandoval – Medios y RS; Observatorio de Infancia de la Universidad Nacional; Terre des Hommes; RED PAI-Red de Protección de Infancia; Red PaPaz; Pontificia Universidad Javeriana-Facultad de Psicología y World Vision
6. Asociación Centro de Desarrollo y Consultoría Psicosocial Taller de Vida
7. Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta (Justapaz)
8. Asociación de Afrocolombianos Desplazados (AFRODES)
9. Asociación de Colegios Jesuitas de Colombia (ACODESI)
10. Asociación Santa Rita para la Educación y Promoción (FUNSAREP)
11. Asociación de Venezolanos en Nariño (ASOVENAR)
12. Benposta Nación de Muchach@s
13. Caracolas en red podemos
14. Censat Agua Viva
15. Centro de Atención Psicosocial (CAPS)
16. Centro de Promoción Integral para la Mujer y la Familia- Taller Abierto
17. COLVENZ Región Pacífico
18. Concejo ciudadano de Mujeres Pasto
19. Cormepaz-Corporación de Memoria y Paz – Buenaventura
20. Corporación Infancia y Desarrollo (LA CID)
21. Corporación Vínculos
22. Defensa de Niñas y Niños Internacional (DNI Colombia)
23. Escuela de Arte Taller Sur
24. Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Chocó (FISCH)
25. Fundación Creciendo Unidos (FCU)
26. Fundación Cultural Cagüinga
27. Fundación Fuerza Eva
28. Fundación PAX Colombia
29. Fundación Pro & Paz ¡Por un futuro Mejor! (Colectivo juvenil de Buenaventura)
30. Fundación Progreso y Paz - PRO&PAZ
31. Fundación Visiones para el Desarrollo Integral de la Población
32. Humanidad Vigente Corporación Jurídica
33. Mesa de trabajo por la vida de Medellín y REDEPAZ Antioquia
34. Pastoral Social Diócesis de Buenaventura
35. Red de Derechos Humanos, Piamonte Cauca y Cofanía Jardines de Sucumbimos Ipiales-Nariño
36. Red de Iniciativas por la Paz y contra la Guerra-REDEPAZ
37. Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados Colombia (JRS Colombia)
38. Tejido Juvenil Rafael Uribe Uribe, conformado por: Colectivo Distrito de Arte CCB, Colectivo Emergente, Colectivo Épsilon, Colectivo JAK (Jóvenes activos por la convivencia), Colectivo Sin Fronteras
39. Vicaría del Sur Arquidiócesis de Florencia
40. Women's Link Worldwide
41. World Vision Colombia

Latin American and Caribbean Organizations

42. Ciudadanía Joven - Movimiento ISAIAS PERÚ
43. Federación Coordinadora Nicaragüense de ONGs que Trabajan con la Niñez y la Adolescencia (CODENI)
44. Programa Centralidad de la Niñez Latinoamericana. Garantes de las actividades e iniciativas que se emprenden en favor de la niñez latinoamericana y caribeña. conformada por: Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM); World Vision América Latina; Secretariado Latinoamericano y Caribeño Cáritas (Selacc); Confederación Interamericana de Educación Católica (CIEC); Confederación Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Religiosos y Religiosas (CLAR); Federación Internacional Fe y Alegría (FIFyA) y Movimiento con la Niñez y Juventud (MNJ)
45. Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados América Latina y el Caribe (JRS LAC)
46. Tejiendo Redes Infancia en América Latina y el Caribe

International organizations

47. DKA Austria – Agencia del Movimiento de niñas e niños católicos de Austria
48. Fundación ALBOAN
49. Fundación Entreculturas Fe y Alegría
50. MADRE: Viva Girls, una iniciativa por niñas adolescentes
51. Terre des hommes Suisse (tdh Suisse)