

**Committee:** Disarmament and International Security

**Issue:** Decommissioning child soldiers in Colombia

**Student Officer:** Fotis Aggelidis

**Position:** Co-Chair

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## PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Fotis Aggelidis and I am an upcoming 11th grader in the German School of Thessaloniki (DST). I will have the honor and the pleasure to serve as a Co-Chair of the Disarmament and International Committee in the 3<sup>rd</sup> DSTMUN conference. I am really excited and looking forward to the conference since this is my first time as a Student Officer.

To begin with, I would like to congratulate you all for participating in this conference. From my experience, MUN has a lot to offer. It will give you the opportunity to expand your knowledge of international relations as well as to broaden your horizons regarding politics. But simultaneously you can improve your English and meet new people.

Moving on, the Study Guide will equip you with the most of the necessary information of the topic, but in order to understand it better, it is advised that you conduct some further research on your own. Specifically, in this study guide, you will find definitions of key terms, events, previous attempts aiming to solve the issue regarding our topic. To that end, you shouldn't only familiarize yourself with your country's policy on the topic at hand, but all major issues concerning it.

My e-mail address is [faggelid@gmail.com](mailto:faggelid@gmail.com). You are highly encouraged to contact me if you have any questions about the topic, the committee or the conference in general.

Yours truly,  
Fotis Aggelidis

## TOPIC INTRODUCTION

“On April 27th, 1979 a nine-year-old boy by the name of Luis Alfonso Velasquez Flórez, who was an active member in the rebellion against Anastasio Somoza, was shot in the head by a soldier. The National Guard ran a military vehicle over him while he was still alive.”<sup>1</sup>

Colombia is the only country in the US that uses children as child soldiers. The child recruitment in Columbia is a very important and long debated topic, since it has been going for a lot of decades. More specifically, unauthorized armed groups like the National Liberation Army (ELN) and former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), recruit both boys and girls as soldiers and attempt to control border crossings and cause chaos on civilians through killings, terrorism and sexual violence. They battle for control not only between each other but also on the Colombian soldiers.

To fulfil this purpose, they use young children of both sexes to fight as soldiers in this conflict. They complete many different tasks such as kidnapping and then getting the ransom and combatants. They are also used to guard hostages, as human shields and as messengers or spies.



**Figure 1: Child soldiers in Colombia recruited by FARC**

<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, they transport arms and place mines and some sources also mention that these children are being used in order to produce and sell cocaine.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Child soldier

A child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force

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<sup>1</sup> Parra, Jaime Alberto Carmona et al. "Child Soldiers In Colombia: Five Views". *Universitas Psychologica*, 2010, <http://www.scielo.org.co/pdf/rups/v11n3/v11n3a06.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Florey, Rebecca. "The Reality Of Colombia'S Child Soldiers". *Colombia News | Colombia Reports*, 2015, <https://colombiareports.com/reality-colombias-child-soldiers/>.

or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes.<sup>3</sup>

### Armed Conflict

International armed conflicts exist whenever there is a resort to armed force between two or more States.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the Colombian armed conflict is between the Colombian government and paramilitary groups such as the FARC or the ELN.

### Guerrilla

A member of an irregular, usually indigenous military or paramilitary force operating in small bands in occupied territory to harass and undermine the enemy, as by surprise raids. For instance, the members of the FARC are guerrillas.

### The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is a Marxist revolutionary guerrilla force engaging in armed struggle against the government of Colombia.<sup>5</sup>

### National Liberation Army (ELN)

ELN is a Marxist terrorist group formed in 1963 by Colombian intellectuals. They are responsible for a campaign of mass kidnappings and resistance to the government's efforts to stop the drug trade.<sup>6</sup>

### Rebel Groups

Rebel Groups are political groups that impose open, armed and organized resistance to a constituted government for reasons such as to create a political change or gain independence.<sup>7</sup> In our topic, such rebel groups are the FARC and the ELN.

### Terrorism

Terrorism is the calculated use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby to bring about a particular political objective. Terrorism has been practised by political organizations with both rightist and leftist objectives, by nationalistic and religious groups, by revolutionaries, and even by state

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<sup>3</sup> "The Effects Of Being A Child Soldier Can Last A Lifetime". *War Child*, 2018, <https://www.warchild.org.uk/what-we-do/protection/risks-for-child-soldiers-are-huge-and-the-effects-can-last-a-lifetime>.

<sup>4</sup> "How Is The Term "Armed Conflict" Defined In International Humanitarian Law?". *Icrc.Org*, 2020, <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/opinion-paper-armed-conflict.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> "Definition Of Farc | Dictionary.Com". *Www.Dictionary.Com*, 2020, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/farc>.

<sup>6</sup> "ELN". *Thefreedictionary.Com*, 2020, <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/ELN>.

<sup>7</sup> "Rebel Groups". *Thefreedictionary.Com*, 2020, <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Rebel+groups>.

institutions such as armies, intelligence services, and police.<sup>8</sup> Many actions of the FARC and other guerilla groups can be characterized as terrorism.

### Decommission

To remove the child soldiers from the region from service and help them recover.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### The Colombian conflict

Colombia's armed conflict was a result of economic, political and social factors. It is traced back to a long history of political violence, high social and economic inequality, engagement of political ideologies and unequal distribution of land, power, and wealth in the country. The date of the conflict's beginning is believed to be in 1964 with the creation of the FARC.



*Figure 2: Child soldiers in war training in Colombia<sup>9</sup>*

A lot of people, mostly in low-income and rural areas of the country, supported the guerrilla groups like the FARC, the ELN since they tried to create greater equality through communism. There was not extreme violence during these years and happened mostly in distant parts of the country. But, simultaneously Colombia reinforced the political and financial autonomy of some local governments and, thus, strengthened the Colombian Government.

Between 1985 and 2002 the Colombian government supported right-wing paramilitaries in order to eliminate members and supporters of the opposition part. This resulted in thousands of people being killed or disappearing and therefore the

<sup>8</sup> "Terrorism | Definition, History, & Facts". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/terrorism>.

<sup>9</sup> "Former FARC Child Soldiers Face Uncertain Future". *The Bogotá Post*, 2016, <https://thebogotapost.com/former-farc-child-soldiers-face-uncertain-future/18454/>.

conflict was aggravated. Furthermore, the violence in the region was increased as a result of drug trafficking. In Colombia, the drug activity included the production and trafficking of cocaine, marijuana as well as other drugs mainly in the United States. After the Colombian Government closed many of the drug cartels, many capitalist and communist organizations resorted to extortion and kidnapping for financing, activities which led to a loss of support from the local population. These funds helped them to buy weapons which were sometimes used to attack military and civilian targets.

During 2002 and 2008, the Colombian government pressured the FARC and other such groups militarily. After the aggression, many security indicators improved. Moreover, the cocaine production in Colombia was diminished and it was declared that Colombia wasn't the world's biggest producer of cocaine anymore.



*Figure 3: The picture depicts the number of innocent lives lost due to the Colombian conflict and it highlights the necessity for a permanent peace solution.*

In February 2008, millions of Colombians demonstrated against the FARC and other paramilitary groups. This action leads to the demobilization of a lot of FARC and ELN soldiers. In parallel, the military of the Republic of Colombia was boosted.

In 2012 the Colombian government and the FARC organization had a peace talk in order to find a political solution to this armed conflict. After almost four years of peace negotiations, the Colombian state and the FARC announced an agreement on a 6-point plan towards peace and reconciliation.

The current president of Colombia, Iván Duque Márquez, who is in presidency since the national elections in 2018, stands clearly against the peace agreement with the FARC. For his position, he has received heavy criticism by the opposition party. After he took the office, several murders of ex-combatants and ex-member of paramilitary groups which surrendered during the peace treaty achieved by the former President, took place all over Colombia. These actions resulted in freezing negotiations for peace and thus engaging again in war actions.



*Figure 4: The current President of Colombia, Ivan Duque Marquez*

## Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is the largest armed group in Colombia. It was established in the mid-1960s and was based on Marxist ideologies. They tend to use a variety of military strategies in addition to more non-conventional methods, such as terrorism. The funding of FARC's operations was mainly by kidnapping and demanding ransom, by illegal mining and by implementing heavy taxes on several forms of economic activity and by producing and distributing drugs.

The FARC forces (numbered in 2007) consist of 18,000 men and women as well as around 16,000 children<sup>10</sup>. In 2010, the Colombian military estimated that FARC forces were about 13,800 members in numbers and in 2011 were fewer than 10,000. By 2013 it was reported that 26,648 FARC and ELN members had decided to withdraw from war action since 2002.



Figure 5: FARC forces recruitment campaign

In 2012, the FARC attacked the energy infrastructure many times, despite showing signs of fatigue. In 2014, they did not seek to engage in outright combat with the army, instead, they organized small ambushes against isolated army units. Later on, in June 2016, the FARC agreed on a ceasefire with the President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos. This was considered a historic moment to end the ongoing for 50 years of war. Within the same year, the Colombian government and the FARC signed a contract for peace, an action also approved by the Congress. Furthermore, in 2017 FARC stopped to characterize itself as an armed group, since it proceeded in disarming all its units, handing weapons to the UN. In the same year, it declared its transformation into a political party under the name of "Common Alternative Revolutionary Force", in compliance with Colombian legislation. However, a small number of rebels in favour of the old character of the organization continued with illegal activities such as drug trafficking.

<sup>10</sup> Tiempo, Casa. "Desmovilización, Principal Arma Contra Las Guerrillas". *El Tiempo*, 2013, <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-13077339>.

In 2019, a small number of FARC leaders disrespecting the official signed bilateral agreements for peace and willing to rearming, resulted in them being attacked by the Colombian government, which ultimately lead to their death.

### The recruitment of child soldiers

Violence and poverty in Colombia led to the recruitment to thousands of children into armed groups, either by force extracting them violently from their families or under the promise that membership in the group will offer a better chance to life, health care and protection or escape from starvation, unemployment,



**Figure 6: Child soldiers of FARC marching in rural areas**

and ethnic or political persecution. In addition, sometimes young children are lured into joining an armed group, by the offer of low valued presents such as a watch or a small amount of money. Through this trick they make them feel obligated in order to return the favour and join the group. Most of the child soldiers are grateful to get three meals per day, as “privileged” members of the group, they feel

protected and empowered with a weapon since they believe that in this way, they gain the respect of the community. According to published surveys, child soldiers are mainly male (88%), have an average age of 15 years. The children who report having joined the armed groups, due to family or political violence are 35% and due to economic reasons are 65%. Their recruitment into armed groups is, therefore, explained both as a result of economic as well as socio-cultural factors. <sup>11</sup>

Before the FARC demobilization, about 16,000 child soldiers<sup>12</sup> were estimated in Colombia. They acquire broad yet quick military training, such as the usage of a weapon, how to manufacture bombs and military strategy in general. They become prisoners of their leaders. If they disobey or deny completing a task the punishments are very cruel and even extend to the death penalty in some cases. But according to various sources, heavy recruitment is mainly towards native teenagers, since they have a very good three-dimensional orientation in the jungle. Furthermore, it is a

<sup>11</sup> Lieberman, Amy. "UN Security Council To Study Child Soldier Use In Colombia - Passblue". *Passblue*, 2012, <https://www.passblue.com/2012/06/28/un-security-council-to-study-child-soldier-use-in-colombia/>.

<sup>12</sup> "Recruitment Into Armed Groups And Reintegration Into Society | Children Change Colombia". *Childrenchange colombia.Org*, <https://www.childrenchange colombia.org/en/what-we-do/recruitment-and-reintegration>.

fact that child soldiers are more often killed or injured than adult soldiers. They cost less for the group than adult recruitments since they receive fewer resources, less and smaller weapons and combat equipment. In short, they are expendable.

Specifically, regarding the young girls that are being recruited in these armed groups, they are often subjects of sexual abuse of their commanders. For example, many reports have been sent to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which refer to sexual manipulation of young girls by guerrilla and paramilitary officers. A lot of reports also mention that they recruit teenage girls often for special missions and specifically they force the girls to have sexual relations with government soldiers in order to get information from them and then deliver them back.

### Effects and implications on the child soldiers after being recruited

Child soldiers after being recruited, if they manage to survive the battles and the abuse of their commanders, have enormous problems with their rehabilitation. Firstly, all these children are deprived of essential education, since they engage in combat and therefore they are more likely to be functionally illiterate. It is common knowledge that being functionally illiterate can cause serious problems in someone's life since it is a heavily criticized group by the society and in



**Figure 7: French satire about stopping the recruitment of child soldiers**

addition, it is harder to get employed in the job market without being subject of manipulation. Moreover, child soldiers are deprived of normal and healthy development in a family environment, which can cause serious mental problems in their adult life. Simultaneously, severe exposure to chronic and traumatic stress during the child's development leads to mental illness and psychological problems causing problems in interaction with the rest of the society.

The Colombian community has developed a negative attitude towards ex-combatants who manage to escape and thus it is common that they experience social isolation. Consequently, some of the ex-combatants can't find a job because they are being socially and irreversibly stigmatized. All the above-mentioned factors force some ex-combatants to rejoin rebel groups since they fail to become financially autonomous and to socially integrate into their civil host communities.

## The human rights violations and the reaction of international organizations

According to the United Nations, both implicated sides in the Colombian conflict use child soldiers and therefore severely violated basic human rights, such as the right to life and liberty, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education and freedom from slavery and torture, with several horrifying actions like killings, intimidations and sexual violence. These inhuman and terrible practices damaged irreversible children in Colombia, local populations and the whole society.

The Human Right Watch (HRW) reported in 2005 that more than 11,000<sup>13</sup> children joined paramilitary armed groups and fought in Colombia's conflict, a percentage which is estimated to be one of the highest in the world. One out of four combatants in Colombia was under 18 years old and thousands were under 15, which was under the Geneva Conventions for minimum age recruitment.

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

### Colombia

Colombia is the main country affected by this issue. At the beginning of the conflict, the recruitment of child soldiers was within "accepted" practices of the Colombian government. Furthermore, they constantly engaged in armed conflicts against the rebel groups and didn't focus on peace negotiations, which led to thousands of civilian deaths including child soldiers. But later on, they tried to restore the balance and finally end this 50-year long war and focus on the economic, social and cultural growth of the country. The Republic of Colombia is committed to protect the rights of children and stop their recruitment as required by basic national documents.

### United States of America (USA)

The US government has already provided countries with child soldiers' help, such as a donation of over \$100 million to UNICEF in 2006, in order to improve the lives of children. Furthermore, it has given \$20 million to specifically help countries with child soldiers, such as Colombia. In general, USA supports the decommission of child soldiers in Colombia.

### Yemen

In Yemen, child soldiers are still being recruited. In their culture, it's considered that a boy enters manhood at the age of 14 or 15 - and part of being a

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<sup>13</sup> "Colombia: Armed Groups Send Children To War | Human Rights Watch". *Human Rights Watch*, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/02/21/colombia-armed-groups-send-children-war>.

man is taking up a weapon. They are recruited by some paramilitary forces and there has also been reported that they are victims of sexual abuse.

### Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

FARC is the largest paramilitary rebel groups of Colombia. One of their main strategic policies is to recruit both young boys and girls and after heavy military training, use them for a variety of tasks to achieve their goals. Lately, they ceased their regular recruitment methods as well as released thousands of child soldiers and proceeded with peace agreements with the Colombian government.

### Human Rights Watch

The Human Rights Watch organization has stated that “We are working to prevent the use of child soldiers and to hold accountable the people who send children to fight”<sup>14</sup>. They are going to donate money and fund local organizations as well as proceed with the further implementation of measures, such as cooperating with local communities, national authorities and international organizations, in order to tackle the issue.

### United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

UNICEF makes efforts to prevent children from joining armed conflicts and being deprived of their family and school environment. They are dedicated to offering help to under-aged ex-combatants and former child soldiers to regain their normal lives and reunite with their families.

### TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1964	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the current largest guerrilla group was set up.
May 27 <sup>th</sup> , 1964	The Colombian war between the government of Colombia, some paramilitary organizations started.
1975-2014	The recruitment of 11,556 15children as child soldiers in FARC took place.

<sup>14</sup> Bleasdale/VII, Marcus. "Child Soldiers | Human Rights Watch". *Hrw.Org*, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights/child-soldiers> .

<sup>15</sup> Moloney, Anastasia. "Colombia's Child Soldiers, A Scourge Of The Past?". *News.Trust.Org*, 2016, <https://news.trust.org/item/20160520165229-7lecr>.

1984	The government and the rebel groups agree on a ceasefire.
1987	The ceasefire agreed in 1984 ends as a presidential candidate associated with FARC was murdered.
2000-2006	Thousands of civilians died every year in the war. These were some of the years with the most blood spilt in the whole conflict.
November 2001	FARC is listed by the US State Department among groups part of the "war on terrorism".
2002-2013	26,648 FARC and ELN members had decided to withdraw from war action.
May 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2008	FARC announces the death of their founder Manuel Marulanda.
November 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2011	The military killed FARC's leader Alfonso Cano.
August 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2012	The Colombian President, Juan Manuel Santos, announces that a new peace process has begun.
May 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2014	FARC agrees to stop the drug trade and trafficking and, thus, losing most of its funding.
September 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2016	The Colombian Government and the FARC leader sign a peace agreement at a ceremony in Cartagena.
August 24 <sup>th</sup> , 2016	The rebels and the government declare that they have reached a final peace agreement.
2016	FARC released child soldiers under 15 from their ranks as part of peace talks with the Colombian government.

2017	FARC did not characterize itself as an armed group anymore and declared its transformation into a political party under the name of “Common Alternative Revolutionary Force”.
2019	Some FARC leader that disrespected the official signed peace agreements were killed by the Colombian government.

**RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS**

**United Nations Security Council Resolution 1261**

In the resolution above, proposed in 1999, the United Nations addressed for the first time in a resolution the topic of the recruitment and usage of child soldiers in an armed conflict. The Council expressed its concern about the long-term effects on peace, security and development. Furthermore, all parties affected by the issue, including Colombia, were asked to comply with their obligations under international law and to ensure the protection of the children as well as to protect their rights during peace negotiation.

**United Nations Security Council Resolution 2427**

This resolution aims to strengthen the protection of children, prevention of their recruitment and involvement in an armed conflict. Furthermore, it urged “all parties to armed conflict to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access to children, respect the exclusively humanitarian nature and impartiality of humanitarian aid and respect the work of all United Nations”<sup>16</sup>. Lastly, it was emphasized that child soldiers, who committed war crimes and were part of the unauthorized paramilitary groups, should be treated as victims.

**United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612**

Security Council Resolution 1612 aims at strengthening child protection on the grounds of preventing children caught in armed conflict from violence and related threats. Key points of the resolution are to improve efficiency and political wheel among opposite parties to achieve successful negotiations. Moreover, the established UN Monitoring and Reporting (MRM) mechanism on children and armed

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<sup>16</sup> "UN Security Council Passes Resolution On Children In Armed Conflict (July 9, 2018) | ASIL". *Asil.Org*, 2018, <https://www.asil.org/ILIB/un-security-council-passes-resolution-children-armed-conflict-july-9-2018>.

conflict should monitor and report the whole range of crimes committed against children in the process of armed conflict. Lastly, it called for organizing an annual open debate on children in armed conflict, grounded on the secretary general's report.

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The recruitment of child soldiers in Colombia has lasted decades and can be defined as a very serious issue. Therefore, a lot of attempts for a viable solution have been made. Firstly, the Colombian government created the 'Plan Colombia' in 2000. This was a six-year plan for 'Peace, Prosperity and Strengthening of the State', which included peace negotiations with the rebels in order to solve the issue, stop the recruitment and the war, which had a lot of ambitions. However, it eventually did not fulfil its purpose; instead, it increased the human rights violations in the country, such as children recruitment. Furthermore, Colombia has negotiated with FARC in order to find a peace agreement once again around 2012. Nevertheless, the first negotiation was not successful and, thus, after some time they proceeded with rebating on the already agreed terms and changed some of them. In addition, in 2001 a global report for child soldiers in Colombia was conducted by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). This report included the context within the Colombian armed conflict, the engaged parties and their policies. Moreover, the report elaborated specifically on the recruitment of child soldiers, the casualties of the war, prevention and demobilization programs. This report aimed at raising global awareness and strengthening the international community's commitment to ending the global scourge of child soldiers.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

### **A peace agreement between the Colombian government and the paramilitary organizations in order to stop the conflict and the recruitment of child soldiers**

The most effective way to decommission child soldiers in the region would be through the end of the war and the establishment of peace. When peace negotiations begin, there must be constant attention to the protection of the children. The government, as well as the rebel groups, should focus on solving the issue and finally moving to a new time of economic, social and cultural development.

### **Using local and United Nations created organizations**

The Colombian government can ask for support from UN organizations, such as the Security Council working group on children and armed conflict, in order to stop the recruitment and protect child soldiers. Moreover, it can use local mental health facilities in order to provide ex-combatants child soldiers with the services as

an essential part of demobilization and rehabilitation programs. Simultaneously, some Colombian schools can be used only by the former child soldiers, in order to make their rehabilitation easier and avoid social isolation. The only viable solution for former child soldiers seems to be their safe return to their families and their integration into the society as functioning members.

### **Governmental Prevention Model**

A prevention model designed and implemented by the Colombian government would also be a possible solution against the recruitment of child soldiers. This model should include a warning system, which would be conducted in three major axes. In the first axis, local families would be informed in order to recognize possible signs of recruitment of their children by paramilitary groups. This informative campaign against such practices could be implemented in schools and community centres of villages or cities in Colombia. The second axis would encourage families, having already recognized possible recruitment threats, to report when their child is at risk of leaving home and joining guerrilla groups. The third and final axis would include legal action by local authorities, according to national legislation. The use of military forces by the authorities would be within the accepted methods depending on the possible danger of the children involved.

### **Identification of High-Risk Recruitment Areas**

A long term but nevertheless effective possible solution is to identify high-risk recruitment areas within Colombia, where guerrilla groups seem to be more active and recruit easier child soldiers. This could be achieved by conducting surveys, gathering statistics and ongoing monitoring of guerrilla activities. Such an initiative should be financed, designed and conducted by international organizations in cooperation with the Colombian government in order to ensure objectivity and efficiency throughout the process.

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