

MADRE /TALLER de VIDA Report: Child Soldiers in Colombia

More than 11,000 children, some as young as eight, are serving as soldiers in Colombia's armed conflict. In a decades-long war that pits the government and paramilitary groups against anti-government guerillas, there truly are no good guys. All sides exploit poor children to advance their combat goals.

For many children from poor families, joining the armed groups is the only way to ensure that they get a meal each day. Some street children are bribed with promises of money and adventure. Others are taken from their families as a "tax" levied by arms groups.

No matter where they come from, these children face horror; many of them are sexually abused for years. Their childhood and humanity are destroyed as they are forced to become killers. Because there are so many impoverished children to be kidnapped or coerced, their safety and their lives are viewed as expendable.

MADRE is working in partnership with [Taller de Vida](#) to provide much needed assistance to children who have been displaced by the war. In a country where 25 percent of the population has been uprooted from their homes by war and poverty, this work is vital for the children. Taller de Vida offers children hope and strength with programs that include:

- Scholarships for children who have no other source of funding to attend primary school. Being out of school and on the street is one of the biggest risk factors for children to be forcibly recruited by armed groups. Uprooted from their homes and separated from their families, many of the children who come to Taller de Vida do not have enough money for food, let alone for school enrollment fees.
- Supplies for the Taller de Vida art school. The Taller de Vida art school offers classes in acting, painting, music, pottery, video, photography and dance. These programs give children who have been displaced by the war a positive environment to develop their creativity and serve as an outlet for their trauma and frustrations.
- Trauma Counseling. Taller de Vida provides trauma counseling to help young people cope with the psychological wounds inflicted by war, including loss of family members, displacement, post-traumatic stress and extreme poverty.

- Books for a Brighter Tomorrow. Working in partnership with MADRE, Taller de Vida has established a children's library, "Books for a Brighter Tomorrow," which offers free access to books for any child who wants to read and helps combat extremely high illiteracy rates.

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to help support MADRE's work with Taller de Vida, please [click here](#). If you prefer to donate by check or money order, please send to:

MADRE

121 W. 27th Street, #301

New York, NY 10001