



# Children of the Andes

Building a future for street children and children at risk in Colombia

Newsletter no. 19 Summer 2001

## “This is not our War”

One million boys and girls displaced from their homes!

The progressive expansion of the armed conflict is generating a serious human rights crisis in Colombia.

2,500 million people have been forced to leave their homes and flee to the cities; but unsurprisingly, it's the children who have been most affected by this forced displacement.

More than 1 million boys and girls have been violently uprooted from their homes and families. The children and young people are dragged along in a migratory current, pressured by violence, threats, massacres and armed confrontations between the different fighting factions.

### UNICEF figures state that of the displaced children:

**12.72%** were boys and girls under the age of 5,

**19.78%** were between 5 and 10 years old,

**12.78%** were between 11 and 14 years old,

**9.03%** were between 15 and 18 years old.

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## Letter from the Chairman

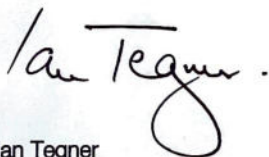
I have taken over the Chairmanship of *Children of the Andes* at a very exciting time: at the start of our second decade, we can look back over 10 years of remarkable achievement. I know you'll join me in paying tribute to the founders who, 10 years ago, had the vision to recognise how funds could be raised in the UK for the welfare of children at risk in Colombia; and to all those who have over the last decade been so generous in their support.

Sadly the need now is even greater than it was then. Violence is producing even more child victims – all for a war which is not theirs. The statistics are horrendous. We have an enormous amount to do, but we are determined and well prepared to do it.

Unfortunately, Jackie Reiter had to resign as Chief Executive at the end of last year due to ill health. Gabriela Bucher acted most effectively as Chief Executive until we were able to make a new appointment, and has now moved to further her career. The Trustees are very grateful to both of them for their dedication to *Children of the Andes*, and to the team of staff and volunteers who have maintained morale and success during a very difficult period.

We have been most fortunate to recruit our new Chief Executive Pilar Arango-Ribeck, who has a lifetime of experience working with children and children's issues in Colombia. Pilar's arrival coincided with a necessary move of offices. We are now resettled at 309 Kentish Town Road, where supporters will always be welcome.

In the coming decade we will continue to work with, and help to fund, Colombian projects to help the children fulfill their lives and potential. These children are Colombia's future. We want to help make that future a peaceful one.



Ian Tegner  
Chairman, *Children of the Andes*

# Boys and Girls and Forced Displacement

### Children as targets in a war that is not theirs!

*Colombian boys and girls are increasingly being caught up in the indiscriminate and violent attacks on civilian populations. The armed factions involved in these politically motivated attacks have been known to kill, kidnap and use children as soldiers in violent combat.*

## **DID YOU KNOW? DURING THE YEAR 2000:**

- 37%** of families fled their homes because of direct exposure to armed conflicts,
- 25%** because of the climate of fear, which gripped the regions in conflict,
- 22%** because of massacres and murders,
- 8%** because of cases of forced disappearances,
- 3%** due to direct attempts against life,
- 2%** because someone in the family had been tortured.

**All these families had young boys and girls!**

**160 children were killed for political purposes.**

*11 year old Maria Julieth Lizaro Ubate was killed on January 18<sup>th</sup> in a grenade attack on a police station in the South of Bogotá.*

**6,000 children participated as soldiers in combat.**

**Of these 6,000:**

- 18%** have killed at least once,
- 60%** have witnessed someone being killed,
- 78%** have seen mutilated corpses,
- 25%** have seen kidnappings,
- 13%** have kidnapped,
- 18%** have seen tortures,
- 40%** have shot someone,
- 28%** have been wounded.

*"They, the paramilitaries, told me that the best way to help my family keep their land was by preparing myself to fight and enter self-defence groups." Juan*

**267 boys and girls were kidnapped and held by the armed factions.**

**Of these:**

- 68.4%** experience post-traumatic stress,
- 21%** experience severe emotional depression.

*Rigoberto, 6 years old, was forced out of his school bus by six masked men. Amidst the horror of his classmates Rigoberto was dragged out and kept in captivity for nine months.*

*Statistics provided by UNICEF-Colombia and COHDES.<sup>2</sup>*

*Children of the Andes is working to provide these children with a life without violence. We are helping boys and girls that have witnessed horrendous war atrocities to deal with their experiences and to build a peaceful future for themselves and their families. Our projects provide a safe environment where they can have fun, recapture their lost childhood and start to love and trust again.*

*If you require further information about children and displacement in Colombia please call, write or email us at:*



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# Two Lives, Two Stories, Two Futures



Forced to grow up living amidst poverty and violence, witnessing massacres and experiencing the loss of family members, Colombian boys and girls do not experience childhood as we know it. Many have had no choice but to leave their homes and resort to surviving the best they can in the harsh streets of the cities, or in urban shanty towns.

Below are two very different accounts comparing the lives of two girls - Jo and Lucia. Jo lives in her home on Merseyside and Lucia lives in the streets of Bogotá.

"My life is really complicated. I am ten years old. We used to live in the Valle del Cauca. Then my family was forced to leave because of threats against my father. That is why we came to Bogotá. We used to live in a village with mountains, trees and animals. It was beautiful. I had lots of friends. I used to run down the mountains and had five little birds that my father had given me as a present. Here in Bogotá life is very hard. My father has been detained and I don't know why. I just know that he is a good man. I am living wherever they take me in. I feel very sad and miss my family. I feel so lonely, living on the streets where I don't know anybody and suffer. I don't go to school and I don't know what my future will be. I just hope that I will see my father soon and be happy again!"

*Lucia Garcia, 10 years old*

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Help children like Lucia to be happy again!

YOU can help make a difference to the lives of many boys and girls who live in Colombia and have to face life on the streets!

By giving monthly to *Children of the Andes* we can plan our funding support and offer many Colombian boys and girls a long-term stable environment.

Please complete the following coupon, and return it to *Children of the Andes* in the enclosed return envelope.

"Hi, I'm Jo. I'm 13 and live in a small village called West Kirby. I have quite a big house with three floors, and I have a bedroom all to myself. In the house there is my Mum, my Dad, my older brother and my pet hamster. We have a big garden, which is great for playing in in the summer. I go to a grammar school. I have lots of friends there, and most of the teachers are very helpful and friendly. Out of school, I play a lot of tennis at my local tennis club. I also play the piano and the saxophone. At home we have a computer, and I like going on it and going on the Internet. A lot of my friends also have the Internet, so I send them e-mails, and talk to them through Instant Messenger. In the future I would like to go to University like my cousins and then I want to be a journalist."

*Joanne Weldon, 13 years old*



Giving children like Lucia a new opportunity.

I / We would like to make a donation to



**Children of the Andes**

£10     £25     £50   
£75     £100     £250   
£300     £ other \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheques payable to  
*Children of the Andes*

OR

We accept the following cards:

Access, Visa, Eurocard, Mastercard, CAF Charity Card

Please debit £   
from my  (card type)  
Expiry date   
Account no.   
Signed   
Date

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

Address

Postcode

Tel no.

Fax no.

E-mail

### Gift Aid declaration

I would like *Children of the Andes* to reclaim tax\* on all donations I have made since 6 April 2000 and on any donations I make in the future.

Signature

Date

\*Please let us know if you change your address or if you no longer pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax equal to that tax we will reclaim on your donations (currently 28p for every £1 you give).

I do/do not require an acknowledgement  
(delete as appropriate)



**Children of the Andes**

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I / We would like to receive the following information:

- A regular giving form
- A legacy information pack
- A corporate sponsorship pack
- More information on becoming an area organiser
- More information on the current situation in Colombia
- An information pack on organisations we support
- More regular news updates

## A New Opportunity for Yolanda and Juan

Children of the Andes has teamed up with a Colombian charity, *Cedavida* or "Give back life", to help families who have been forced out of their homes by the war start a new life away from the dangers of the conflict. A "Peace Building Community" was set up in the war torn zone of Apartado, northern Colombia. With YOUR support and that of The Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, the Community Fund of the National Lottery and the Civil Society Challenge Fund, more than 7,700 people have received direct therapeutic, nutritional, educational and vocational help.



and silent children. They could not laugh or play. They had fled their home with their two older siblings and their mother after seeing their father shot, accused of collaborating with "the other group."

Slowly, with the help of "community mothers" - teachers who themselves have experienced the trauma of war, Yolanda and Juan started their road to recovery. With the help of toys, colour paints and crayons, the children re-enacted scenes that haunted them every day. Juan would be seen alone in a corner, loading and unloading a toy truck, with "mummy", "sister" and "brother" dolls. He would drive them to a place on the other side of the room, unload the dolls and load them back again. Meanwhile, Yolanda painted. She drew painful distorted figures that reflected all the hurt she felt inside.

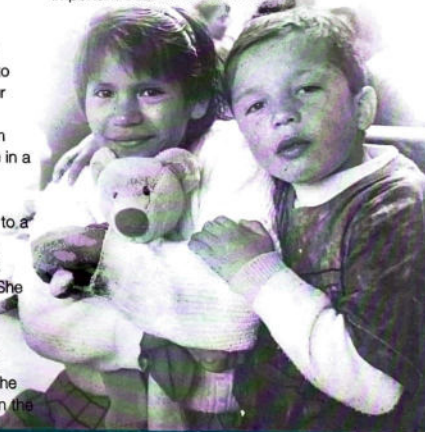
The children received nutritional and medical aid. Their mother attended the vocational training and participated in the

*Cedavida* Community Shop. The siblings came in the afternoons to the youth groups and participated in a conflict mediation workshop.

The results of *Cedavida* have been remarkable. It is probable that for Yolanda and Juan the scars of their experience will never disappear, but they have healed. This year Yolanda has taken her first step out of the closed safe environment of the nursery school and initiated her primary education at the local grammar school. Juan is now reading and beginning to write, but most important of all he is SMILING!



The "Peace Building Community" of Apartado is a little haven amidst the unhappiness of the region. The nursery school, which hosts 120 boys and girls between 2 and 5, is the centre of activity. It was here that Yolanda and Juan arrived two years ago. They were sad



### How your donations have helped the Peace Building Community of Apartado



- **7,700 people have received direct help**
- **A nursery school for 120 boys and girls, 6 classrooms, therapy rooms, recreation units and a full kitchen have been built and equipped**

Sources: UNICEF "Armed Conflict and internal forced displacement in Colombia" UNICEF-Colombia Office, Santa Fe de Bogota, March 2000  
 Cedavida "Formacion de valores democraticos en juvenes" - document presented to Children of the Andes in May 2001  
 COOHES "The Colombian information system on Household Displacement and Human Rights" - SISDES