

# UNICEF HUMANITARIAN ACTION UPDATE

# COLOMBIA

## 28 SEPTEMBER 2007

**UNICEF PROVIDES PROTECTION AND LIFE-SAVING ASSISTANCE TO DISPLACED CHILDREN AND WOMEN, SEEKS TO PREVENT THE RECRUITMENT OF CHILD SOLDIERS, SUPPORTS THE REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN WHO WERE PART OF ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS, AND CARRIES OUT MINE ACTION ACTIVITIES.**

- Based on official records, in the past 10 years, two million Colombians have been displaced, more than half of which are children.
- Internal displacement and confinement are increasing due to violence, threats and pressure. Indigenous populations are particularly affected.
- Recruitment of children and adolescents continues, as well as their engagement in urban armed groups.
- Continued presence of landmines and unexploded ordnances in 31 of the 32 Departments. 30% of the civilian victims are children.



*\*\*The names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UNICEF*

## 1. ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

Colombia has an estimated population of more than 41 million<sup>1</sup>, around 39.7 % of which are under 18 years of age (49% girls and 51% boys). In 2005, an estimated 64.2 per cent of the population lived in poverty and 31 % in extreme poverty<sup>2</sup>. Rural poverty is three times greater than urban poverty, children have a 36 % greater probability of being poor<sup>3</sup> than adults, and the rate of violence associated with the conflict is twice as much in the territories of indigenous populations than in the rest of the country<sup>4</sup>. The country is also vulnerable to natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions.

Internal displacement is the most evident humanitarian effect of the conflict in Colombia. All groups involved in the hostilities are blamed for forced displacement as a result of combat, pressure and threats.

Based on official records, 1,976,970 persons have been displaced in the past 10 years, and of them, 37,400 (or 2%) are indigenous persons and 108,510 (5.5%) are Afro-descendants<sup>5</sup>. On average, at least 400 people are displaced every day. It is estimated that 48% are women. According to Official Statistics, 36% of the displaced population is less than 18 years of age<sup>6</sup>. Poverty is particularly prevalent among internally displaced population (IDPs) (93%). While 12% of Colombian children under five suffered from stunting, this percentage reached 23% among displaced children.

There are no official figures on the number of child soldiers recruited by the illegal armed groups. The average recruitment age of these children is 12.8 years<sup>7</sup> and 88% of these children take part in warfare activities such as combating, explosive manufacturing, planting of landmines or guarding of hostages. All known illegal armed groups recruit children. The vulnerability of girls recruited by the illegal armed groups is particularly high due to early sexual initiation, high rates of pregnancy (36% of teenage girls that are part of armed groups has been pregnant once or more) and abortions (31% of the total of pregnancies).<sup>8</sup>

Despite the demobilization of 30,000 members of the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia), children have not been handed over in the framework of collective demobilizations. Reports of child recruitment continue. There are also concerns about the demobilized being regrouped into criminal groups, as well as the appearance of new illegal armed actors or the strengthening of the existing ones in areas already evacuated by demobilized groups. At least 21 new armed groups have been identified<sup>9</sup>. The situation of violence caused by illegal armed groups remains impregnated by drug trafficking interests.

Colombia has experienced an increase in the number of events involving mines and unexploded ordnances (UXO) between 1990 and 2006, registering the highest number of new victims worldwide in 2005<sup>10</sup>. Between January and December 2006, 65 new child victims were registered in Colombia<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> According to the last census started in October 2005, the population of Colombia is 41.242.948 Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (National Administrative Department of Statistics, DANE, for its acronymus in Spanish).

<sup>2</sup> Declaración conjunta sobre la situación de Derechos Humanos en Colombia para la 62 Sesión de la Comisión de Derechos Humanos de las Naciones Unidas, 2006. Coordinación Colombia, Europa y Estados Unidos.

<sup>3</sup> Measured by unsatisfied basic needs (UBN) Source: Departamento Nacional de Planeación (National Department for Planning).

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF. Los pueblos indígenas en Colombia. Derechos, políticas y desafíos. Bogotá, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Registro Único de Población Desplazada, Acción Social Presidencia de la República. Febrero 2007

<sup>6</sup> Acción Social Presidencia de la República. Febrero 2007 Registro único de Población Desplazada. Acción Social Presidencia de la República. Febrero 2007

<sup>7</sup> Colombia's Ombudsman Report "Characterization of boys and girls separated from Illegal Armed Groups", Bogotá, November 2006 (Information obtained based on interviews with teenagers that have been separated from the Illegal Armed Groups).

<sup>8</sup> Colombia's Ombudsman Report "Characterization of boys and girls separated from Illegal Armed Groups", Bogotá, November 2006 (Information obtained based on interviews with teenagers that have been separated from the Illegal Armed Groups).

<sup>9</sup> Eight Quarterly Report of the Secretary General to the Permanent Council on the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia. (MAPP/OEA). February 2007.

<sup>10</sup> International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Landmine Monitor Report 2005

<sup>11</sup> Observatorio de Minas Antipersonal, Vicepresidencia de la República

Even if a child is not the direct victim of a landmine blast, when a parent suffers an accident it will have an impact on the school attendance and development of their children. Landmines are used for military defense, but are frequently found in school yards, local water sources and on rural access roads and 96% of all mine and UXO accidents occur in rural areas. One of the greatest challenges to mine action in Colombia is trying to ensure that mine action is firmly placed on the humanitarian agenda in the midst of an ongoing situation of violence caused by illegal armed groups. UNICEF strives to ensure that Mine Risk Education is driven by this principle and that the focus of our work is community-based.

Confrontations between security forces and illegal armed groups in March have provoked the displacement of more than 6.000 people that sought shelter in schools and other public places. This is the fourth incident of displacement that in the Municipality of El Charco, Department of Nariño this year. In the same Department, 1018 persons, including approximately 450 children and adolescents have been reported to have been displaced in September 2007.

## **2. UNICEF RESPONSE: ACTIVITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS**

Coordination in humanitarian action among the UN Agencies and main international and national actors has improved significantly between 2006 and 2007. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has been established<sup>12</sup>. A common needs assessment has been carried out. The Thematic Groups on i) Protection, ii) Basic Services and iii) Early Recovery are carrying out common missions to verify different humanitarian crises. The thematic group of Basic Services is being led by UNICEF.

UNICEF is also carrying out training and workshops on Emergency Preparedness as well as on UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies. Four regional workshops with counterparts were conducted, which at the same time allowed the consolidation of an emergency preparedness and child information network, with the participation of 160 people from 60 institutions. Furthermore, a workshop with UNICEF staff was carried out in order to include the final adjustments to the Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (EPRP).

### **Humanitarian action for IDPs**

UNICEF has continued carrying out humanitarian interventions in areas severely affected by violence by illegal armed groups. The strategy is directed mainly at families that have been displaced or are at high risk of displacement, as well as at communities severely affected by the violence. The programme ensures an integrated response that addresses crisis recovery and capacity building needs for dealing with and overcoming crises.

UNICEF supports actions towards the revitalization of primary health care services and pre-primary and primary schools. UNICEF has supported the provision of health and education to about 12,690 children and adolescents in 12 communities in Chocó and in 4 municipalities of Córdoba seriously affected by the violence and destruction caused by the illegal armed groups. In 2007, activities are taking place to increase education coverage, facilitate accessibility, and improve the quality of education with a rights perspective in the municipalities of Chocó, Córdoba, and Norte de Santander.

Another main focus area of work in emergency is the provision of psychosocial support. For that purpose, UNICEF has different groups of youths in the Departments of Chocó, Antioquia, Córdoba and Cauca trained as recreational therapists. These groups provide psychosocial support in the four departments on a regular basis and expand their intervention whenever an emergency occurs.

UNICEF has continued supporting the Vulnerable Population Care Unit – UDAPV – strategy in partnership with the National Registry, UNHCR, Plan International, and Opción Legal, augmenting the

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<sup>12</sup> The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is a team that is formed by the international humanitarian community in Colombia (international agencies and non-governmental organizations) to coordinate humanitarian actions at regional and national level.

National Registry's capacity to increase registration service coverage and identity in areas of difficult access; 6,124 Civil Registration documents and 50,926 Identity Cards were presented to as many children and adolescents in 37 municipalities of 7 departments.

The dramatic situation in Chocó has led UNICEF, together with the World Food Programme, to plan a nutritional survey that will take place in 225 indigenous municipalities, covering a sample of 41,000 people. Once the nutritional assessment is completed, UNICEF expects to undertake actions to ensure access to improved basic services.

## Humanitarian mine action

UNICEF's mine action programme in Colombia has been running since 1999, beginning with activities at national level. UNICEF has supported interventions in 120 municipalities, using public information campaigns, advocacy, mine risk education, training and community liaison activities, together with the National Landmines Observatory and several partner NGOs.

In June 2007, the Government of Colombia decided to elevate the political status of the National Landmines Observatory through its transformation into a Presidential programme for Mine Action<sup>13</sup>. Currently UNICEF has a field based capacity of 43 focal points for mine action. UNICEF is the United Nations System's focal point for coordinating action against mines. In this capacity, UNICEF has led the design and implementation of a multi-year strategy for mine action, which has included active and sustained participation of more than 14 actors.

Together with its counterparts in the departments of Antioquia and Cauca and Magdalena Medio, UNICEF has developed a training programme for local authorities and landmine survivors on the rights of victims of the situation of violence caused by illegal armed groups. To date some 5,000 local civil servants have been trained. The programme also provides direct support to landmine survivors who are in the process of claiming the humanitarian aid established by law. Approximately 300 landmine survivors have received support to date.

In two departments, UNICEF is supporting Handicap International in the identification, rehabilitation and social reintegration of 73 mine survivors and the Centre for Integral Rehabilitation in Colombia (CIREC) in the identification, rehabilitation and social reintegration of 265 people with a disability. This partnership is working with local institutions to promote the rights of victims of landmines and to ensure that the duty bearers respond to their obligations in their treatment and wellbeing. 17 landmine survivors have already established productive projects and a further 15 are currently in the process of training and preparation.

UNICEF is currently providing support to mine action activities in the some of the most affected municipalities in the departments of Antioquia, Cauca, Narino, Bolivar, Sucre and Choco, through Mine Risk Education (MRE) programmes which include trainer of trainers and direct intervention in affected communities. These prevention activities will ensure that an estimated 75,000 people are equipped with knowledge of how to protect themselves and others from the dangers of landmines and UXO in their daily lives.

UNICEF and its partner organizations have developed community-based methodologies for Municipal Needs Assessment; MRE relevant data collection (using a specifically designed methodology for this purpose); and participatory design of MRE activities and materials at a community level.

The continued use and presence of mines and UXOs and the absence of humanitarian de-mining in Colombia mean that activities in Mine Risk Education are the only opportunities available to mitigate the threat to the lives of the civilian population. For that reason, UNICEF and partners have given the

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<sup>13</sup> Decree 2150, June 2007

highest priority to an accident prevention strategy based on risk reduction education methodologies in those municipalities and communities that are directly affected.

## Prevention of child recruitment and protection of children demobilized from illegal armed groups

UNICEF supports and promotes actions aimed at preventing the recruitment of children and adolescents into armed groups and supporting strategies for their demobilization, protection and social integration. UNICEF has undertaken a research with the Office of the Ombudsperson<sup>14</sup> that analyzes factors contributing to children joining illegal armed groups, as well as violations of human rights that occur while they are part of these groups.

Although the majority of children and adolescents demobilized stay in institutions<sup>15</sup>, a study carried out with the Ombudsman's Office has shown greater results if children face the reintegration process while being with their relatives. For this reason, UNICEF has decided to support socio-family alternatives for reintegration with the formulation of a new system of assistance: "*Hogar Gestor*". A pilot testing was initiated in 5 departments selected. Teams made up of two professionals have been selected, and regularly visit and provide psychosocial support to children and adolescents demobilized and to their families. The modality is under the process of being adapted with a view to also assisting indigenous children from the Cauca Department. UNICEF is also participating in the discussions on how to link the public policy for the attention of adults (responsibility of the *Alta Consejería*) with the public policy for adolescents demobilized from illegal armed groups.

UNICEF also supports several regional prevention programmes in the departments of Chocó, Antioquia, Cauca, Córdoba, Montes de María, Magdalena Medio, Urabá Antioqueño with different NGOs. The recreational, music, cultural, and sport groups created are targeting 55,654 children and adolescents as participants. Through these networks, participation is promoted and psychosocial support is provided. Children and adolescents participate in trainings where issues of citizenship participation, public policy, leadership, gender equity, equality, life project, sexual health, vocational training, meaning of human rights, are addressed.

UNICEF has been providing technical assistance for comprehensive legislative reform and the promotion of an organic law on children and adolescents that was recently passed by the Congress. UNICEF and the Office of the Attorney General of the Nation elaborated guidelines for the attention of demobilized children and adolescents. These guidelines seek to help strengthen institutions so that resources can be optimally used and roles within the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF) clarified, and to settle a child friendly procedure forbidding, for example, the military interview model to be applied to persons under 18 years of age.

## Emergency assistance

In April 2007, UNICEF assisted 520 indigenous people of the Nasas ethnic group from the Cauca Department after the eruption of the Huila Volcano. Stocks of plastic sheeting, edukits, blankets and other provisions were supplied for use in the provisional shelters in the most affected municipalities. The strategy of "return to happiness" was put in place benefiting 200 children.

Due to structural deficiencies and complex emergencies, UNICEF supported the delivery of health services and care to 1,050 indigenous people of the Wounan ethnic group from the Department of

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14 Colombia's Ombudsman Report "Characterization of boys and girls separated from Illegal Armed Groups", Bogotá, November 2006 (Information obtained based on interviews with teenagers that have been separated from the Illegal Armed Groups).

15 61% are in institutionalised centres, 34% in socio-familial centres, and 5% under protection networks. Information up to 31st July 2006.

Choco and 780 indigenous people of the Embera ethnic group from Choco. In June, UNICEF intervened in the Mojana region (located in the Northwest of Colombia) which at the time was the area most affected by the floods, with psychosocial recovery activities for children left homeless and displaced because of the floods and landslides. Personnel trained in the “Retorno a la Alegría” (Return to Happiness) methodology travelled to the zone of La Mojana to perform community psychosocial recreational therapy and train community agents and groups of youths. To date, through UNICEF support, 500 children and youth between the ages of 14 and 20 have been trained as peer counsellors in addition to receiving direct psychosocial support.

The rainy season also severely affected the Department of Cordoba. UNICEF and its partners, including UN agencies and international and national non-governmental organisations, are working closely with the Government of Colombia to respond swiftly and effectively to the crisis. To finance these efforts, three grants were approved from the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF)<sup>16</sup> for Food and Nutrition (WFP), shelter (OIM) and for Water and Environmental Sanitation (UNICEF). In order to respond to urgent children’s needs not covered under CERF life-saving criteria, such as psychosocial support and education in emergencies, UNICEF Colombia requested and received additional funding (in the amount of US \$350,000) from UNICEF’s internal Emergency Programme Fund.

### 3. APPEAL REQUIREMENTS AND RECEIPTS

UNICEF outlined a requirement of US\$ 5,500,000 to support humanitarian interventions for children and women in Colombia for 2007. During the Mid-Year Review this amount was revised downwards to US\$ 1,300,000. The table below provides detailed information on the current funding status.

**Table 1: Funds received against 2007 HAR (US\$)**

Sector	Original 2007 HAR requirements	Funds received	Revised funding requirements	Funding gap
Protection of child soldiers and prevention of recruitment	3,800,000	0	0	0
Humanitarian action for internally displaced children	600,000	0	<i>unchanged</i>	600,000
Humanitarian mine action	1,100,000	0	700,000	700,000
<b>Total*</b>	<b>5,500,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,300,000</b>	<b>1,300,000</b>

\*The total includes a maximum recovery rate of 7%. The actual recovery rate on contributions will be calculated in accordance with UNICEF Executive Board Decision 2006/7 dated 9 June 2006.

No emergency funds have been received to date against the 2007 Humanitarian Action Report. However, under the Country Programme ceiling, UNICEF Colombia at present has an actual budget of US\$ 4,390,000 to support humanitarian interventions concentrated on mine action and in preventing the recruitment of children and adolescents into armed groups as well as strategies for their demobilization, protection, care and social reintegration.

<sup>16</sup> Please note that the CERF-funded emergency activities related specifically to the flood response and are therefore not reflected in the funding table.

At the moment, key projects are on hold and remain unimplemented due to the lack of funding. The need of funds for internally displaced children is particularly urgent to support 7,000 indigenous children and their families of the Departments of Chocó and Nariño, who are currently affected by forced displacement or confinement as a result of combat, pressure and threats. Resources are also urgently required to provide training to 30,000 persons on prevention of accidents caused by landmines and unexploded ordinances.

**Table 2: Funding Priorities as of September 2007**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Beneficiaries/coverage</b>	<b>Amount Required (US\$)</b>
Humanitarian action for internally displaced children	7,000 indigenous children and their families affected by displacement or confinement due to combat, pressure and threats	600,000
Humanitarian mine action	30,000 persons to receive training on prevention of accidents caused by landmines and UXO	700,000
<b>Total Priority needs</b>		<b>1,300,000</b>

**Details of the Colombia Programme can be obtained from:**

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