

UNICEF HUMANITARIAN ACTION REPORT 2009

COLOMBIA

THE STORY OF A BOY WHO DID NOT GIVE UP...

This is the story of a boy who lived with his family in a *vereda*. He was nine years old. He attended school half an hour from his house. He was in second grade. He played with his friends. He was happy... until some armed men came to the village and killed a lot of people.

The family decided to leave their farm, their *vereda* and their friends. But two days before they were moving to the city, the armed men ended the life of the boy's father. The boy was sad because his father was very good to him.

In the city, he was left in the care of his sister. He felt lonely and missed the affection of his family as his mother had moved to another town searching for a job and his brothers worked all day as tailors. Several months later, however, his mother sent for him because she had found another husband, who had a son his same age. He felt good. He was able to go back to school and had good results.

At the end of the school year, his brothers told him that the armed men had left the village and that they were again working on the farm to recover what they had lost. He decided to join them and to go to work because their economic situation was weak. He thought that studying was not important in life, that it wasn't good for anything.

One year later, however, a man arrived in the village to collect children and take them to a foundation in a town called Abrego, where they would receive food, studies, clothing etc.

The boy said goodbye to his brothers. Before leaving, he thought, "They killed my father, I work stripping coca leaves, and my mom has a husband. Several of my brothers have found wives and have their own homes. And what will become of me?" Then the boy said, "I'm going to be one of the best kids there in the foundation."

Right now this boy, 15-year-old Yorgen Leandro Robles, is a good student. He participates in a new UNICEF-supported child protection project implemented in the municipality of Abrego, in Catatumbo, Norte de Santander.

Initiated in 2006, this project aims at preventing the voluntary association and recruitment of girls and boys in armed groups – especially displaced and working children – through the promotion of protective environments and structures within the family, community and relevant institutions. It also promotes the participation and the development of vocational, educational, cultural and sports strategies at community level. To date, 1,970 children and adolescents have benefited from this project.

When he finishes his studies, Yorgen wants to become an architect, have a home, be very happy and help those who need his support. He leaves a message for everybody, "No matter how many difficulties appear along the way, don't give up, take heart, everything is possible even if the going is hard."