

**The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers**  
**Colombia**

**Yvonne E. Keairns, PhD**

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# 1. SUMMARY

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“... if a girl got pregnant she was made to have an abortion.”

- *Child Soldier, Colombia*

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“... for far too long, the use of child soldiers has been seen as merely regrettable. We are here to ensure it is recognized as intolerable.” This document provides an opportunity to hear the voices of girl soldiers in Colombia and to more fully understand why this vision by the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, in May 2002, commands our attention.

This report on the voices of girl child soldiers in Colombia is part of a larger study that carried out in-depth interviews with 23 girl soldiers from four different conflict areas around the world. The voices of these girls provide important insights into becoming a child soldier, the experience of being a child soldier and their view of the future. Among the key conclusions were the messages that:

- Becoming a child soldier is very dependent on a combination of the local environment and the personal circumstances surrounding the girl’s life.
- Living in poverty was important in girls joining a movement or being abducted.
- The girls are not searching for ways to retaliate and bring harm to those who had used and misused them. They were looking for ways to make a contribution, to do something meaningful and productive with their life and to make up for the harm they have delivered upon others.

In order to participate in the study the girl soldier must have served as a soldier before reaching the age of 18 years and been out of the conflict for less than two years. Given the in-depth interview methodology, the objective was to obtain interviews from four to six girls from each conflict area. The girls were selected by the country team based on their accessibility, willingness to be interviewed and the team’s ability to assure confidentiality and pro-

vide for their safety. Twenty-two girls met the criteria for this study. There were five girls from Angola, six girls from Colombia, five girls from the Philippines and six girls from Sri Lanka. A seventh girl was included from Sri Lanka. The girl soldiers were from the same armed movement within each country. This is not to say that there were not other armed movements or government armies that used child soldiers.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. The transcribed interviews use fictitious names for the girls in order to maintain confidentiality and safety for the girls. Other identifying information was changed to protect the girls interviewed. Common themes from each of the 23 interviews were identified, articulated and synthesized. The common themes served as the basis for developing conclusions and recommendations. Nine themes were selected and the report is structured around these themes. The themes are grouped into three areas:

- Common characteristics of who they are and their experiences:
  - Family Relationships
  - Festivals and Religion
  - Education
  - Play
- Their evolution and journey as a child soldier:
  - Reason for joining
  - Training and life as a child soldier
  - Reconsideration of the decision
- A view of who they are and how they view the future:
  - Sense of self
  - Time and the future

Key risk factors in the choice to become a child soldier were identified from the voices of the girls. Two of the important risks beyond the central risk of inhabiting a combat zone are being poor and disadvantaged and being separated from their family. These risks were present for the girls studied and played an important role in their becoming a child soldier.

While there are common themes, it is important to know that child soldiers cannot be treated as all

having the same characteristics — even in the same conflict area. The voices of these girls show their horrific memories and angry feelings, but they also show their desire to care for others and to do something with their life. Key recommendations on demobilization from the girls’ messages include:

- Listen to the girl and her experience and needs – provide basic needs and safe forums for discussion when she needs help.
- Work to locate some member of her family or significant adult to bring about some level of reconciliation.
- Provide new experiences that will change her identity from soldier – to reclaim who she is and to regain faith in her decision-making ability.
- Provide opportunities for education and training – the girls recognized the value of education and job skills.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Violence against children is unacceptable. Addressing this problem requires the work of governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and individual men and women. It also requires that we listen to the voices of child soldiers to understand their story. This is an important aspect of our work on prevention, demobilization and reintegration. This study is an effort in listening to the voices of girl soldiers from four countries – Sri Lanka, Angola, Colombia and the Philippines. This report represents the voices of girl soldiers in Colombia.

February 12, 2002 represents a major event in the efforts to end the use of child soldiers. On this day, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child came into force. The enforcement of this international treaty will be important in preventing children from becoming child soldiers and living through the horrific experiences described by the girls in this study. Under the Optional Protocol governments are charged with ensuring the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers as well as protecting and not punishing them. Mary Robinson, United Nations High

Commissioner for Human Rights, stated on February 12, 2002: “We are urging all governments and armed groups to end the military recruitment of children under 18 and to release those children already in service. There can be no excuse for arming children to fight adult wars.”

The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, in his address before the UN Special Session on Children, May 2002, stated that “the deployment of child soldiers is a despicable and damaging practice that must end.” He went on to say, “Those who practice this form of child abuse must be held accountable.” In addition, he stated that “for far too long, the use of child soldiers has been seen as merely regrettable. We are here to ensure it is recognized as intolerable.”

## 3. WHY LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF THE GIRL SOLDIER?

There are many documents that have been and are being developed to address the concern of violence against children. These are necessary actions to gain understanding and agreement among international parties to prevent the use of children as soldiers and for rehabilitation. The characteristics of many of these actions are to call for “providing resources” or “establishing mechanisms to facilitate activities for children” or “ensuring provisions for demobilization and reintegration are spelled out.” To accomplish these objectives, we must understand what resources to provide, what activities will meet the child’s need, or what provisions need to be spelled out. We can rely on theories, typically Western concepts of treatment, and we can also listen to the child and try to gain an understanding of what may be most effective in meeting their needs.

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Child soldiers cannot be treated as all having the same characteristics – even in the same conflict area.

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It has often been the case that child soldiers have been thought of as a common category of children who would possess the same characteristics and needs. The unique individual features and characteristics of the children were often overlooked or ignored. There was a time when the prevailing opinion was that all child soldiers were boys. We now know that child soldiers include girls as well as boys and that demobilization and reintegration programs must take into account the unique needs of girls.

The fundamental needs of girls, who have been child soldiers, have not been very well documented, understood and addressed. It has only been recently recognized that girls are used in many different ways by the armed groups. Their demobilization and reintegration needs are directly related to the specific ways that they were used.

For example, it has been assumed that most if not all girl soldiers were raped and sexually abused by the armed groups of which they were a part. This study reveals that not all armed groups raped the girls. The stated position of some of the armed groups forbid sexually intimate relationships between men and women without the consent of the woman and the approval of a commander to enter into a relationship. In some armed groups, contraception shots were required and abortions performed even when the girl opposed this action. In all the armed groups there were power differentials between the men and the young girls and many of the girls agreed to a sexually intimate relationship when they recognized it brought with it benefits such as more food, better living conditions, opportunities to ride rather than walk long distances and other privileges. None of the girls talked about receiving information to protect against sexually transmitted diseases.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to gain culturally salient information from which to construct demobilization and reintegration programs and develop prevention strategies for girl child soldiers. It has been designed and is dedicated to capturing the voice of the girl child soldier and allowing her voice to be heard.

There is limited data on the actual experience, of being a child soldier, as it is lived by the girl child. A qualitative format for information gathering has been utilized based on in-depth descriptions by girl child soldiers who have lived through the experience.

It was concluded that a self- or interviewer-administered quantitative survey with response categories would not get at the information stipulated by the core question posed by this study: What was the lived experience of the girl soldier? The objective is to hear their voice and gain the ideas and thoughts that emerge from the girls being interviewed. This is accomplished in this research through an open-ended interview process. Guba and Lincoln (94) suggest that the dialogue process allows for the emergence and growth of ideas from the interaction between people and is critical to the understanding and information-gathering process.

As was described above, and given the specific gender/cultural nature of the information desired, new material is likely to emerge during interviews. The need for flexibility is critically important to capture emergent information and ideas (Patton 90), although the core question will remain the “spine” of the study (Janesick 94). Theoretical framework for the project lies within phenomenological and ethnographic constructs (Patton 90).

The in-depth interview methodology used in this study is based on the work of Irving Seidman in his book, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (98). This interviewing method will allow new thoughts and information to emerge during interviews. There is an opportunity for important information to be presented that may not have been in direct response to a question. The broad in-depth questions will move from general to specific and from less intrusive to more intrusive. The sample is small and therefore the

desire for in-depth information is considerable.

## CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THE GIRL SOLDIERS

In order to participate in this study the girl soldier must have served as a soldier before reaching the age of 18 years and been out of the conflict for two years or less.

## AFFIRMATION OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR GIRL SOLDIERS

An affirmation of Informed Consent for Interviewee's form (Appendix I) was designed that was signed by each girl prior to the first interview. The form was presented and carefully reviewed by the interviewer with each girl so that the interviewer was convinced the girl knew what she was being asked to do. When the girl's reading ability did not reach the threshold of the document the form was read and carefully explained to her. The girl was given the choice of not participating or of not having the interviews tape recorded but written.

## THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

This methodology involved conducting three in-depth interviews with each girl soldier.

The interviews were scheduled to last for not more than two hours. The interviews were to be held from three to seven days apart to allow for a period of reflection between each interview. In some circumstances the length of the interview or the interval between the interviews had to be altered depending on the availability of the girl and issues of safety. If at any time the interviewer observed that the girl was experiencing too much discomfort recalling or reflecting on painful experiences the interview was stopped. The girl, as indicated in her informed consent, could stop the interview at any time for any reason.

In the first interview the girl was asked to talk about her life prior to becoming a soldier. The interviewer asked her to describe her early childhood. The child's description might include memories of her village, parents, brothers and sisters, extended family, festivals, religion, school and activities enjoyed as a child. This enabled the researcher to

have a broader sense of the context of the girl's life and history prior to becoming a soldier.

The second interview focused on the girl's life as a child soldier. This is the area where there is limited information. The girl's response might include a description of what led up to her entrance into the armed movement, was she abducted, gang-pressed or did she "volunteer." If she joined "voluntarily" how much pressure was she under from friends and significant others in her life to join? She also described her days, in the movement, in detail, from early morning until late at night or beyond, what she was asked to do, what she was forced to do and the consequences of not being compliant.

The third interview focused on how she saw herself moving into the future. Her response may include seeing herself as being without a future or without meaningful options, guilt feelings about what she had been forced to do in order to survive, conflicted feelings about wanting to return to the movement, wanting to enroll in school, or returning home to live with family. It might also include her perceptions of what she believed she needed to move forward and reconstruct her life. She may also have reflected on the meaning of her experience as a child soldier.

## SELECTING THE INTERVIEW TEAM

A project team was developed in each country. The team leader had been identified through advisory board contacts or contacts from non-government organizations with experience in the countries where the research was going to be conducted.

Each team consisted of a team leader who coordinated the project. At least two women were selected by the team leader to conduct the interviews. All the girls interviewed were selected and contacted by the country team. The interviews were conducted in the girl's native language. Translators were utilized when necessary when transcribing the data. An anthropologist type person was available after the interviews were transcribed to provide clarity and alert the researcher to particular cultural nuances present in the data. Counselors were identified by the team leader in the event the girl found the material she was recalling or describing too emotionally disturbing and a referral could be made.

## PREPARING THE INTERVIEW TEAM

A training/dialogue session was instituted in each country with each team prior to the collection of data. The training/dialogue always involved a review of essential documents that included Ethical Guidelines for interviewers (Appendix II), Interviewer Actions and Responsibilities (Appendix III) and sections of the American Psychological Association code of Ethics (Appendix IV), The Affirmation of Informed Consent for Interviewees (Appendix I) and Team Leader Action and Responsibilities (Appendix V). The team was versed in the interview method as outlined in the book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. The country team entered into dialogue with the trainer and the research method was adapted in ways that would work most effectively in each country. Length of time between interviews had to be altered in some countries because of difficulties posed by transportation in reaching the girls and issues of safety and confidentiality.

The training/dialogue (Appendix VI), included a description of the research, the value of qualitative studies, how to conduct interviews, working as a team, interviewing process, eliciting information, debriefing for the interviewee and the interviewer, listening skills and training in the use of the tape recorder and the laptop computer.

The training/dialogue also included role plays (Appendix VII). Dialogue and instruction also focused on when and how to make referrals, securing the room where the interviews would take place and providing a quiet, comfortable, safe, private space in which to conduct the interviews. Ways of establishing trust and establishing rapport was also a significant part of the training/dialogue.

Lori Heninger, Co-Director of the Quaker United Nations Office in New York, who was trained in the research method, traveled to each country to conduct the training/dialogue. The training/dialogue took from three to five days and was held in a location, within the country, designated by the team leader. A training agenda was designed by the head researcher and the trainer that met the needs of each country while maintaining the integrity of the research method.

The research method was adapted in each country in dialogue with the country team. This dialogue covered all aspects of the research and allowed for each country's team's perspective to be taken into account and integrated into the dialogue/training.

The country team instituted the interviewing in a timely manner. The head researcher remained available by e-mail with the team leader in each country. Once the interviews were completed and translated they were sent to the head researcher for analysis.

## EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

After the interviews were completed each girl received a gift as a way for us to say thank you. She was not told of this gift at the beginning of the interview so it could not be experienced as a bribe or some form of manipulation. The girl was asked after the last interview by the interviewer or the team leader what they would like to receive. In some instances the country team established educational funds for the girls rather than an individual gift.

## 5. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

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In order to comprehend the significance of the interview material, as it was given by each subject, the following steps were taken in a sequential fashion to analyze the data of all the girl soldiers from the four countries. This report documents the data from Colombia.

The process began with reading and rereading the interview material in order to hear, appreciate and accept what each girl described and revealed about her experiences as a child soldier. Her experience as a child soldier was then viewed within the broader context of her life. That is to say, it was viewed from where she had been, who she saw herself to be in the present and how she envisioned herself moving toward the future. The third reading of the data included continued intense listening, observing patterns and designating and marking units of meaning that were present within the descriptive material.

The units of meaning emerged from the answers to a series of questions posed by the interviewer. For

example, the interviewer may have asked the question, “Could you tell me about your family or could you tell me about your life as a young child before you became a soldier?” The girl’s responses to these questions may have included references to siblings, a school event, games enjoyed as children, etc. The units of meaning were marked in each of the interviews. The units of meaning from all of the interviews were then identified as significant themes. The significant themes were not independent or isolated from one another. They emerged and presented as interrelated significant themes.

Once the themes were established, the information each girl soldier gave in her interview on that particular theme was brought together to establish a composite of information on each significant theme. A summary statement was written to capture the essence of each significant theme in each of the four countries.

In some instances the themes overlapped. Information on one theme may have been so interrelated with another theme that they could not be separated. When this situation presented itself the information was included under both themes.

Conclusions were drawn based upon the composite of information, as given by the girl soldiers, on each of the significant themes for each country. Recommendations based on the conclusions were developed for the significant themes for each country in an effort to address, clarify and/or respond to what the girl soldier told us she needed, i.e., revealed in her interview.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. A person knowledgeable about the local culture reviewed the interviews to provide perspective on aspects of the culture that would not be clear from the message as transcribed. The transcribed interviews use fictitious names for the girls in order to maintain confidentiality and safety for the girls. Other identifying information was changed to protect the girls interviewed.

## 6. WHAT WERE THE IMPORTANT THEMES?

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The common themes from each set of interviews were identified, articulated, synthesized and elaborated upon in order to understand the experience of the girl soldier. The articulated themes then served as the criteria for recommendations made for reintegration and demobilization programs. The program recommendations are based on the specific and unique information from this specific population of girl soldiers.

Nine themes were selected based on analyzing the data from all four countries. These themes can be grouped into three areas:

- Common characteristics of who they are and their experiences:
  - Family Relationships
  - Festivals and Religion
  - Education
  - Play
- Their evolution and journey as a child soldier:
  - Reason for joining
  - Training and life as a child soldier
  - Reconsideration of the decision
- A view of who they are and how they view the future:
  - Sense of self
  - Time and the future

## 7. THE VOICES OF GIRL SOLDIERS FROM COLOMBIA

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### THE GIRL SOLDIERS INTERVIEWED

Six girl soldiers met the criteria for being included in the study: serving as a child soldier prior to reaching the age of 18 and having been out of the conflict for less than two years. All the girl soldiers in this study served as a child soldier prior to reaching the age of 18 years. The ages at which they became a

## **A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A GIRL CHILD SOLDIER IN COLOMBIA**

A representative day in the life of a girl child soldier in Colombia is constructed based on the interviews with the girls in Colombia. The construction of a day in the life is a composite taken from the descriptions of the training, duties and daily activities taken from all the interviews from Colombia.

4:45 to 5:00 a.m. Morning wake-up. Organize and pack up everything in order to be able to leave.

5:00 a.m. Coffee and exercise

6:00 a.m. Breakfast

7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Rigorous training that included sit-ups, running in streams, navigating through tunnels, walking on the high bar and training that taught them how to train others

12:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m. Rest

2:00 p.m. Jogging and additional exercise

3:00 to 5:30 p.m. Group sessions on relations. Reports on how others had treated you and how you had treated others. Emphasis who had treated you badly.

6:00 p.m. Supper

7:00 to 9:00 p.m. If not cooking, assigned to guard duty or patrolling.

Patrolling involved walking and keeping watch over the area surrounding the camp in general, bringing in food and collaborating with civilians and recharging radio batteries.

Guard duty involved guarding the camp site.

9:00 p.m. Flag down was a time to parade in front of the commanders.

Coffee allowed if it was cold.

9:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. Walk in patrols or moving camp

9:00 until dawn Partying and drinking after battle

child soldier were 11,12,13,14,15 and 17 years. All six had been out of the conflict for two years or less. All six girls were “voluntary” participants. The length of time served as a child soldier was one month, six months, two and a half years (3), and four years. One girl had been abandoned as a child and taken in by a two-parent family, two had been raised by grandparents and an aunt, one girl’s father died when she was three, two girls were raised in a two-parent family, one set of parents was in a violent relationship with one another. All of the girls had siblings three, four, five (two girls had five), six and 11. They attended school up through fourth grade (2), fifth grade, sixth grade (2) and seventh grade. Three girls indicated they lived in villages and three indicated they lived in the countryside or a rural farm.

Once the girls were in the armed movement they were given:

- congratulation party for joining celebrated by drinking
- a pistol after 1 week
- an assault rifle AK-47 after 3 months
- uniforms and jumpers
- sanitary towels, shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste
- make-up after 1 year
- contraceptive injections
- major responsibilities

They were taught/forced:

- to be prepared to give up your life
- to walk along a bar 2 meters high, if you fell off you would be killed
- how to fire guns
- how to take apart, clean and put a gun back together
- how not to be sighted by an enemy helicopter and shot down
- to cook
- to patrol

- the politics and philosophy of the movement
- the movement’s anthems
- how to operate a communications radio
- not to get pregnant
- to bring in food
- to go on special missions
- to collaborate with people
- to run for 4 and 5 hours as punishment
- to serve as a bodyguard for the commander
- to give your life for the commander
- to have an abortion if you got pregnant

They were forced or ordered to:

- kill the enemy or be punished or disabled
- walk long distances without food
- serve as bodyguards and shields to the leaders at camp and in battle to keep them from being killed
- to continue on a mission even when they were covered with boils or scabs
- watch their fellow soldiers convulse after taking the cyanide capsule and observe them being shot (by their own side) if they did not take cyanide before capture so that they would not be able to give away the secrets

They discovered:

- drinking
- life was easier if you were in a good relationship with a commander
- you could lose your life at any moment
- you would be killed if you had not protected the commander when you were their bodyguard
- in battle, the commander runs off and you are left to fight
- the woman was held totally responsible for getting pregnant, not the man
- each person was out for his or her own self

- everyone was allowed to drink and smoke and have sexual relations

## MESSAGES FROM THE COLOMBIAN GIRL SOLDIERS

The voices of the girl soldiers as they related to each of the nine themes previously identified are presented in Appendix VIII. The conclusions relating to each of the themes are presented in this section. Based on these conclusions, options and choices were identified for potential use in demobilization and reintegration programs.

### FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

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“One of my mother's boyfriends tried to abuse me when I was younger. He tried to abuse me and because I didn't let him he got angry. He used to fight with my mum and he used to fight with me ... so I didn't want to live with my mum anymore.”

- *Child Soldier, Colombia*

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Often within the family there were divided loyalties and changing relationships between the family members. The parents, step-parents and parents' paramours could be physically and sexually abusive to the children. The girls were left to look after the family when parents went to the fields to work or when they left to live with a new male friend. This left the girls vulnerable to intrusion by outsiders, including the guerrillas. In some instances the girls may have been given to a grandparent when the parent no longer wanted to protect or provide them with humane treatment. Parents separated over these abusive and shifting relationships. One girl who had been taken in by a family at birth always felt like an outsider. She was repeatedly reminded of how she was different. There were some memories of family gatherings when the family enjoyed being together and helping one another. There were more recollections of families not getting along, with siblings fighting or fighting with parents. It was the mother's responsibility to raise the children

to be respectful and listen to the directives given by the father. When the children did not listen it was seen as the mother's fault. One primary area of conflict was the mother's attitude and acceptance of her daughter having a boyfriend. Physical punishment was used by the mother to prevent the daughter from having a boyfriend. Consequently, these relationships were carried out by the girls in secret.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- Long-term nurturing family relationships were very limited.
- Grandparents often provided the most nurturing.
- Girls were not protected from sexual abuse from family members or paramours.
- Girls were given and left with major family responsibilities and care of younger siblings.
- Girls were discouraged from having boyfriends.
- Girls were physically punished for having boyfriends.
- The mother was held accountable for her children's behavior.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Work with the family and the girls to begin a reconciliation process where all family members can be included.
- When the family is not able or willing to meet with the girl, assist her in developing some strategies for managing her frustrations.
- Provide the girl with time to talk about and reflect upon the kinds of relationships that are important to her.

### FESTIVALS AND RELIGION

The girls indicated that they had been taught about God and that some of them had been baptized and went to church with their families before becoming a member of the armed group. At least one of the girls found having to go to Mass a drag and resisted attendance but finally gave in to the family expectation to attend. Religion was not something to be

discussed in the armed group. The armed group prohibited some church groups from gathering because of infiltrates. Those who said they believed in God indicated they prayed to God to protect them when they left camp, to help them get out of the armed group and keep their family healthy. Fetes and festivals were held on a regular basis. The entire community participated in these fetes and festivals.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- Girls did not discuss their religious beliefs in the armed group.
- You were not told by the armed group what to believe or not believe.
- Some of the girls prayed for themselves and their family.
- The girls recalled some of their earlier religious beliefs.
- Fetes and festivals were important and frequently celebrated by families and the community.
- The armed group prohibited churches from functioning if suspected of harboring infiltrates.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices could be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Assist those girls who wish to identify with their church community.
- Encourage discussion of their religious beliefs within that community by identifying people to talk with the girls.
- Support them in participating with their families in their church community.
- Continue to help the girls participate in meaningful fetes and festivals.

## EDUCATION

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“The teachers there used to hit us when we didn't bring our homework. I went out with my mum and helped her to sell cassava and plantain, other days I stayed at home and looked after my brothers and sisters.”

- *Child Soldier, Colombia*

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All of the girls recognized that by going to school and studying they could acquire new information. At some level they recognized that they should value going to school. Several of the girls enjoyed studying; others felt they were being forced to study. Several girls had to choose between the needs of their family and attending school. Attending school and meeting the demands of walking long distances without breakfast, caring for siblings or ill family members proved to be too great a demand and school was ultimately sacrificed. School was experienced as a place where you could make friends, receive care and gain recognition. It was also a place where there were obvious discrepancies in treatment and where the punishment for failure was severe. There was also recognition that there were good teachers and bad teachers.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- Interest in studying and attending school varied widely.
- Family demands eventually took precedence over education.
- Education was recognized as important to their future.
- School was a place where you learned how to behave, how to treat others and about others' rights.

Based on these conclusions, the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Acknowledge and build on the girls' understanding that education is important.

- Assist girls in identifying areas of interest for further reading, study or training that is matched to their level of ability.
- Work with families to try and reduce some of the family demands so that some time can be devoted to continued education or training.
- Identify sources of funds for education and training.
- Acknowledge the importance of their interest in human rights.

## PLAY

All of the girls have positive enjoyable memories of playing. Much of the joy expressed about playing was directly related to the connection it gave them to others. One girl who was not permitted to play would go out into the fields without her mother knowing so she could play with a friend. The girls played with dolls and made houses in the fields when young. When they were older they participated in group activities such as deer and hunter and team sports. When they were in the armed group they played five-a-side soccer on week-ends and made little ovens when the first arrived at a new camp.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- The girls enjoyed playing as children and adolescents.
- Play was enjoyed because it provided them with friendship and camaraderie.
- Play was important to all of the girls.
- When in the armed group some of the girls created ways of playing (making ovens) from their early childhood.
- The armed group permitted some time on week-ends for play

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Build time for play into the daily routine that is not unduly aggressive.
- Have girls share their memories of friends and play activities.

- If comfortable for the girls, have them play some of the games and activities from their early childhood.
- Support the development of friendship and camaraderie.

## REASONS FOR JOINING

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“I was afraid of my mum. When my mother left she took my other sister and I stayed behind looking after the children. She left me with my dad; my dad also left and I was left alone in the house and that was when the guerrillas appeared.”

- *Child Soldier, Colombia*

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Several girls joined because they were being physically abused or emotionally mistreated by some member of their family. They had very sad feelings about their family relationships. One girl had experienced a very troublesome time with her boyfriend. She joined because she wanted to get away from her boyfriend and the humiliating rumors about her sexual behavior that were being spread in the community. Two of the girls had been misled. They were told that life with the guerrillas was fun. One girl was forced to go with the guerrillas for three days. She was told she could make a decision to leave after three days. Once she was with them they told her she could only leave after three years. Another girl was told she could leave after two months. Both of these girls wanted to wear the uniform of the guerrillas because of how good it looked. They thought by joining they would see new and exciting places.

Conclusions based on these observations include:

- Girls were looking for a way out of abusive families.
- One girl was looking for a way to escape rumors about her unsavory sexual behavior with a boyfriend.
- The way of life of a guerrilla looked appealing: attractive uniform, status and an opportunity to

see new places.

- Two girls had been lied to regarding their ability to leave.
- One girl had been forced to spend at least three years with the guerrillas.

Based on these conclusions the following options and possibilities should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- When possible, work with the girls and their families to improve their way of relating to each other.
- Provide the girls with attractive, decent clothing.
- Enable them to make some decisions about their life that they experience as positive.
- Provide truthful answers to the girls' questions to help them develop trust in others.

#### TRAINING AND LIFE AS A CHILD SOLDIER

Life as a child soldier, for the girls, often began with the information that if you did not want to stay with the guerrillas after three days or some other established short period of time you would be free to leave. The girl had been assured, by the guerrillas, of her right to leave before she went with them. If the request to leave was invoked by the girl it was made known that it did not apply to her and she was there for three years not three days or some other long-term period.

The period of training stated by the girls varied. Some of the girls received more training than others. Training on the high bar was life threatening because if you fell you would be seriously injured or even killed. They were forced to run for hours, navigate through tunnels, run in streams and perform rigorous physical exercises. The time established for being given a weapon and the training in the use of the weapon also varied. A pistol might be received after one week and an AK-47 after three months. Learning how to clean and take apart the weapon was part of training. The girls were also taught to provide training for others.

The girls also were taught the politics and philosophy of the movement and used this information to

collaborate with the people. This information was also lived out in the group sessions held about relationships and the way the participants in the movement treated each other.

Contraceptive injections were routine, even when the girl objected. The injections were as much a part of training as the weapons. All pregnancies were the fault of the girl. The girl was held responsible and forced to end the pregnancy by having an abortion. There was some mention that some exceptions were made and the girl was permitted to continue the pregnancy and return after the birth of the child.

The girls recognized that their life would be easier if they were in a partner relationship with a commander. They had fewer duties to perform, they had privileges regarding supplies, they were able to ride rather than walk long distances and others granted you some respect and listened to you.

They discovered in battle that the radio was more important than their life; if you failed to protect the commander if you were his bodyguard, you would be killed; that the commander might abandon the troops in battle, and the troops were left to make it on their own and each person was on his or her own; you were ordered to kill others (sometimes innocent people); and that at any moment you could be killed.

Conclusions based on these observations include:

- Sometimes they were treated better by the guerrillas than they had been by their family.
- The movement provided them with the necessities of life.
- The movement enforced contraception and abortions when pregnancy occurred.
- The girl was held totally responsible for all pregnancies.
- They were forced to kill others and terminate their own pregnancies.
- They killed to protect themselves when in battle.
- They learned how to be political and apply this in collaborating with the people and each other in group sessions on relations.

- They learned communication skills.
- They remain afraid that the guerrillas will find them and harm them.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Provide a safe place where the girls can look at their experiences as a child soldier and help them evaluate how to organize their life in order to move forward.
- Encourage but not force them to look at their participation in killing and inflicting harm on others.
- Encourage but not force them to address their thoughts and feelings about terminating a pregnancy.
- When possible help them reconnect with their family.
- Work with the girl and her family to establish new ways of relating.
- Encourage them in making their own decisions and looking at the consequences.
- Support their efforts to participate in projects that will help others.
- Support their efforts to regard their rights and the rights of others.

## RECONSIDERATION OF THE DECISION

When the girls joined the guerrillas they did not appreciate or realize what would be asked of them and how they were going to be treated. Some had joined as the only way to escape a terrible life situation. Because they were children no one listened to them so they joined the guerrillas hoping to improve their situation. In the beginning it was possible to feel proud of being a part of the guerrillas and helping the people until they began to ask questions. Often after joining life became hell. Frequently what they had dreamed about and imagined for themselves in the movement did not exist. The longer they stayed with the movement the more they grew up and matured which enabled them to see things differently. They came to realize they did

not know what the guerrillas were fighting for or what they were fighting for and they observed people being killed just for the sake of killing. They observed young children being forced to participate in the movement and small children being brutally killed. They never knew if you were going to live or die and they felt like they were living on borrowed time. They lived in fear that they were going to be told to kill someone or they would be killed.

Conclusions based on these observations include:

- The girls learned and recognized that joining the guerrillas was not a way to improve their life situation.
- They felt proud in the beginning about helping the people.
- As they matured and saw what was really happening they raised questions for themselves that they could not answer or did not agree with the answers.
- They did not like knowing that children were being forced to participate.
- They did not like it when people were killed just for the sake of killing.
- They were afraid of being killed.
- They were afraid they would be asked to kill others.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Support the girls in their continued questioning so they can come to a fuller understanding of how they had gained new insights based on their own experiences.
- Listen to them as they attempt to clarify the value of a human life and how people should be treated.
- Help them appreciate that they made the decision to join the guerrillas (when not forced) on limited and inaccurate information and how to apply this to future decisions.

## SENSE OF SELF

All the girls acknowledged that their sense of self is to some degree tied to other people. One girl said she had high regard for herself and feels she can be successful in her studies. She indicated that by respecting others her respect for herself increases. Several of the girls mentioned that they were distant from others. They feel lonely because they are not close to anyone. They feel it is difficult to be close to others because once it is known you have been with the guerrillas others have a hard time trusting you. They are also afraid of you and in some instances they distrust you as well as being afraid of you.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- Their sense of self involves self and others.
- Respect for others increases one's own respect for self.
- Having been a guerrilla they realize others will distrust and be afraid of them.
- They feel lonely and distant from others.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Work with the girls to help them begin to trust their own self.
- Help them establish some standards for their own behavior.
- Help them recognize that it will take time for others to trust them.
- Provide safe forums where they can talk about their feelings and how to develop trustworthy behaviors.

## TIME AND THE FUTURE

The girls experience the time following their release from the guerrillas as a new time.

Life has changed for them and so has their way of thinking. Fighting every day has been hell for them and they want to organize their life. Even though life with the guerrillas was hell they were often

treated better in the movement than their families had treated them. They are now able to think about their own self, their family and what it is they want to accomplish in the future. They see it as a time to begin constructing a new life. It is in many ways an idealistic time. Some of the girls want everything to change -- not just their world view but everyone's world view. It is suggested that everyone, all parties to the conflict, give themselves up so that everyone can live together in peace. Once out of the fever of combat they begin to consider how they would like to help others who have just escaped.

They would advise the girls still with the guerrillas to give themselves up and take time to think carefully about their future decisions. In their planning they are attempting to restore some of their original dreams. They recognize the importance of getting along with others, being successful and respecting others' rights and decisions, and the importance of self-regard. They indicate they want to make the most of this second chance at life. They want to live in family groups where they receive genuine affection, understanding, where people help you, hug you, speak to you and ask how you are and where you are free to talk about absolutely everything. They are no longer willing just to be other people's servants.

They realize that other people have a low opinion of them for having served with the guerrillas. People who were not in the guerrillas see you as being different from everybody else and not a good person because of the harm you have brought others.

What other people do not appreciate is that the girls would like to do something useful for children and old people. They want to take care of the people who are considered "disposable" by the culture's standards. They acknowledge that children should be treated in a very special way, nurtured to be successful, listened to, respected, recipients of an education and shown love and affection.

They are still afraid that the guerrillas will find them and kill them or bring them harm. They are cautious about their routines and feel they are less visible living in the city than if they returned to the country.

Conclusions based on these observations include

- The girls are afraid of being harmed or even

killed if they are recognized by the guerrillas.

- They feel safer in the city, less visible, than if they returned to their villages or to the countryside.
- They recognize that there were times when the guerrillas treated them better than their families.
- They see this time between escape/capture and full integration into the culture as an opportunity to reorganize their life.
- They want to define their own future and make their own decisions.
- They want to do something constructive with their life, help the elderly, children, current and former girl soldiers and the “disposable” people in general.
- They recognize the importance of their rights and the rights of others.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices should be considered for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Assist girls in finding places to live where they feel safe and help them with safety issues.
- Work with the girls and their families when possible to help reestablish some connections.
- If renewed family connections are not possible, help them establish meaningful relations with other caring adults.
- Encourage their attempts at reorganizing their life.
- Work with them to clarify their decisions and explore the consequences of the decisions they are considering.
- Encourage and assist them in their attempts to establish and work on projects that will help others.

## 8. COLOMBIA DISTINCTIVES

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Some distinctive features from the armed movements were identified from the interview material that appear to be of critical importance or unique to each country. This is not to suggest that these were the only distinct features but rather they were the ones reported by the girls. The following summarizes the distinctive features associated with the girls interviewed in Colombia.

The girls in Colombia received some form of contraception immediately upon their entry into the armed group. The type most frequently used was contraceptive injections, although IUDs and birth control pills were sometimes used. Contraception was as much a part of their life as a soldier as their combat training. They were given the injection even when they expressed their strong objection. It was reported that condoms were given to men with AIDS. The girl was held totally responsible for any pregnancy. All pregnancies were to end with an abortion. The girls reported there were some rare exceptions made to this rule and the girl was permitted to have the baby.

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“When you were on guard duty, if you saw the army you had to warn the others, or to shoot at them, and try to save the commander. That was the biggest responsibility that we had. If anything happens to the commander then you’ll be killed. The guerrillas themselves would kill you if they realized that you hadn’t defended the commander. In combat you had to give your life for him. In combat, he runs off ahead and you’re left behind fighting, shooting at the army.”

- *Child Soldier, Colombia*

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“I think this was very painful for the girls, I mean, imagine that, making someone have an abortion. You’re told, from when you join, that you can’t get pregnant.”

“...They can’t use pregnant women, because at any moment a pregnant woman... they might even kill her. You were given contraceptive injections, they had many methods to stop the girls from getting pregnant. The men weren’t given contraceptives. They’d say that it’s the woman that has to deal with the contraception. It was just the women that were told because the commander said that it was the women that decided, the men asked to have sex and the women were the ones that decided .”

“I found out about one girl who got pregnant but she was made to have an abortion after three or four months when the commander realized that she was pregnant. There was a very strong reaction. She cried, she said that she’d rather they killed her than have an abortion. She had an abortion, everybody has to have an abortion.”

“...If any woman gets pregnant there then they make her have an abortion. You can’t have the baby, it’s not allowed. The commander was in charge of birth control He was the only one who knew how to give the injections. Every six months he gave you an injection. I wouldn’t let them give it to me. My boyfriend said that it was for the women’s good, it wasn’t for them but for the sake of the woman. Think about it, a woman out there, she gets pregnant and then she has to have an abortion. I was given the pill but what’s used most of all is the injection. The men were given condoms. My boyfriend said that condoms were for... that they were for those people with AIDS that was what condoms were for. The majority of men didn’t use them, there were only a few people that used them.”

## 9. WHAT ARE KEY RISK FACTORS IN THE CHOICE TO BECOME A CHILD SOLDIER?

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Three risks have been identified and reviewed:

- being poor and disadvantaged
- inhabiting a combat zone
- being separated from their family

These risks were present for the girls studied and played an important role in their becoming a child soldier.

The girls in these interviews also shared other factors that were important in their becoming child soldiers. These additional risks include:

- dropping out of school
- not having a voice in decisions that affect their life
- being marginalized in new family structures
- failure to be protected by the family

### DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL:

Girls dropped out of school because the teachers were often punitive and the girls felt humiliated or they could not reach the high standards and expectations set by their parents. They also dropped out of school to provide for the survival needs of their family, e.g., helping to provide food or being responsible for a younger sibling or an aging or sick family member. They often did not have money for tuition or supplies and had to drop out of school. Frequently the school was a great distance from the home village and they had to walk long distances. Public transport was very uncertain.

### NOT HAVING A VOICE IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR LIFE:

Girls were sent, without being included in the decision, to live with relatives or sent off to work as domestic servants. They also were not willing to participate in arranged marriages and would flee to the armed group rather than marry at their parents’ insistence.

### BEING MARGINALIZED IN NEW FAMILY STRUCTURES:

When a parent remarried, the girl may have felt rejected by the new step-parent. They were often abused or mistreated in the newly created family structure by the new parent as well as their birth parent. They no longer felt included in the family.

## FAILURE TO BE PROTECTED BY THE FAMILY:

Girls were left at home to watch younger siblings without an adult. The girls were emotionally and physically exhausted, an easy prey for armed groups. Girls and women were used to perform tasks for the family such as walking long distances to collect salt or working in the field with other women and girls. They were vulnerable to ambush by armed groups.

## 10. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE GIRL SOLDIERS ON THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

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The interviews provided a broad understanding of the girls' experience of being child soldiers. They also provided information on the interview process. Comments by the girls have resulted in an understanding of how they viewed the interview process. Two areas are considered: the consent forms and the interview. Most of the information on the interview process came from the interviews in Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Colombia.

### AFFIRMATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

Many of the girls showed heightened interest in the consent form. They took note of every word. They often went through the form repeatedly, reading it in silence. If they could not read, when the consent form was read to them, they asked for it to be read several times. They raised questions about its implications for them and for their family. They specifically asked if it would pose any danger now or in the future for them or their family. They were very interested to know how the material would be used.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- They recognize that what they do may have serious implications for meaningful others in their life; they now experience themselves in relationship to their family, their community, etc.
- They took seriously what they were being asked to do and felt responsible for the decision they were making in participating in this study; they

were being thoughtful and careful about the decision they were in the process of making.

- They want to participate and take an active part in the decisions that are going to affect their life.
- They want their voice to be heard and taken into account.

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices are recommended when using consent forms for research or other purposes:

- Consent forms must be used and written at a level that the girl can understand.
- If she cannot read, the form must be read to her with opportunity for her to have it re-read and for her to ask questions until she feels comfortable with the document.
- She needs to be told of the value of the research, how it will be used and assured of her right to withdraw at any time without suffering any adverse consequences.
- Care must be taken to fully inform and allow girls to participate in decisions that are going to affect their life.
- Confidentiality must be assured.
- A written summary based on the experience of girls who have been through the interview process could be provided so she could read and evaluate for herself how the process had helped, hindered and/or had been of value to others.

### INTERVIEWS

In the beginning of the interview process the girls described feeling nervous and afraid of the process and about giving correct answers to the questions. They were reassured that there were no wrong answers and everything they said would be accepted. Some exhibited curiosity about the laptop computer and the cassette recorder. One girl wanted to review the questions that were going to be asked in advance. Another wanted to know in more depth the purpose of the interviews. Another asked if she could pretend the interview was for the media so that it would be more entertaining. Most of the girls indicated a strong desire to tell their story as they

had wanted to do this for some time. They said it was a relief to go to the memories and be able to express and master the process of relating to the happy and sad moments in their life.

One girl stated “I was a bit scared, as I did not know why you people were coming to meet us but as you went along it looked not too bad.” They thought it would be useless and nothing would come out of it and that it would be another waste of time. They found, however, that the interviews brought some clarification to their experience and enabled them to look at their life even when that was difficult for them. For example, “All of us thought that it will be like everybody talking and talking but nothing happens, they go away and do not care about us. This has been different. It has helped me in many ways. First of all I went down memory lane and found out why I ran away.” Another girl offered the following comment on the interview process: “As for me I can see myself clearly this has helped and given me encouragement to go ahead and improve my life. I can now face my future with confidence. In a way this has been useful. I am able to see what I have learned through all these experiences.”

Two other girls made the following enlightening comments to the interviewer: “After talking to you, lots of thoughts went through my mind. In a way I was happy I could talk about all this to both of you. I do not talk much because I cannot trust any one. All the time I spend here is either with the machine or with the radio.” And, “I have to talk to you. I have not told my story to any one else and I must now see you and talk to you. I wanted to talk to someone; finally I have got this chance. When I saw you I thought I could tell everything. Now my burden is a bit less. Thank you.” And finally one of the girls said to the interviewer, “Please listen to me; it would be good if you listen to me.”

Conclusions based on these observations:

The interviews:

- were entered into with some amount of fear
- provided many girls the opportunity to tell their story
- provided an avenue for beginning life review

- enabled the girls to begin to evaluate the future
- helped the girls to see their self in a broader perspective
- increased their capacity to trust another person
- contributed to an increase in their self-confidence
- provided the beginning of the integration of past, present and future
- provided a space and time for physical and emotional safety
- helped them see they could be valued and important to others
- enabled them to realize they were not alone
- helped them recognize that others could treat them respectfully

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices are recommended when interviewing and for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Make available trained, sensitive interviewers to conduct in-depth individual interview sessions with each girl soldier who wishes to participate. Participation is voluntary.
- The interviews should take place in an environment that assures physical and emotional safety.
- Multiple interview sessions should be offered and the spacing of the interview sessions should be decided by the girl in dialogue with the interviewer.
- The interview permits the girl to review her life in a broad context where she can take into account where she has been, where she is now and what she sees herself moving toward in the future.
- The interviewer acts with due respect for what the girl wishes to recall, when she wishes to recall information and at what pace.
- The interviewer allows the depth of the interview to be determined by the girl.
- The interviewer does not focus on the girl’s strengths or weaknesses but rather listens intently and hears and listens without judgment.
- Confidentiality should be assured.

- Resource people should be available if the interviewee feels a need for follow-up to the interview to deal with emotions that may arise from the interview process.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I

### AFFIRMATION OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWEE

(This consent form will be reviewed verbally with the interviewee to be certain that it is understood. Once understood the written consent form is presented for a signature. Research interviews may not be conducted before this has taken place.)

I am \_\_\_\_\_ (interviewer's name) and I am working with the Quaker United Nations Office and \_\_\_\_\_ (NGO or University). I am interested in understanding the story of your life. What kinds of things you did when you were younger, where you lived, who you lived with, what you liked to do, who you enjoyed being with and other information about your family and community that you remember and would like to share with me. I would also like to hear about how you became a child soldier. I would be interested in knowing what happened to you when you were a child soldier. What each day was like for you. I am also very interested in hearing about your life as it is now — the way it is today and how you see the future. What you and other young women tell us will be used to assist groups like ours begin to plan programs that will include what young women like yourself tell us you need. It would help us to know the kinds of things that would be most helpful for you to have a better and easier life. The experiences you have had in your life will help us understand what we need to do for young women who have been used as soldiers. A report will be written at the end combining the stories of all the young women we talk to from four different countries. All of this information will help us know what young women want and need as they continue to build their life.

If you give me permission I would like to tape record what you tell me. I can also just write what you tell me. You can decide if you would like me to use the tape recorder or write what you tell me. After we have finished, if you like, you and I can read together the story you have told me. If you want to make any changes in what I have written you can tell me when we go over your story.

When I am writing I will not use your name or anyone's real name. If we are using the tape recorder you can use different names for people so that the person's real name will be private and protected.

I will ask you to meet with me three different times. Each time we would meet for about 1 \_ hours. We will agree on a time and place that is comfortable, private and safe. A second interviewer may be with me to be sure I am recording your story just the way you are telling it to me.

One other thing that is very important for you to know, if you change your mind, for whatever reason, and decide you do not want to continue talking with me we will stop. You should not feel bad about doing this because everyone has the right to change their mind and make their own personal decisions. You can make that decision at anytime, during any of the interviews.

I have reviewed this information and I agree to participate in this study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX II

### Ethical Guidelines for Interviewers

Having completed the training provided by \_\_\_\_\_ (name of person providing training) in relation to the Female Child Soldier Project being conducted by The Quaker United Nations Office and \_\_\_\_\_ (name of University or NGO)

I agree as an interviewer to:

1. Follow the process for contacting and interviewing as outlined in our training.
2. Keep all names and information confidential. Never use any identifying names in the written or recorded material.
3. Protect the safety, security and privacy of the interviewee at all times.
4. Review informed consent with interviewee prior to any interview taking place and make certain it is understood and signed.
5. Remain sensitive to the interviewee and stop the interviewing if it appears necessary or if requested by the interviewee. Make referrals for emotional support when appropriate and manage any secondary traumatization.
6. Be available for follow-up support requested by the interviewee.
7. Not raise expectations and/or make promises that cannot be fulfilled.
8. Honor all commitments made to the interviewee as outlined in the Interviewee Informed Consent Form.
9. Report the data with as much accuracy as possible and honor the voice, i.e., the story as given by the interviewee.

I have reviewed the Ethical Guidelines and agree to act in accordance with them.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX III

### Interviewer Actions and Responsibilities

At all times the safety and security of the young woman and others involved in this project is more important than the data.

1. Complete days of training as outlined in the training agenda.
2. Identify and interview between four and 10 female child soldiers between the ages of 10 and 18 years of age who have not been out of the conflict for more than two years.
3. Conduct interviews only when assured that the interviewee understands the entire process outlined in the interviewee informed consent form.
4. Times, places and length of meetings will be arranged keeping safety, confidentiality, privacy and convenience in mind.
5. Follow the in-depth interview method being utilized in this study and as outlined and adapted in training.
6. Use of the tape recorder and the computer or willingness to be trained in their use.
7. Follow the contacting and interviewing process as presented in training.
8. Assume responsibility for the recording device and the computer and return the equipment to the project director at the end of the interviewing process.
9. Tape record, when permission is given, and translate the data deleting all identifying names.
10. Take notes in addition to recording.
11. If recording will compromise the girl being interviewed, record data in writing.
12. Translate the material as given without making changes in the words, but clarified as to cultural context where necessary for reasons of clarification. This will take place in dialogue with psychologist/anthropologist.
13. Submit data to a psychologist/anthropologist for clarification of cultural nuances.
14. Submit the material to the interviewee for any changes or deletions requested. If it is not possible to present the material in written form, the interviewer will review the material with the girl interviewed for clarification following the collection of the data.
15. Complete final data sets.
16. Transmit the data to the head researcher after the interviewee and the psychologist/anthropologist have reviewed the material and made changes (following each interview).
17. Call team meetings between anthropologist/psychologist, team leader as needed.
18. Make referrals of girls for outside emotional support.

**(continued on next page)**

## Interviewer Actions and Responsibilities (page 2)

19. Report any problems, broken equipment, safety issues, etc., to team leader or head researcher.
20. Allow for longer interviews or spacing of interviews so that a trusting relationship can develop over time so the real story can be heard and avoid a rush to bring closure.

As an interviewer for the Female Child Soldier Project, my signature on this document confirms my acceptance of the following actions and responsibilities. The fee that I will receive for successfully carrying out my work will be \_\_\_\_\_. This amount will be paid to me following my submission of the translated data to the head researcher of the project. All data will be submitted to the head researcher.

I have reviewed the actions and responsibilities and agree to act in accordance with them.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX IV

### APA Code of Ethics ([www.apa.org/ethics/code.html](http://www.apa.org/ethics/code.html))

In the design and implementation of this research project the APA code of ethics and a statement by the American Anthropological Association serve as the standard to be followed. The significant sections are referenced.

The American Anthropological Association states that in research the paramount responsibility is to those they study: When there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Anthropologists must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social and psychological welfare and to honor the dignity and privacy of those studied.

APA standards to be followed:

- 6.06 Planning Research.
- 6.07 Responsibility.
- 6.11 Informed consent to Research.
- 6.19 Honoring Commitments.
- 6.21 Reporting Results.

## **APPENDIX V**

### **TEAM LEADER ACTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. Monitor and provide oversight for the research project in the conflict area.
2. Work with head researcher and research trainer.
3. Identify and obtain agreement with two interviewers.
4. Identify and obtain agreement with anthropologist/psychologist to support the interviewer.
5. Monitor need for girl soldier support/referral and assist with providing support.
6. Make arrangements for training logistics (e.g. place, time)
7. See that research method is carried out in described in training and assist in modifying research training to be culturally relevant.
8. Review data after psychologist/anthropologist has placed it in cultural context and suggest additional clarification as needed.
9. Help identify with the project team an appropriate way of thanking the young women for participation in the research. This would be implemented at the end of the project.

## **APPENDIX VI**

### **INTERVIEWER TRAINING / DIALOGUE AGENDA**

(example: to be adapted in each country)

#### **DAY 1**

##### **Morning**

Introductions

Review of Agenda

Description of the project

Reason for study

Qualitative studies: what they are and why do them

Feedback on description of study

##### **Break**

Number and form of interviews

Interviewer Actions and Responsibilities

Ethical guidelines for interviewers

APA Code of Ethics

Informed consent

Interviewing

Why interview?

Need to develop the interview guide together:

We have ideas, but they must be culturally relevant or they will not work

What are the cultural norms when interviewing this group in this country?

What are the things with this group that may be different than with other groups in other countries?

What might they expect in the interviewing process?

Working as a team

##### **Lunch**

Western ways of eliciting information:

Reducing resistance

Active listening

Open-ended and closed-ended questions

#### **DAY 2**

##### **Morning**

Introduction to this interview process

Opening up life histories

Interview role-play one: School headmaster interview

Debrief role-play one

##### **Break**

Interview role-play two and three: Affirmation of Informed Consent for Interviewee and Focused Life History/Engagement

Development of Questions

Role-play

Debrief interview situation  
Development of preliminary guide with prompts for Initial Interview  
Suicidality

**Lunch**

Initial work with computer:  
    Basic word processing  
    Use of discs  
    Setting up an email account for them

**DAY 3**

**Morning**

Role-play four: Second interview, The Details of the Soldiering Experience/Mid-phase work  
Development of Questions  
Role-play  
Debrief interview situation  
Development of preliminary guide with prompts for Second Interview

**Break**

Training in western model of trauma reaction, part I

**Lunch**

Training in western model of trauma reaction, part II  
Work with digital recorder:  
    Use  
    Transfer to text  
    Setup of voice recognition

**DAY 4**

**Morning**

Role-play five, Third interview: Reflection on the Meaning of the Soldiering Experience and the Interview  
Process/Termination  
Practice interviews  
Debrief interview situation  
Development of preliminary guide with prompts for Third Interview

**Break**

Final questions on responsibilities  
Final questions on hardware/software  
Other questions

**Lunch**

Taking care of yourselves:  
    Stress  
    Working as a team  
    Stress reduction techniques

## APPENDIX VII

### Role-Play

Role-play is being used as a method for learning and practicing in-depth interviewing skills. The goal in the interviewing process is to create an environment in which the young girl feels free to talk to you. Talking about personal, painful matters may not only be difficult, it may also go against what she considers socially correct.

The following role-plays, based on the interview protocols, will enable you to practice ways of increasing communication skills when conducting in-depth interviews. There are no right or wrong answers. However some questions are better than others in eliciting information. The main question is, What is it like to be...? Generally speaking, questions that elicit fuller answers begin with what, when, how and where. As you practice and take on the role of the other you will come to understand and appreciate what it feels like being that person.

Directions for role-play. I will read a role-play situation and then ask each of you to divide into pairs and take turns assuming the role of the interviewer and the interviewee. After assuming each role (approximately 20 minutes) stop and explore how it felt to be in that particular role.

We will begin by working in pairs with a short role-play (about eight minutes); one person will serve as the interviewer and the other person will be interviewee. Then you will change places and explore what it's like in that role. Another option is to stop the sequence of actions and evaluate as you work your way through the role-play. By questioning various ways of asking questions it is possible to evaluate a variety of more comfortable choices.

#### SHORT PRACTICE ROLE-PLAY:

You have just accepted the position of directing a school for young children in a village where the school has been closed for more than three years. You want to employ local people who will be able to teach the children, provide social support and help to create a garden where children can play.

In this role-play, you will work in pairs, one person will be the new director who is conducting the interview and the second person will be the person wishing to work at the school. Change roles and follow up with discussion, discovery, renewed understanding and sensitivity. The discussion begins with the two participants and is followed by a discussion with the entire group.

#### ROLE-PLAYS OF THE ACTUAL INTERVIEW SITUATIONS:

The following role-play situations are placed within the context of the meeting where the Interviewee Informed Consent Form is shared with the interviewee and the three in-depth interview situations that are to be conducted with each interviewee.

#### MEETING: Informed Consent Form

The informed consent form is presented so that it is clear that the young woman understands its contents.

#### Role-Play:

In this role-play the interviewee reviews in detail the informed consent form with the young woman. In this role-play you will work in pairs with one person being the interviewer presenting, i.e., sharing the form and the other person being the child soldier who must understand it. Change roles and follow up with discussion, discovery and renewed understanding and sensitivity. The discussion begins with the two participants and is followed with a discussion of the entire group. (The discussion will include changes that may need to be made in the consent form to make it more culturally relevant.)

## APPENDIX VIII

### The Voices of Girl Soldiers from Colombia

The transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed to identify important themes. The nine themes identified that were common to the interviews from girl soldiers in all four countries were used as the framework for organizing the data. This section organizes the voices of the girls according to these nine themes. In some instances the themes overlapped. Information on one theme may have been so interrelated with another that they could not be separated. When this situation presented itself the information was included under more than one theme.

Additional perspective on the data presented include:

- The interview quotes do not represent a complete collection of the interview transcripts.
- When a girl made extensive comments on the same topic, a typical representation of those comments is included.
- Each girl did not necessarily speak directly to every theme.
- In many cases one girl's voice represented the voice of others; in general, only one representation of the voice may have been included.

The names used are fictitious and do not reflect the actual names of the girls. Other identifying information has been changed to protect the identity of the girls.

Comments are presented as given and may not be complete sentences.

### FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Often within the family there were divided loyalties and changing relationships between the family members. The parents, step-parents, parent's paramour and siblings could be physically and sexually abusive to the children. The girls were left to look after the family when parents went to the fields to work or when they left to live with a new male or female friend. This left the girls vulnerable to intrusion by outsiders, including the guerrillas. In some instances the girls may have been given to a grandparent when the parent no longer wanted them around. The parents were caught up in abusive and shifting relationships. One girl who had been taken in by a family at birth always felt like an outsider. She was repeatedly reminded of how she was different. There were some memories of family gatherings when the family enjoyed being together and helping one another. However, there were more recollections of families not getting along. Generally speaking it was the mother's responsibility to raise the children to be respectful and listen to the directives given by the father. When the children did not listen to the father it was seen as the mother's fault. One primary area of conflict between the girl and her mother was the mother's attitude and acceptance of her daughter having a boyfriend. Mothers used physical punishment to prevent their daughters from having boyfriends. Consequently these relationships were carried out by the girls in secret.

#### Girl A:

My family (extended family, not parents) was very close and very honest. Yes, I lived with them, I went to school until seventh grade and my family really loved me a lot. When my relative (X) died, it was really difficult for me, even though I was only nine years old, because after that things weren't the same.

My other relative was left by himself with an aunt, and then things started getting complicated, I didn't feel as loved as I did with my X, I felt something different. When my X was still alive, I was never told off, and then when my aunt started telling me off, and I didn't like that, well, of course, she didn't show the same affection for me as my X had, like a mum.

I hadn't ever lived with them (parents) and so I never developed that love for them that you develop for the people that you live with.

My mum is, let's say, a special person for me, but she'll never be the same as my X was for me. He's (father) also a very special person but not the same as my X. I didn't feel that they (parents) showed the same love for me as my X did. If they'd been interested in me then they wouldn't have left me with my X from the beginning.

Well, I mean, the first child and already you're giving it away. I was always asking them why they'd done that and they never told me, never. I carried on living at my X's house. They used to give me everything, everything I needed, but then I didn't have the same enthusiasm to go on like I did before.

I was a very honest and respectful girl, I was very agreeable, and that began to change, that began to change for me. After the situation with the neighbors and those problems with my boyfriend they beat me a lot, and that's when I left, because I'd been very indulged as a little girl and everything and so I joined the guerrillas.

#### **Girl B:**

I first remember, from when I was about five years old, or six, I mean, at that age I started studying, everything, my family was very, very strict, I was beaten a lot.

And so my mum told me that she wasn't really my mum.

My mum shared out the housework between myself and my older sister, sometimes my sister did it, sometimes she didn't and if I didn't do it my mum would beat me really hard but she never beat my sister.

And my sister, well, she used to do what she liked and everything, and my mum never said anything to her. She got angry sometimes because we didn't always do as we were told, and it really got to her, and so she said that to us, sometimes she would throw whatever was at hand at us, she used to throw stones at us, she would hit us with bits of firewood, things like that.

And then she had her last child, and it was my job to look after it. My mum had to go to work far away. My mum just came back sometimes once a week, and then the fights came back as well, the arguments, people used to say things to her, her friends, they used to say, and she used to say that she didn't want her daughters to be out there hanging around in the street, because it looked bad on the family. We used to go out with some boys from another village but my mum didn't like it because they were from the other village.

I was afraid of my mum.

When my mother left she took my other sister and I stayed behind looking after the children. She left me with my dad. My dad also left and I was left alone in the house, and that was when the guerrillas appeared.

My legs were like black and blue from the beatings she (mother) used to give me. Then my mum found out and she came back to look for me, and that was when they went to look for me, and they told the guerrillas to give me back because I was underage, and how on earth could they even have thought about taking me and everything, and so I talked to them and I said that I wasn't going to go back home because they maltreated me a lot and because I didn't want to go back home, and since then I haven't seen them again, until who knows when.

And then when I was with the guerrillas I didn't miss them anymore, I didn't need them, or anything.

**Girl C:**

My brothers and sisters fight a lot, I mean, they treat each other badly, or maybe they don't like each other much, I don't know. They treat each other really badly. They swear and they insult each other.

With my dad I mean, we don't really talk. We're not that close. Well, yes, I mean when I needed advice I asked him, but other than that I didn't.

With my mom it's OK, she gives me advice, when I had problems she helped me, she told me what I should do. When I was fed up, lonely, when I had problems. She used to tell me to look for the good things, not the bad things that I shouldn't do.

My mum and dad used to fight a lot, they used to treat each other... sometimes they treat each other badly....because of my brothers and sisters.... sometimes they don't obey my dad and so my dad says that it's my mum's fault.

My mum didn't bring us up properly when we were young. To obey my dad. Well, my mum, she feels bad, since the father's like the head of the family. That my mum didn't bring us up properly when we were young to obey my dad.

It's the father that should tell the children what to do and not the mum. Well, I mean the mum should also do something, yes, the mother should also do her bit, help the children, but the person that should really educate them is the dad.

The father is like the head of the family, he's the person... I mean, the most intelligent. The father understands things better, he can see things better.

When I was at home, we used to fight sometimes, all brothers and sisters fight a bit. We would start talking about girlfriends and then fight about that. I mean, they almost didn't let me have a boyfriend. They didn't like it, they said I was still too young to have a boyfriend.

I had to keep it secret (having a boyfriend). He was just incredibly cute. He was really caring, above all he was really nice, he was fun, he was pleasant, he never treated me bad. He used to say that he really loved me, but who knows, men are such liars.

Well, I fought a lot at home, I mean, I fought a lot with my mum. She got angry with me and so I used to answer her back and stuff, and so I got fed up with that. We just argued, nothing else.

I locked myself into the room, but one of my sisters realized and she opened the door and came in as I was about to shoot myself, and so she came in and kicked the butt of the rifle and so the shot passed me here, it just missed me by this much.

**Girl D:**

I was brought up by my mum and until recently by my X, and my mum, and as my mum gets sick and she's like, really strange, she...OK, so my mum had my older brother, then my other sister and then me, and so when she had me she left me with my X, and went off with another man, they were together for quite a long time and then she got pregnant with my other sister and came back, and so my X got all angry and said what was she going to do, if she was going to come and collect us but she didn't take any notice and left my other sister with her and she went off again, to work.

And then my mum said that she'd suffered enough and gave me to my X to look after. Then my oldest brother, he was all, like, a man already, bossy, and always picking fights, and he used to fight with us, he used to beat us despite us not taking any notice of him. I used to work, I chopped firewood, and sold it, I

used to work in the fields, weeding, sowing, with my X and my other brothers and sisters.

The men sometimes help to do things at home as well, cleaning, washing, cooking, there everybody works, they all cook, wash, it's like that. All of us have a different dad, my dad worked in one of my X houses and that's where they met, they started going out and they had me, and he, as far as I know when my mum was pregnant he left.

When I was a bit older my mum took me to his house, and my dad said that I was his daughter and that he would pay for my studies and he asked me to live there with him.

He tried to abuse me when I was younger, when I was...at the time my X took me away from the house and she took me in, and he tried to abuse me and because I didn't let him he got angry.

On of my mother's men tried to abuse me when I was younger. He used to fight with my mum and he used to fight with me, and he used to get back to the house at the time that he felt like it and so I didn't want to live with my mum anymore and I don't like her. We had to work hard.

I had to go down to the village up to three times a day to sell firewood to get enough money together for food. Because there wasn't anybody that worked. I started when I was seven years old, helping my X to chop firewood, and she showed me how to carry it, she taught me everything, and there I learnt.

I used to go down to the village and I sold it and I came back up for another load and so on, she used to tell us to buy the things that we most needed at the time.

My older brother was the one who helped my X the most...and when we were studying whatever little thing, for example, a pencil, a notebook, she always provided it. And with whatever else that they could help us with they did.

Well my relationship with my X was good, because I love her a lot, even though she's not with us now, she died. She didn't like it when I was told off, or treated badly. My older brother used to beat us and swear at us. I used to run to my X so that she would defend me.

On Sundays the whole family used to get together, and we used to chat and mess around for a bit and then everybody went back to their houses, and they came to see us at home. Everybody got on well there, nobody bore anyone any grudges or anything, if someone was in a bad state then everybody helped them get over the problems, to do things well, there's no looking back whatever problem you might have.

At the end I was with her (mother) at home, with my brothers and sisters and with her, well, we used to talk and she said that I had to behave myself, that I had to study, to get on with things, not to go and fall in love or anything like that, and I didn't really pay attention to her because she (mother) was kind of crazy.

That was all, she talked nonsense. Despite us not being together any of the time, and the things she said... I think that they must have been true. Well, you must be stupid to go and fall in love because the same thing will happen to you as happened to her, that's what she told us, that we shouldn't fall in love, look at how much she had suffered, now not even her children loved her. She says she hasn't even got children, she hasn't got anyone to love her.

### **Girl E:**

My family... I remember when my dad was, well, together with my mum and that, and my sister, well he, he wanted to abuse my sister and wanted her also to be his, his, his woman and my sister didn't want that and so...my mum went off to work, or I mean she went and, she went to sell pineapples and sometimes she didn't get back to the house and she stayed out, and so we were left with my dad, with my dad, he... he'd get up at night and go and bother my sister, and he, sometimes my sister screamed and he covered her mouth, and I told my mum.

I was like 10 years old, and I told her, and one day I caught them, I caught my dad when I was at school and we left at break time, I went, I went home and well, I entered the house quietly, and caught him trying to force himself on my sister. And so I saw them, and then my dad saw that I'd seen him and he said that he'd give me 500 pesos not to tell my mum. At the time I said yes because he was in a rage, and so when my mum got home I told her, my mum was furious and grabbed a knife and that, she didn't know what to do and we left, and we left my dad behind.

And it was from then on that my mum and dad were separated. My dad used to hit her (mother) a lot, he ordered my sister to wash all my other brothers' and sisters' clothes, and when she, there were times when she couldn't do it and he hit her hard with a, with a piece of cable, and so it... and I was little so I cried for her.

My dad, mmmh! he used to hit us a lot. My mum went out to work, and so I looked after them (brothers and sisters), I stayed and looked after them. They were in a kindergarten so I used to get up and, well, I used to get up early and take them to the kindergarten at seven o'clock, and at, and at eight o'clock I went to school and we left at half past twelve.

I used to get on well with my mum, and that, and I loved her a lot, and she loved me and, and I used to make... there were times when I disobeyed her but afterwards I would look back and start to think and well and she never treated me badly, and well yes she hit me for some things that I did, but bad things. We used to fight a lot, my brothers and sisters and I. Because of the housework, she didn't want to do anything and, and I didn't either so that's why we fought each other.

#### **Girl F:**

I can remember about my family, well, I remember lots of things because when I was at home I had fun with them, I was given everything, I was never treated badly, or anything like that. I had a good time; the person I remember most is my little sister, and my brother.

Since I was very young... for me... while I was there, it was fun, with my mum, my brothers and sisters, we used to go from one house to the other, we would be on this plot for a month, then another month on the other one and so on, since we had three plots, we had three plots so we would explore the land.

My mum used to give us everything we wanted, she never said no or objected to anything, she was a great mum for me, and she still is, she's still alive. We liked to go horse riding there, pick oranges or mangoes and things like that.

We used to get up at six, my mum would get up to make breakfast, sometimes I used to get up and helped my big brother. She (mother) liked manual work a lot, she likes picking coffee, helping my step-dad out, and the workers, and so she used to go off and do that and we stayed behind to help because she always used to make breakfast, lunch and dinner, all at the same time and then she went, and so we stayed there.

I got on well with my step-father until one time when he hit my mum, and then, we... my brothers and sisters, we really gave him a hard time and I didn't have anything to do with him after that.

He beat my mum and so I got really upset and my older brother, too, and so we went in, where he was beating her, and that man, he gave me such a kick, and so from that day on we refused to have anything to do with him. If he said something to us he could've been talking to a tree because we didn't take any notice. We used to say to my mum, can we go to such and such a place and we never asked him for permission, never.

He didn't touch her again, but we got really angry at him, and so, so we didn't speak to him again, and we would do things or go somewhere but we never told him.

I asked him (brother) what a boyfriend was, I asked him and he told me that a girlfriend was, you know, someone you spent time with, you went out together, you kissed and all that. He told me that was what it was, and he said, look, it's like this and he began to explain, and so I told him not to say anything to my mum because otherwise she'd hit me, but my mum never... and he told me to be careful with this, be careful.

He told me to be careful about having sexual relations with them, or, my mum used to tell me, from when I was about ten years old, when you have a boyfriend, you're going to have a boyfriend, right? But don't ever get in a bad way, I mean, have sex with him. She told me about love, at least all of that, what sex was, she explained all that to me. As well as being my mum she was also my friend.

And then later, after we'd been going out (with boyfriend) for about two months she found out. She said, why didn't you tell me, you know that I wouldn't hit you just for having a boyfriend, and so she said... and that was when she found out, and she said, why I haven't you told me, I know that you trust me so much, and I said, no, I was afraid that you would hit me, and then I told her everything, and she said, but what would I hit you for, why wouldn't I allow you to have a boyfriend if you're free to have one?

We, we used to see each other, after my mum found out, he was about 15 years old, he was older than me, after my mum found out she asked to meet him, she told me to bring him round, and I said, no, mum! What's wrong with you? I mean, I don't want to bring him to the house, and so one day my mum told my sister to bring him round and she did and so she found out who it was.

And my mum really liked him, because he was from a good family, and I don't know what else, my mum was really happy.

The most important person for me? My mum. Because I... because she was my mum, she was the one to bring me into the world, and that's why I'm alive, because of her. And because she was really nice to me when I was little, because when she realized that I was going to join the guerrillas, she said, stay here, I'll give you everything that you want, I'll take you to (the city) that was my biggest dream. She said, I'll take you and I'll give you whatever you want but don't go, and I went and joined, I went.

## **FESTIVALS AND RELIGION**

The girls indicated that they had been taught about God and that some of them had been baptized and went to church with their families before becoming a member of the armed group. At least one of the girls found having to go to Mass a drag and resisted attendance but finally gave in to the family expectation to attend.

Religion was not something to be discussed in the armed group. The armed group prohibited some church groups from gathering because of the possibility of infiltrators. Those who said they believed in God indicate they prayed to God to protect them when they left camp, to help them get out of the armed group and keep their family healthy. Fetes and festivals were held on a regular basis. The entire community participated in these fetes and festivals.

### **Girl A:**

I was taught loads of things about God. I believe in respecting my parents, I believe in God, I was taught to pray, loads of things. Your soul tells you that there must be a God, and that there is. I believe that God exists and that God is the Father Creator of the whole world.

It's a very united community, there is no hate, there aren't any grudges, I mean, for me, let's say it's like something that... I'll never forget my community. There was a Mass every Sunday at the school and everybody used to go.

The day of the fiesta for the Patron Saint, everybody always got together that day. The people always cele-

brated that day. That day everybody went to the village, to sell things, they used to bring animals to sell, loads of things.

When it rains a lot and an area gets flooded, and so the other people help out and so people don't let other people's things get washed away. The people were very poor, very humble, and nothing else.

I believe in God. I always used to ask him to keep my family healthy and one day, to get me out of this hell (armed group).

**Girl B:**

Well, with them (armed group) you just have your own religion, there they don't tell you to be this or to be that, and you have the religion that you belonged to at home, I mean, we, I was Catholic, but there you, like, you forget it, but nevertheless you still belong to that religion, but above all, most people are atheists, they don't believe in anything except what they see.

I used to pray at night when we went, when we left the camp, I used to cross myself and ask God not to let anything happen to us on our way.

**Girl C:**

You don't talk about that (religion) there (armed group). I mean, you do believe in God and the Virgin Mary, but there you don't talk about religion.

**Girl D:**

At the school they held fetes about every two months and so we used to go to these, and practically the whole community went, anywhere where there was a party, all of us from the houses around there, we used to go, almost the whole family went.

**Girl E:**

We often had fiestas, about, about every month. There were musical bands, there were several musical bands, well, you know, groups that sang, and they used to do live shows, all these bands and, well, they were great but sometimes there were fights. Since the armed group lived there.

**Girl F:**

The fiestas began at about six o'clock, but there was loads of booze and we used to drink a lot. Sometimes there were cock fights that went on until dawn. Many people liked to watch the cock fights, make bets on them...

On Sundays, on Saturdays and Sundays people used to go to the village to go to discos and bars. The people used to go to church. At that time they (armed group) prohibited the Adventist Churches, because there were supposedly infiltrators in the church and all that. And so they didn't allow those churches to function, some, because not all, not all, there were infiltrators in some, some of the ministers were soldiers, and so they prohibited those churches at once.

They (family) went to Mass. I was baptized. She (mother) told us to go to church with my little sister. My sister likes... she just loves going there with my granny. No! I'm not going there, what a drag. I used to make up so many excuses not to go and then at last I went, I got dressed up and I went, as my granny used to nag us a lot about it, I mean that's what they say there, you know, what a drag, that woman, she doesn't do anything during the day, and then Saturday is a day of rest, you can't make anything to eat, everything is done on Friday, no, I didn't like going there. In the end I got used to going with him, with her, to church.

## **EDUCATION**

All of the girls recognized that by going to school and studying they could acquire new information. At some level they recognized that they should value going to school. Several of the girls enjoyed studying; others felt they were being forced to study. Several girls had to choose between the needs of their family and attending school. When attending school and meeting the demands of walking long distances without breakfast, caring for siblings or ill family members proved too great a demand, school was ultimately sacrificed. School was experienced as a place where you could make friends, receive care and gain recognition. It was also a place where there were obvious discrepancies in treatment and where the punishment for failure was severe. There was also recognition that there were good teachers and bad teachers.

### **Girl A:**

With all my school friends, I liked them a lot, a lot, and I still like them a lot. We were all like brothers and sisters, all of us there in that classroom, we were all very close. It was a very small school, but the people were very honest, very caring, I 'specially remember two teachers.

The two teachers were very special for me. They used to tell me that I was a very loving child, that I was a girl who never swore because my parents had brought me up like that, not to swear.

I didn't actually dislike anything about school. I've always liked studying. The math problems were very difficult, but despite that, I still liked studying a lot, my greatest desire is to be someone in life.

At school we always studied art a lot. I like art a lot because art is also a thing that should come from the soul.

I was a very upright person, I was very studious. I always dreamt about myself studying, that I was going to study (philosophy) a lot.

I know that human rights are very important -- a child should be respected and valued. I've read a lot about people's rights and children's rights.

I've always liked reading. The teachers and also I myself tried to find important books to read. I read a lot about philosophy, history, wars.

I can't remember any dates, but I can remember a very special day. It was my X birthday, I had a party at school, a cake was bought for me and all the children there celebrated that day with me.

### **Girl B:**

I was forced to study, I mean, I went anyway, but sometimes I had to look after the baby, the smallest in the family, and so I got behind by a year at school, second grade of primary. Sometimes we used to go to the library, and we did our homework, and then we went home.

I can't really remember much from school.

At school I had one friend, she was a cousin of mine. Because when my mum sent me to school I was, she sent me to kindergarten because I was allowed to start school, because I was too young, and so, in kindergarten, they thought I was intelligent, I don't know, and so from kindergarten I went straight to first grade, and then I did first grade, and then in second grade, I only studied for just two months, until my mum had the baby, and then I did second and third grade together, and fourth and fifth together, in just one year.

### **Girl C:**

I finished primary school there in my hamlet. I liked school because you learn things, but sometimes I got tired of it because, I mean, it was so far away for me to get to.

It was half an hour away on foot. Sometimes I would just leave, just like that, without breakfast.

I was the teacher's pet. She liked me a lot because I was the best behaved out of the class.

**Girl D:**

There were some good teachers and some bad ones. Some taught you things... (the teachers) used to fight with the pupils, they used to expel people from the school, they didn't teach you good things, they taught some people more than others.

You learn how to talk with people, to respect other people's things, and how to behave with other people. How to behave at home, to respect your companions, how to dress and all that. The teachers and the pupils went to the mines, look at this thing, this is for such and such a job, and with nature as well. When you're taken to see the plants and that kind of thing.

I had to be careful and do my homework so that we wouldn't be punished, because if you failed the grade you were given a right thrashing and you couldn't study anymore.

It was when I started X grade and I finished X grade that I didn't want to study anymore. ... my (family member) was already ill by this stage and there was no one there to stay with her at home and so I said that I wasn't going to study any more so that I could be with my (family member) and do the housework and so, no, I didn't study any more.

**Girl E:**

I told my mum that I didn't want to study any more, so I left school and my mum used to go out to work and I stayed with my little brother and sister and looked after the house.

[My mum] said that you don't think straight when you are very young because you'd be silly not to like studying, it was a waste. Well (she) took hold of me and, took me to the school and I left, and went back to the house again.

I don't know why I didn't like it when I was younger. Well, those teachers were really bad tempered and they were... The teachers there used to hit us, when we didn't bring our homework.

I went out with my mum and helped her to sell cassava and plantain, or if not, other days I stayed at home and looked after my brothers and sisters, like, and until the end then I stopped to think and said I'm going to study, and I started to study and did... I went back to fourth grade. Because at that time I was bored, I was bored at home without anything to do, like there were times when, well, I was doing the housework and I was with my brothers and sisters but you miss writing and learning new things that you haven't... that you don't know.

**Girl: F:**

I was sent to school. I left school because I didn't like studying. If I remember rightly, I left school when I was about X years old.

They (parents) told me off a lot because I didn't go to school, because I didn't study, and they said that I would need the qualifications in the future, and I told my mum that I didn't like studying.

That village had got good teachers, and they'd known me since I was a baby and all that, but it's just that I don't like it.

I was at school from when I was about five until X years old, because every once in a while I would get rebellious and say no, mum, don't spend more money on me because I'm not going to study anymore, and then I stopped studying.

## **PLAY**

All of the girls have positive enjoyable memories of playing. Much of the joy expressed about playing was directly related to the connection it gave them to others. One girl who was not permitted to play would go out into the fields without her mother knowing so she could play with a friend. The girls played with dolls and made houses in the fields when young. They participated in group activities when they were older, such as deer and hunter and team sports. When they were in the armed group they played five-a-side soccer on weekends and if they arrived early at camp they made little mud ovens and played with clay.

### **Girl A:**

The neighbors were very friendly, we've always been good people, good friends. My friends, well, like friends, we all used to go out and play.

I used to like and I still like playing football (soccer). I played every three, every four days. I was in the men's team. I used to play volleyball a lot, basketball and tennis. Well the only thing that they thought was strange was that I played football, I mean, why I did it. I liked football best because it's a sport that I value highly, whatever other people might say, I've never accepted that it's strange for a girl to play football.

I was told that I had a stronger conviction than the other girls, because when we played together, or when I persuaded them to play, they used to say that it was a very boring game and all that.

I used to like playing with dolls a lot. With a friend, she was a neighbor of mine, she used to come to my house every day, I used to go to her house, and we were very good friends.

### **Girl B:**

Because my mum didn't let us (play) she used to pick us up from school and she wouldn't let us play with the other children, we stayed in the house.

At school I had one friend, she was a cousin of mine but my mum didn't let me play with her. When we got together, sometimes she took me to her house and I would get sad because her parents were really nice and like a family, and so I used to go there, I left and went home.

I used to go there with another girl, she also studied with me, and lived nearby, but my mum didn't let me be with my friends, she said that it was because you learnt bad things with others, she said. I used to go to the fields with her, we used to go there because she didn't have a mum and her dad was very strict with her. We used to go out there (fields) without my mum knowing.

### **Girl C:**

[I played] with my brothers and sisters. We used to play tag, sometimes we played gunfights, what are they called... I liked playing that as well, we played deer and hunters, but what I liked most was tag.

### **Girl D:**

First I had a friend, and that friend was a colleague of my brother's, they used to work together, he was very considerate and giving, he used to bring me a whole load of things. And then I made some other friends and we started going out together to dances, and when we were studying we all helped each other with the homework. We used to play the "secret friend" on Love and Friendship Day and people used to play jokes on us.

### **Girl E:**

I had three friends of my own age. I liked playing with them. We used to play, like, sometimes we played hide and seek or if not sometimes we used to just chat. They used to go home together and they got to the

house and they were also kind of lazy. They liked playing more than food. They spent all the time playing and playing and playing.

**Girl F:**

I missed my brothers and sisters a lot, and being with my friends in the village, because I've got lots of friends there and they used to go to the house, we all used to go out with my mum, all of us at home and we would go and bathe in the river at weekends, we go out and have lunch somewhere in the countryside and go swimming in the rivers.

We used to play tag, statues and other games and many other things, or sometimes we made play houses, when we were young we used to make play houses out in those little hills that you could see from there, and we would go there and spend loads of time there, we were there for really a long time.

In the armed group, on Saturdays, at the weekend, you could play, at the weekend. I thought that was just great, because you could play five-a-side football, and we used to play five-a-side.

We used to make little ovens, when we first got to a camp we'd make ovens, and we played with clay. It was good fun.

Sundays and Saturdays were for resting, and it was good fun because we could play what we wanted, whatever game, because what we had in that "column," where I was going out with the commander... Because I didn't have to do much, because of that, because I was going out with him, yes, I didn't have to do a lot. We had footballs, basketballs, we had about five balls in the column to play with, and we used to go and play five-a-side, yes, we played hard, really hard.

## **REASON FOR JOINING**

Several girls joined because they were being physically abused or emotionally maltreated by some member of their family. They had very sad and angry feelings about their family relationships. One girl had experienced a very troublesome time with her boyfriend. She joined because she wanted to get away from her boyfriend and the humiliating rumors about her behavior that were being spread in the community. Two of the girls had been misled. They were told that life with the guerrillas was fun. One girl was forced to go with the guerrillas for three days. She was told she could make a decision to leave after three days. Once she was with them they told her she could only leave after three years. Another girl was told she could leave after two months. Both of these girls wanted to wear the uniform of the guerrillas because of how good it looked. They thought by joining they would see new places.

**Girl A:**

I carried on with my life as normal, studying... and after that situation and those problems with my boyfriend, well, my (family member) at that time he used to beat me a lot, and that's when I left, because I'd been very indulged as a little girl and everything and so I joined the guerrillas.

In some ways it was because I hated them (people who were spreading rumors about her) and they (her neighbors) had a sister in the guerrillas and also I wanted to get to the point where I couldn't be humiliated anymore.

I said that I wanted to join them. I never said anything to my family. That day I went to school, got some clothes and packed them in a bag that I used to carry around and I never said anything to my family.

They were very sad to hear that I'd joined the guerrillas, they said it was like risking one's life. I left a note. I told them I'd join the guerrillas because of this problem with my boyfriend. Yes, it was a really, really tiny

note, I didn't say anything more than I'd joined the guerrillas because of that problem I'd had with that other person (boyfriend and another friend).

**Girl B:**

I was about X years old. They (people in the group) asked me why my legs were like that and so I told them it was because my mum used to beat me a lot and that's why I was like that and so they said to me why didn't I go with them, because the guerrillas didn't beat people, they didn't treat you badly, they didn't insult you, nothing.

And so I told him that I would think about it and the next day I went off with them.

And then my mum found out and she came back....to look for me, and that was when they went to look for me, and they told the guerrillas to give me back because I was underage, and how on earth could they even have thought about taking me and everything. And so I talked to them and I said that I wasn't going to go back home because they maltreated me a lot and because I didn't want to go back home, and since then I haven't seen them again, until who knows when. And then when I was with the guerrillas I didn't miss them anymore, I didn't need them, or anything.

**Girl C:**

Once I dreamt that I was amongst their ranks, I dreamt about being with the guerrillas. They used to pass through. I was 14 years old. Well, sometimes they made lunch near here, they had lunch and then they left.

I was the only one to talk to them. I asked them what their life was like. They said it was fun, and they asked me if I wanted to join them.

I longed for a uniform like that...because it looked good. They looked good, it suited them, it looked good on them, I mean. I used to dream about being able to wear it one day. To get to see new places, lands, all that kind of stuff.

**Girl D:**

I had a problem at home. I was scared, and so I went to them secretly, so that no one would know, one day when I went down to the village to sell a bundle of firewood and I left at six in the evening.

When I went down to the village the guerrillas called me over and told me that I had to go with them for about three days while they were sorting out this problem. And so after being with them for three days I asked to leave but they said I couldn't...only those people that had been with them for three years could leave.

Sometimes they persuade you not to go. They say that it's just for three days and then when you've been there for three days they don't let you leave, they say, no, now you have to face up to the situation and carry on in the organization. I said I didn't want to, I wanted to be with my family, that I wasn't going to join and they said no, that I had to join them and that I had to. And so I had to join.

**Girl E:**

When I was going to finish fourth grade, yeah fourth grade and going to go into fifth and I left, I left and so that was when some friends arrived and asked me to join the guerrillas.

This girl arrived, a friend of mine, so, so she, she persuaded me to join, and so two militiamen arrived, and persuaded me to join, and they told me that, that it would be for two months, and they, and they lied to me, and so I said, OK, but only for two months. I didn't know them. She's from the same place, and she was a friend of mine and she was also a good friend of m. For example, I wanted to do two things, either to be a singer or, if not, then to be a guerrilla.

I said let's join and so these two militiamen arrived and they lied to us. Well, we went, and after two months we told them that we wanted to go home and they wouldn't let us. I liked the uniform.

**Girl F:**

She (friend) lived nearby, the same thing happened to her as to the other girl because, because her mum rejected her, she joined up because of that, because she was sad.

I joined up not because of that but because I thought they (the guerrillas) were really cool.

**TRAINING AND LIFE AS A CHILD SOLDIER**

Life as a child soldier, for the girls, often began with the information that if you did not want to stay with the guerrillas after three days or some other established short period of time you would be free to leave. The girl had been assured, by the guerrillas, of her right to leave before she went with them. If the request to leave was invoked by the girl it was made known that it did not apply to her and she was there for three years, not three days, or some other long-term.

The period of training stated by the girls varied. Some of the girls received more training than others. Part of the training was learning to train others. Some of the training was intense and dangerous. For example, training on the high bar was life threatening because if they fell they would be seriously injured or even killed. They were forced to run for hours, navigate through tunnels, run in streams and perform rigorous physical exercises.

The time established for being given a weapon and the training in the use of the weapon also varied. A pistol might be received after one week and an AK-47 after three months. Learning how to clean and take apart the weapon was part of training. The girls were also taught to provide training for others.

The girls also were taught the politics and philosophy of the movement and used this information to collaborate with the people. This information was also lived out in the daily group sessions held about relationships and the way the participants in the movement treated each other. Even though the men and women were expected to have full respect for one another, especially in the area of relating to one another sexually, at least one girl was raped.

Contraceptive injections were routine, even when the girl objected. The injections were as much a part of training as the weapons. All pregnancies were considered the fault of the girl. The girl was held responsible and forced to end any pregnancy by having an abortion. There was some acknowledgement that rare exceptions were made and the girl was permitted to continue the pregnancy and return after the birth of the child.

The girls recognized that their life would be easier if they were in a partner relationship with a commander. They had fewer duties to perform, they had privileges regarding supplies, they were able to ride rather than walk long distances and others granted you more respect and listened to you.

They discovered in battle that the radio was more important than their life -- if you failed to protect the commander if you were his bodyguard you would be killed; that the commander might abandon the troops in battle; and the troops were left to make it on their own and each person was on his or her own; you were ordered to kill others (sometimes innocent people); and that at any moment you could be killed.

The girls wanted to escape -- they could not stand the battles and being ordered to kill people at the will of the commander. At the same time, they liked the feeling of power and control that having a gun gave them. They also enjoyed and wanted the companionship and the sense of belonging that being in the movement provided for them and they were torn by these conflicting feelings.

## Girl A:

At the moment I'd rather not say the names of the commanders because if I say their names, I know that they remember me a lot, and I might say their names... because if they find out that it was me that said their names they might even kill me. They sent lads to get me, they picked me up at a house. I went there and met up with the rest of them that were there, the commander was there, and there were several women and several men.

They congratulated me for having joined, it was very important for them that people collaborated and they said that this was a very easy way, the only thing you had to do was to be prepared to give your life.

They celebrated in a normal fashion, the way you would celebrate anything, by drinking. Yes, every time that somebody joins they celebrate because they think that this person is going to give the commander... is going to give him..., like, more safety. I mean, he feels safer and safer as more and more people join.

I was on a training course for six months. After a month and a half I was sent to the training course. Training was very difficult, you have to walk along a bar that's two meters high, it's very thin and very dangerous -- if you fall you kill yourself. You have to go through a tunnel, many, many things, do sit-ups and run. The training is really very difficult, from five in the morning to six in the evening. There was a person in charge who's trained many, many people to be able to give the training course to other people.

After a week I was given a pistol, after three months I was given an AK 47. I was just told how to fire it, how to take the safety catch off and how to put it back on again and that kind of thing, how you clean it, how you put it back together again.

Patrolling is walking and walking and always hiding from the army and always being in the wilds. We were told that you have watch out for the army, that they weren't following us, when helicopter passed overhead we were told to throw ourselves down on the ground and to be careful because the helicopter could machine gun you. On patrol we were to bring in food from the village, to do special missions, to go and visit other people, they have many people that collaborate with them. The special missions were, for example, to go and recharge the battery for the radio, you have to do that every two days, every three days, you have to go to a house to change the battery.

The training was really very difficult for me, because as a woman you're not used to these things, that every day from 5 until 6 you're out there running in the streams, jogging, doing sit-ups, walking along the bar and many other things that I can't remember at the moment. For me it was really very difficult because when you weren't able to do that anymore then you were made to cook or something else, you were punished by being made to run for four or five hours.

If they like you, the jobs that you're supposed to do are different, for example, you have to cook every other day, it's the same for cooking or doing guard duty, that's very difficult because you have to be stood up in one place and you're risking your life because the army might arrive at any moment, and you might die at that moment. When you were on guard duty, if you saw the army you had to warn the others, or to shoot at them, and try to save the commander. That was the biggest responsibility that we had. If anything happens to the commander then you'll be killed. The guerrillas themselves would kill you if they realized that you hadn't defended the commander. In combat you had to give your life for him. In combat, he runs off ahead and you're left behind fighting, shooting at the army.

The worst thing was doing guard duty and cooking. The commander decides, he says, today this person cooks, next day, that person cooks and so on. I mean, on guard duty there were five or seven lads, guard duty turns were given out, you went and did your guard duty and then, right, you were relieved by other people, and then the next day another six or seven had to do it, and two people were chosen for cooking and that day they had to make lunch, breakfast and supper.

We were told a lot about politics, we had to learn their anthem. The only thing they do really is get everybody ready for a confrontation with the army. At the end of the day you have flag down, which is like marching in front of the commander. You do that when you're far away from the army, when there's almost nothing else to do. You are told about politics.

On a normal day you begin at seven in the evening and go on until about nine. You talk about politics, talk about the constitution, they have different ideas to the things that we have at the moment. Well, at least in politics, they say that as long as there isn't a leftist president we're going to continue in this terrible state. And now I say, every time they destroy something we're also going to continue in this terrible state, and every time they do something violent, it's going to get worse and worse.

I'm one of these people, that having a radio I can communicate with other people, it could be with the army or with any other person, or even with people with telephones, you can communicate with any old telephone using the radio. I had to talk to different commanders, to talk about whether they had sent weapons or if they had sent more people so that we could wait for them. I never had problems with the radio I was very interested in studying.

They print a lot of newspapers themselves, I don't know where they get them from, magazines that they produce about people, people that work for them, they produce a lot of things to be able to give them to the other people in the villages to try and scare them more and more.

People feel more and more afraid because they're saying more and more things to the people in the villages, to the people in the regions, that one-day they'll be in charge of this country.

If a girl got pregnant she was made to have an abortion. I think this was very painful for the girls. I mean, imagine that, making someone have an abortion. You're told, from when you join, that you can't get pregnant. At that moment, the commander calls you over and he tells you that. They can't use pregnant women, because at any moment a pregnant woman... they might even kill her. You were given contraceptive injections, they had many methods to stop the girls from getting pregnant. The men weren't given contraceptives. They'd say that it's the woman that has to deal with the contraception.

It was just the women that were told, because the commander said that it was the women that decided, the men asked to have sex and the women were the ones that decided. The girls couldn't let themselves get pregnant.

Everybody is just interested in themselves there; you have little affection for other people. Everybody is told you have to look out for your own things, and not to be interested in other people's concerns. Some of the women started playing around with the men... caressing them, and that's something that a woman shouldn't do because there you have to be with the men all the time and anything... and if you want to be respected... then you say, look, you respect me and that's that.

And so the men respect you in the proper way, because if the men don't respect you, then you can go and tell the commander. The commander will punish them, and it's a very difficult punishment for them and sometimes it even draws blood. They're made to dig tunnels, it's something that's very difficult for them and their hands are left covered in blisters, they get completely worn out because of what they have to do. Digging holes, fetching firewood for six or seven months, 30 trips a day. The commander and the person who has been wronged makes the decision about punishment. Nobody else makes that decision, it's just those two people.

I met loads and loads of women, there were almost more women than men, at that moment there were some 500 women and some 400 men. There were about 150 women and the rest were men.

After I joined the guerrillas I was never able to get in touch with my family again. It caused me a lot of

sadness to think about meeting up with my family and talking to them.

They searched heaven and earth for me. They didn't stop looking for me for two and a half years.

I found out through things that the commander told me. They went many, many times, they even pleaded with him to tell them where I was. They (guerrillas) were afraid that I would go back home. Somebody had to come to get me out of there, and they never let me go back to my family.

The commander used to say that everybody has their own religion. Some in the group were Evangelists, some of them were Catholic, and so on, but some people after being there so long, that they'd got bored of praying every night, they'd got fed up with these things. I prayed because I believe in God. I always used to ask him (God) to keep my family healthy and one day to get me out of this hell that I was going through. After having joined I understood that it was hell, that this has nothing to do with this life, and that I had made many, many mistakes, a great mistake in having joined them.

What hurt me most was losing my principles. Principles that you see in other people in the other women... you lose the principle of respecting people because you see that the women aren't respected by the men.

Nothing special ever happened to me, nothing with any other man, nobody was disrespectful towards me. I didn't trust the commander that much, because he's one of these people that you shouldn't trust. He's a person that from one day to the next will just turn his back on you, one day he'll say, no, this person doesn't mean anything to me, we could just get rid of her or him.

If we're all God's children, then we're all like brothers and sisters, for me, we're all brothers and sisters, we shouldn't be fighting with each other. I mean, what's the point?

You could only talk to the commander when you asked permission from another commander of lower rank than him. When you bring him information about other people who have been collaborating with the army, at that moment you're treated like a king. He congratulated you. I saw that other people took him information. I mean, anybody could take him information, anybody could tell him, he could order anyone to go to the village, you're going to do these things, and that person would find out about the things and bring him back the information. You're like a prisoner, it's like you're afraid of the authorities and many other people that you shouldn't be afraid of. Now that I'm free, I'm not afraid of these people. Quite the opposite, I'm afraid of the guerrillas.

They've kind of become bad, bad in the sense that they sometimes kill many innocent people and that you can't say really that they're good people. They killed a man who was innocent, they killed him because he hadn't paid the guerrillas' collaborator, he hadn't paid pesos and they killed him for that, and that's an innocent death.

I was with them on an operation and they asked me to help them to plan it, to see how they could attack the army, how they could shoot them, and really they did well that time. Unfortunately they did well and the poor soldiers... because despite the fact that I had been part of that, I was angry at them (guerrillas). After seeing how things were there, I felt pretty bad, because after having belonged to a group like that you feel bad, really I feel pretty bad, I feel that I didn't have principles towards other people because you have to hurt other people.

You blow up an electricity tower and then the cost of electricity increases and increases for the poor people. That's something that I've learnt a lot about after being free and before that I saw these things closer up, and I don't know how I got it into my head to join that group.

When they (guerrillas) held meetings with the people, I had to talk to them, face to face, and tell the people everything that the commander had told me, I had to go out and tell the people in public. I had to talk about what we did, how they could collaborate, and many other things. I told them how we used work, that, look,

that we were very humble people, that we were helping the country, and that we respected the country a lot.

The girls, maybe if they got involved with the men, they would seduce them. The girls seduced them so they would have sex with them. Nobody's obliged to do this, they do it because they want to.

I had a very special friend and I asked her to tell the commander or a lower ranking commander to get me some sanitary towels, I always got her to talk to him because I was very embarrassed about this. He used to order them to be bought in the village. They had a medical team, I mean, a doctor that's a guerrilla or something, there are many people that are doctors and they join the guerrillas

I was in combat very little, you feel afraid, terrified, all that. I came out unharmed. I don't know if it was because God performed a miracle for me or because of something else to do with God, because that was incredibly difficult for me.

The battles made me very afraid, I almost didn't do anything, I was told that I was useless, that I wasn't good for anything. I was afraid to shoot a gun, something that terrified me was the sound of gunfire, it made me scared. I was very scared that... maybe because I felt why... what are we fighting for, maybe at that moment you ask yourself why.

The radio was the most important thing. A person had to give their life for the radio, whether it was us that was attacking the army or if the army was attacking us. The radio operator had to go to a safer place like a ditch, where the bullets couldn't reach them. where the bullets will pass over their head, it's like an opening, somewhere the bullets can't reach the person so they can continue to communicate easily. The radio is protected a lot because the radio for them is very important, even if the operator got killed.

I had friends, yes, we got on well, we used to chat. We used to talk about life, about our childhood, about how we got on with our family, all that, things that friends talk about.

A girl, a friend of mine, was killed. I found out about one girl who got pregnant but she was made to have an abortion after three or four months when the commander realized that she was pregnant. There was a very strong reaction. She cried, she said that she'd rather they killed her than have an abortion. She had an abortion, everybody has to have an abortion. She carried on like normal, then after that, then after that, you begin to forget about it. I had one friend. No one else she was very close to me, and I respected her a lot, I used to say to her, look, you have to make other people respect you and I instilled these principles in her.

The special celebrations for us were in December, the 31st of December was a day that we celebrated. They always celebrate by drinking. Everybody got drunk, I mean, nothing serious ever happened because there the people are all friends, and everybody began getting affectionate.

It's not prohibited for anyone to smoke. There were moments in combat when it was prohibited to smoke because you could see the glow of the lighted cigarettes.

At the camp there was never television and you never see any of these things, only when you have to go and visit a house.

They don't really have any principles. The principles that the group should have are to respect someone's life, when that person respects the lives of other people. I mean, if you don't offend the army then they respect your life.

They kill innocent people, they killed a soldier once who was innocent, he didn't have anything to do with... maybe just because he had to do military service, that's what I want to explain. The worst thing we were told to do was to kill someone in cold blood, the commander used to say, go and kill them, and you had to go and kill them.

They felt bad, pretty bad, yes, because they felt bad, and to kill someone without knowing if he was inno-

cent or guilty, I mean really, even if a person is innocent or guilty then you shouldn't have to take his life. Some women were told to this and they said no, I'm not going to do this, but they had to do it, either willingly or by force. They felt pretty bad, they used to say that killing someone was a sin. The punishment for that was that every time they had to kill somebody, they would get the same person to do the killing.

If the commander was listening to somebody saying, well, I was afraid when I had to kill such and such, for example, and so the commander would remember this and the next time that he had to order someone to be killed or something, then he would get the same person whom he had overheard to do the killing.

I actually gave myself up in battle; giving yourself up or being captured is the same, because by then you just say, OK, no more, right, no more now. As soon as I saw my chance, I gave myself up to them, to the army. I escaped from them, the guerrillas. We were very tired, and I said to them, I have to go to the toilet, and so I left ... I took off the combat jacket and everything and I ran out onto the road below and I ran away, I ran away and I gave myself up to the army. I said to them, look, help me, I don't want to continue in this group. I arrived practically by surprise, yes, I gave myself up, I slipped past the guard, the guards didn't realize. When I arrived the soldiers were very surprised. How did you do that, they asked me. And I said I was risking my life but I did it.

I left because it was an opportunity to find a different life. I'd been thinking about this for a long time but really I'd never had the opportunity. The army when I surrendered treated me well, they are people that have very strong principles. The only thing that they told me was, maybe you won't be held in prison for a long time.

When they began to ask me things I began to tell them the story that I've told you and everything and really they understood me. They asked me how my life as a child had been, about those moments when I joined the guerrillas.

When I escaped I felt a sensation that I'll never forget, it's also something that I'll never forget because it's a sensation that says to you, I'm free, now I'm beginning my free life.

### **Girl B:**

Among the guerrillas, no man has the right to be disrespectful towards a woman, nor do you have the right to insult someone there. If you insult someone you get punished. Yes, because now nobody hit me, nobody insulted me, I mean, after that the guerrillas were like my other family. I settled in, I never got bored or fed up with the guerrillas, but I had a good time, because the commanders, they helped you a lot, and it's very different when nobody is telling you off, or when nobody is hitting you all the time, and I really changed a lot. But then later, I don't know, that changed and I ran away from there.

What I liked best was there we helped the poor people a lot. There were people that didn't have anything to eat, they didn't have anything at home; we used to buy them sacks of food that we got, we used to give it to them, we used to buy clothes for the children and we gave them money. Sometimes there were sick people and we used to get a car and take them to hospital. Yes, that was what I liked best, that we helped the people.

Before I was a teenager I had a husband in the guerrillas. He knew that I was still a girl, he told me not to be afraid, he wasn't going to abuse me, he wanted me to be his girl, and so, because there the people give you advice, the girls, the women that had been there for the longest time gave you advice, they said that it was better because then you weren't going to be bothered by any of the others, and that he would look after me, someone who was capable, who was more experienced, so that he could help you and so I accepted.

He was, like, in spite of being my "husband" he was like a dad. He helped me a lot, and I told him all about my family. I'd been fitted with an IUD, I had that for about a year and a half, then I got ill and I had it taken out. He helped me a lot, he carried my things, sometimes he helped me with the rifle, he helped me

with everything, and so I just carried my clothes. Then he told me that he, well, that he wanted someone else because I was still a little girl and so he said he was going to get another girlfriend, someone older, a woman. I was moved and I never saw him again.

There you get up at 4:45 in the morning, right? We got up, we organized ourselves, we packed up everything, we left our pack ready as if we were going to leave, we got our toothbrushes out and we went and brushed our teeth, and then they whistled for us to fall in and have a coffee at five. Then we went back to our beds and they whistled again and it was time to do exercises, to go jogging, until six in the morning. At six we had breakfast, and at eight they read the news, and at nine we had a snack, and at 11 or 12 o'clock we were given lunch. Then we had one hour or so to rest, and then we went jogging until about three in the afternoon, then we got back and we had an afternoon snack and then about five or six we had supper, and if we were somewhere cold, at about eight we were given a coffee to go to bed with. And from six to eight in the evening we were given talks in the classroom.

The talks were about the Plan Colombia, which is what the United States wanted to do with Colombia, about drug trafficking and that, how to behave in front of the civilian population, how a guerrilla should behave when in public. You shouldn't treat anyone badly, and you shouldn't insult anyone. If you get insulted, then not to insult back but not to pay any attention, not to take things belonging to the civilians, to respect them, not to bother the girls, the young people, and to show solidarity for civilians, for example, if you get to a house and there's a woman doing the dishes or washing the clothes, then to go and help her, or if the man is chopping wood, then the men should go and help him, to show solidarity like that, that's what we did if we saw people working, and we set about helping them.

When you had your period, sometimes you asked permission to go ahead and wash before the others, and above all the boys are taught that, now it's normal for them, that it's your period and you're not with them. And they respect you. Sometimes you washed with them, you wash in your underwear the same as them, and no, they're not disrespectful towards you. Sometimes there were girls who were embarrassed to do that, because they were new, and so they go and wash beforehand.

Men and women do the same jobs. Everyone is equal, to dig the latrines, trenches, to fetch firewood, cook, it's all the same, everyone is equal, they all carry the same things, everything.

I was in several battles. The first battle the army attacked us, two soldiers died. After that we went to attack the battalion and we also fought the X Battalion.

Also, in attacks on police stations. Then we had to fight the army almost day and night, a lot of soldiers died, no guerrillas died, just two, loads of soldiers died. They died in the first battle, I mean, when they attacked us, that was at six in the morning, a captain died, a corporal, and about six privates, six police privates, and then after that we went to attack them, to get our own back.

I wasn't afraid, I don't know, when you're actually there, you know, the fear just goes, and then after you hear the first ten shots, I wasn't afraid anymore and I carried on like normal. We went on ahead, or in the center, or if not then we all went in a line, and we reached them as a front, all of us... but then in combat you don't realize if you have actually killed someone... but, like, in cold blood, once, but I told the commander that I wouldn't. I said no, and went up to him and I said I'm not going to kill anyone, he hasn't done anything to me and I went on ahead and they ordered some others to do it. The others were ordered to kill the thieves.

Where we were the guerrillas had never been there before, and the people, the poor people had to sleep with everything inside, they even had the cattle in the kitchen because there were many thieves about, and we arrived and we killed about ten and that finished it, there were no more robberies and so the people were very grateful.

I had to organize some meetings in the villages and explain to the people the reasons, or the value of the women guerrillas, and so we held meetings and we explained and sometimes you have to argue with some of the men because they say that women should stay at home, and so you try to change that idea, to get it out of their heads, and so I was sent to hold meetings there.

Most of all I liked traveling, I liked getting to know lots of places.

I was in lots of battles. Sometimes they attacked you, other times you attacked them. One day they showed up at three in the morning. We used to have to spend whole nights without sleeping, standing up, waiting for the army to arrive, guarding the road so that the army couldn't go past.

I was afraid of the army. I'm also angry at the bourgeoisie, because the women guerrillas would be captured there and the soldiers used to rape them, it was a fear of that, I mean if they kill you, then they kill you.

I wasn't afraid of dying but of being caught alive by the army. One of the girls was caught alive; she was about 16 years old, about that age, they captured her and they all raped her, all the soldiers, more than a hundred, and then at the end, they were tired of that and they all stuck their rifle barrels into her vagina and fired and then they poured sulfuric acid on her. They buried her and then afterwards we went there and dug her up and we gave her military honors and everything and we bathed her and then we looked at her and then we dressed her and then we took her to be buried in another cemetery. They poured acid here, on this part only, nowhere else, the body was completely covered in bruises and the shots had come out here in her back. Yes, we were very angry, and so we went and fought the army for two days running.

The guerrillas never take in anyone by force, well, as far as I know, right? Never, but there are many people there because their boyfriend left them, they join out of boredom, or being badly treated at home, because they fancy some guerrilla, or because they like guns, that's why they join, because they haven't got anything else to do, they go there to look for, I don't know, a life.

There, there are times that you enjoy, and there are moments when you suffer, but you suffer more than you enjoy it.

I did things because I liked doing them, because sometimes we would go out and find people in a bad way, and we, I mean, I used to like saying to them, here, take a million pesos and go and buy something. I used to like saying to the children, here, have a sweet, or take this to your parents so that they can buy something to eat. When I was with the guerrillas I bought a lot of clothes for children, there used to be lots of people with clothes to sell, and I said to them, sell me these clothes and then I used to go to the children's houses and give them a change of clothes, like that. I used to like that a lot and I felt good doing that, giving them money, I mean, the women would say, oh, I haven't got enough money to buy such a thing and I'd say, here you are, go and buy it. It is good to have guns just in case, because out there in the countryside if you don't have a gun no one takes any notice of you. The civilians now know that we have to carry guns or something, so that people respect you.

The ideology from before is very different to that now. I mean, before the guerrillas said that, when I was with them, that we were fighting for the people, for a socialist country, and now, it's, like, totally different. People are killed just for the sake of it, fighting just for the sake of it, now it's not the same as before. The guerrillas used to be, I don't know how, they had more good will, they used to help the needy people more and now, now they don't, and now it's like I don't give a damn if people suffer or not. Everyone for themselves, defend themselves, right? I mean we used to hold meetings, we talked, but they were, everyone takes care of themselves, practically no one had been to school.

Some had finished primary, about half way through primary, that's how I explained it, but it's difficult to make them understand.

Before, they didn't use cylinder bombs or anything like that, but now, because the army is there, with the air force bombing such a lot as well, and so the guerrillas say that when the air force stops doing the same thing then they will also stop using cylinder bombs, but many people die with these bombs, because they don't always land in the right place, I mean, that's logical and you see children among, in everything that has been destroyed. For example, we would put land mines in the road, to blow up the army lorries, when we were, we would put them when we were sure at what time they would go by, and so you're ready, and so as they're coming you lay them and they explode at once. They always used mines out there.

When you get moved from one "front" to another, in the new "front" your old rank did not count. In that "front" there were people who had only been there for a year, a year and a half and you had to obey them, and I had already been with the guerrillas, I mean I'd been with them for a long time, but the change in "front" affects you a lot. I had people under my command, I was there alone on some ridge with three, four, even five others. When I was transferred, then it's like just having joined again.

We were with the army after escape from the guerrillas for only four or five days. They asked us a load of questions, but we didn't really tell them much, we didn't really pay too much attention. They didn't say anything to us because we had given ourselves up voluntarily and so there was no reason to treat us badly or anything

What I most liked doing was helping the poor people, the children and old people. When I could I helped them, and what I didn't really like doing was kidnapping people, or taking money from people, or taking the cars that they were driving.

The civilians got on better with the women, the civilians were more afraid of the men, but with the women it was easier to get things across to them, because a woman can go in and talk to the woman of the house, she can help her tidy the kitchen, and so the civilians trust them more. And so because of that there were always two or three women in each squadron or group.

The person I trusted most was my partner, but, I didn't ever really talk to him about what had happened to me at home, but he helped me, gave me advice, he used to tell me, you have to behave well, you have to do what you're told because you are the girlfriend of an important person. You have to set an example, all that kind of stuff. And so with him, that was all we talked about.

Every day at half past five there was "relations session," I mean everyone was called together, except for those on guard and we did the same at five in the afternoon. And so you step forward and say that such and such treated me badly or any other problem and you tell everyone, or suggestions you want to make, so you step forward and say I've got an idea, and so the idea is that we have two cooks or to have one less, or my suggestion is that we all stay in bed, or, and we solved our problems like that.

At five in the afternoon we get together and tell the others about any kind of problem we might have. Or if not, then you go and see the commander, where they always hang out, and there you can talk to them, you go there and you say I need to talk to you, and then they listen to you.

If there are problems with a boy or with a girl, if the problem has got to, if you're about to come to blows, then you're told to talk about it, they explain that you shouldn't fight amongst companions, the enemy is outside, not inside, and so this is explained and sometimes they understand or if not, if they're very angry, then, for example they put them face to face, the two that are fighting and they're sat down until, it could be all night, the two of them on their own, until finally they begin to talk, and if they don't make up like that then they're made to sleep in the same bed, or made to eat off the same plate, and like that, sleeping together they have to make it up.

The worst thing is to desert, other things aren't so bad. For example, some people like to drink a lot, and so they have to have a "council of war," or some people fall asleep on guard duty, they're also given a "coun-

cil of war,” but that rarely happens, most people know, but above all the newest people, if they fall asleep on guard duty, they get tied up and punished. When they were tied up and put before the “council of war” it was by vote, and if the majority of people, they’re put before everyone that’s there, and if everyone votes that they be shot, well then they’re shot, and if they vote for them to be released, then they’re released and that’s it. That happens almost every day there, for whatever reason. And if, for example, you vote to release them, it depends on the case, and then they say no, then it’s held against you, and they say that you’re not being disciplined and you’re not doing this or that, you’re helping to create disorder and so they hold it against you until you do something else wrong and then you’re for it.

The commander of the squadron, he tells you where to go, right? Like in a line, and he says OK, you’re here, and if the army comes you let them approach two or three meters and then you fire, and the retreat is when I say, I mean you arrange a place, for example, and then I say, retreat, and so everybody retreats and for as long as I don’t give the order to retreat, nobody is allowed to retreat.

Thinking about dying the ones that leave, it’s obvious that they’ll be killed, if they get caught then they’re killed. But when we were going into combat, I didn’t think about whether I was going to get killed, all that I was expecting, for example, was that I’d get shot, that’s all really, but every time that I went into battle I always crossed myself and said, Oh God, don’t let anything happen to me.

I never had, I never got shot or anything like that. Once when we attacked an X and then we went in to check it over there were about four dead policemen, some had their faces uncovered and they were all covered in blood. That was the first time that I saw a dead body, and for more than a week afterwards, as soon as I closed my eyes I could see them, that was pretty tough. I never thought that I might get killed or anything like that, I just said, I hope God helps me and nothing happens to me.

What I most miss is, for example, the companionship that you have there, between everyone, that you’re like, one family, like brothers and sisters, I miss that a lot.

And now, being here, it’s difficult to help people, because you don’t have the means anymore, or the means to help the poor, now you can’t be like you were there because there you find someone and you give them money, right? And you distribute money, and you don’t really need money because everything is given to you, and I miss that most of all.

It’s really different, here, you don’t have to worry about anything, you go to study, you come back, you don’t worry about, for example, the army arriving, or that you have to go and do guard duty or that it’s raining and you can’t be bothered to go on guard, you don’t worry here. But there, you’re worried all the time, then when you least expect it, boom! The army comes and you have to leave, if there’s food or no food, and so it’s a big difference, between normal life and the life that you lead out there, it’s tough.

With the guerrillas you have to study, to get a qualification in something that’s useful to you, to value comradeship, it’s good to have a strong sense of comradeship, to show solidarity and help I was studying X. In the evening between six and eight there were always talks about politics. Yes, I read a lot because you’re always carrying quite a few papers that are given to you and little books as well, to study and read.

### **Girl C:**

I received some training from the commander who was in charge. First I was shown how to fire a gun, and how to lay barbed wire. I was told not to make so much noise when walking. If you get a grenade thrown at you, so that it doesn’t...I mean, if it falls some way away then to get down on the floor and you have to open your mouth, I don’t know, I can’t remember any more.

In my group there were three women including me. Men and women are treated in the same way. The regulations were the same for men and women.

On a normal day? Well, you arrived somewhere, you were there for a while, resting. Two people made the breakfast; most of the people that cooked were men. Because I don't like cooking...I told the commander not to make me cook because I didn't like cooking. Then straight away, if we had to get firewood then we went to fetch firewood, we got back, we washed ourselves, we were made to clean the rifles.

Where we were it was very dangerous, and we had to be ready for whatever, in case the paramilitary attacked. I was caught and I still didn't have a gun. That was the first battle. I was hoping to get on and do well, I mean I hoped to get used to it, settle in, I was hoping that I would like it. It was really hard work. Especially the hikes, I had to walk a lot. Sometimes we walked a lot at night, from seven until three in the morning, two in the morning.

When we stopped to rest (fifteen minutes) they made squash, and we drank that, and then we got up and carried on. I felt sad because I thought that I would never see my family again. You do believe in God and the Virgin Mary, but there you don't talk about religion.

Most of the time I was alone. You can have a boyfriend and if you finish with him then you can get another one, but while you're together you respect each other. If it wasn't kept to you were told off, or punished. You had to change groups, you were transferred to another group. My boyfriend was a leader. It was out of respect that they didn't say anything to me. I mean if he found out about anything, then he didn't like that, he told them off, the women. Yes, because there the people have to respect the leader's girlfriend, or his wife.

He said that he loved me a lot, not to cheat on him, to behave myself and also never to betray him. He was in the same company as me, we were together most of the time. We talked about life there, about the guerrillas. He'd been there for about X years, he liked that life. Sometimes I told him that I was fed up with being there, that's when I started regretting having joined. He asked me why, because he'd been there for such a long time and he wasn't bored.

Once you're in you can't leave. You might get killed by the guerrillas themselves because that's betraying one's country. They say that you might just join to see what it's like to, maybe, to tell someone else about it, to see where they are, what they do, what they get up to, and all that. That doesn't help them. If you join then it's because you feel sure about what you're doing, that you like it, it's because you want to, because they don't force you to join. They tell you that when you join, that you can't leave. They say that you're joining until you die, after that you can't leave.

When I was still a civilian I liked the guerrillas, and I longed to join them one day. I didn't talk about my family, I was afraid that I'd do something stupid and then they'd get their own back on my family. I was afraid to escape because they would hurt my family.

Well, what most embarrassed me, with the guerrillas, was to have to wash in front of everybody, when you get ill (menstrual period.). The men looked at me but they never said anything to me. I was embarrassed about washing myself in a bikini and everything. You're used to washing by yourself, to get dressed by yourself, and to have to go and get dressed there in front of everyone, well, you feel kind of bad, you get embarrassed.

Each woman was called up by name to go and get her things for her personal hygiene. We were told to be careful not to start a family.

Having a child there causes a lot of problems for you. I mean, if any woman gets pregnant there, then they make her have an abortion. You can't have the baby, it's not allowed. The commander was in charge of birth control He was the only one who knew how to give the injections. Every six months he gave you an injection. I wouldn't let them give it to me. My boyfriend said that it was for the women's good, it wasn't for them but for the sake of the woman. Think about it, a woman out there, she gets pregnant and then she

has to have an abortion. I was given the pill, but what's used most of all is the injection.

My boyfriend said that condoms were for... that they were for those people with AIDS, that was what condoms were for. The majority of men didn't use them, there were only a few people that used them

Whatever problems there are, they're sorted out between seven and eight at night. The problems...like, sometimes you fight with one of your companions, and so these problems are resolved, and if the problems are serious then you tell the commander and if not, then you don't. Most of the problems were because of gossip. At the meeting you were called upon to say whether it was true or not. The person that invented that piece of gossip has to tell the truth, the truth and not gossip. If the gossip was about me I talked to him (boyfriend) and I told him that it wasn't true, that it was just gossip that someone had invented, that it wasn't true. The person that invented it was punished. He was given a week of cooking duty. The commander decided on the punishment.

In our free time we rested. We were not allowed to have parties. We watched television when we got to a civilian house, we watched the news and soap operas.

The best thing that could happen to you would be to see your family. You asked for permission. When the opportunity existed for permission to be given, it was given, if not then it wasn't. They refused when they knew that there was danger there. For a long time you don't see your family, I mean, because you're never in a fixed place, you're always going from one hamlet to another, walking.

Those that go ahead are on the lookout to see if anyone's coming, and you have to walk very carefully. We were told not to lose each other. My boyfriend always walked by my side.

I was not armed because they hadn't had time to give me the weapon, it takes three months. I walked next to them, in case of anything they'd cover me. There weren't any attacks when I was there.

To get promoted you had to go on a course. Women can get to the rank of commander. That's hard work, there's a lot of responsibility in being a commander. There weren't any benefits, no one got paid.

I thought about death mainly on the day of the battle the day I was captured. It was horrible, because I thought that if I give myself up then they'll kill me, but if I didn't, then I'd be killed as well.

We were making lunch when we were ambushed. I had just been relieved on guard duty, it was about half an hour after I was relieved, when we were ambushed. They waited for me to go inside the house because I didn't have a gun. When I went into the house they fired at us, I was frightened, and I didn't go out because I didn't have a gun, I didn't have a gun. There were three, four including a civilian girl killed. I was in a normal house with a civilian family.

I thought about giving myself up because I had the opportunity of leaving the guerrillas. I wanted to go back to civilian life, everything was going to be much easier. I was afraid that I would be sent to prison. They didn't know I was a guerrilla. I was in civilian clothes.

I had time to take the uniform off and put civilian clothes on, because I didn't want to give myself up. I was afraid that they would kill me or something. The civilian woman told me to put those on. I did what she said and put on the civilian clothes, civilian clothes. When they arrived at the door I was already in civilian clothing, I didn't have the uniform on.

They knocked on the door and told us to come out with our hands up. And so we went out, but they didn't know that I was a guerrilla. They asked the woman how many women there were in the house, and she said two and then straight away they asked me how many women there were and I said three. They asked me who the other girl was and I told them that the other girl was me, the one that had given them the coffee.

We had a saucepan of coffee there, which we hadn't had time to drink, and they asked me for a coffee and

so I gave them one. They said that I could've killed them, I could've put poison in that coffee. They took me as a prisoner and later they transferred me to the battalion. They asked me why I was a guerrilla, because I didn't look like a bad person. They asked me why I was a guerrilla and I said because I liked it. They treated me well. They said that they were going to help me.

They said that they were going to take me to the battalion and then they would see what they were going to do with me. I thought that they were going to throw me in prison. The guerrillas said that I'd be treated badly and that if I let myself be captured I'd be put me in prison for 30 years. I wasn't told to do anything if captured.

At the battalion I was asked questions. I was received well, I was given a "city" lunch, I was interviewed.

He asked how many of us were there, if there were camps, how many guerrillas were with me that day. They said that if I knew anything, to tell them about where the camps were. I told them that I had never been to a camp or anything like that. They didn't believe me. They didn't tell me off, but they said that I was a liar, that I didn't want to tell the truth. Eventually they ended up believing me. In two days the army contacted my sister.

My family came to visit me. They were happy because I'd got out of that. I felt sad because I had left one side and had gone over to the other. I got out of that and I was put in prison. I wanted to be out of there with my family. My companions the ones that were alive managed to get away and the three dead ones were taken to the battalion.

The dead were two of my friends and my boyfriend. Well, I saw them when they were brought to the battalion. Then I was taken to a room to identify them. I told them the names, but the names that are used in the group. I was told to identify them and then straight away I left that room. I felt bad, sad. I was angry because, I mean, look, they'd killed them, and there was the person that I loved most.

From there I was sent to the X. I had to do three months. There we studied, we drew, we made dolls and toys and all that. I made some very good friends. They knew I was a guerrilla and they told me to reintegrate, they were afraid of me. They say that the guerrillas can be dangerous. I felt bad because that lack of trust makes you feel bad.

The were talking about joining the guerrillas. Well, that day, before we got there, they, I mean the commander, told me to try to convince the girl there to join. I talked to her and asked her whether she liked the guerrillas and she said yes. I told her that things were tough and that she should think hard about it before joining, because if not, once she was there she'd regret it.

But she made me look bad, because then she immediately went and told the commander what I'd said. Because of her I was told off. They asked me why I had done that. Instead of encouraging her to join I'd scared her off so that she wouldn't join. She talked to the commander the next day.

Once an ambush happened, the girls started running away but she didn't make it into the house and she was shot in the back. She died. She didn't die immediately, she was wounded but they didn't manage to save her. She was shot in the back, and the people that were on that side were the soldiers, all the others were on the other side. The girl died and the little boy was injured, but no other civilians.

The little boy stayed outside. I went out and I brought him into the room. I went outside to get him, he was outside, crying. I was afraid but I felt sorry for the woman because she was crying a lot for the boy. I thought that it was the best thing I could do, if I died then I died, but at least the boy wouldn't.

I had fulfilled my dream of joining the guerrillas, and wearing the uniform. I didn't feel so good because I only had the uniform on, I didn't have the gun which was the most important part. I fulfilled my dream of being able to wear the uniform but not of having a gun, because there you have to do three months training

first, and you don't get one as soon as you arrive, you have to be there for three months to be able to get a gun. I think it was better in the end that I didn't ever have one (gun), because with the gun I would've done something crazy.

**Girl D:**

I was there (less than a year) months. I didn't get any training, a training course, they would train you to be a radio operator or a nurse, if you wanted, or whatever you wanted they would help you with it.

When you arrive there with the other companions, for example, if there are ten of you and then you arrive, then you meet up with more people, the whole camp full of other guerrillas, and when you get there, if there are other girls, and then you start...and you're introduced and you're given a different name.

I was introduced like, look, we've got a new comrade who's going to fight for the people as well. They told me, look, that group, that squadron was to help the people and that this is why the people were being more and more oppressed and so they were the ones who were going to help the country to recover. To help make changes, to help the people...so that there isn't trouble. They said they were making changes and that before they used to do more harm because they used to take people, they used to kidnap them, and they took them to get money off them.

When I arrived I was given a pistol. I was taught how to use a pistol and in case of whatever, how you were supposed to get down and look for cover and things. For the six months that I was there I didn't get a single training course.

I worked on the X all day long. In case of a battle I had to look for my comrades so that they would protect me and to go on ahead with the commander. I was also taught how to keep watch and how to talk to the people. For example, people were called together and I had to give them talks.

The commander gave the orders and you had to obey them and if you didn't obey them then you were punished. I was told, you have to be at that house over there at 10 and you have to give them a talk about the organization. And sometimes I said, oh, I don't want to go and give talks because I used to be embarrassed by it and then I was told I had to go and give that talk. If not, I'd be punished with 30 hours of guard duty.

You had to watch over the camps, because if you weren't careful and the army... or in case of someone arriving from the other side and they attacked the camp and you managed to survive you were blamed for everything that had happened because you were the one on guard duty and you had to be watching out for everything. If something like that happened you were killed, because if you cause a comrade to be killed by not keeping watch properly you were killed.

The most difficult part was when there were battles with the army or when they said that they were going to attack a village. They came and called everyone together and said, OK, we're going to go to such a place. When you got there they said, we're going to attack this village and you all have to be on the look out and in case of anything... don't leave anything behind. You feel nervous and you think that maybe you'd be killed there and with the family so far away

At that moment I missed my boyfriend and my whole family. When I went out... to go somewhere and I used to think that maybe I'd be left there, and my family wouldn't realize, they leave you where you fall. They leave you there, and then the army collects you and brings you in.

On a typical day when you went out you put civilian clothes on and you went out to run errands or to go and buy things and you were told, OK, go to this village and bring back what we most need, food or whatever is needed. That's what a normal day's like, you rest from always being there, but you're always on the look out, what if there was one of those informers there and he'd told the army that you were passing by and then you get caught.

When you left the camp and you could rest from having to do guard duty and from having to put up with the commander who sometimes got angry with the other combatants and took it out on someone that hadn't done anything, and so you had a rest and also you could go out and walk. And sometimes you could call your family or write to them, but you couldn't escape.

You asked the commander for permission to call or write to your family. And so you wrote a letter and you showed it to him so that he could read it and see what you had written, and if he said you can't write this word, then you had to cross it out.

At camp some people cleaned the weapons, others cooked, or were on guard duty, or if you wanted to sleep, you slept if there was time, or you listened to music or talked to the other companions, or if you had to wash, then you washed your uniform, washed yourself.

The men had to go out and work in the mines hauling sacks, or working hard but the women didn't really have to do that. They had to work when it was time for studying, because from eight to nine was for studying, yes.

One day one of the women gave a class and the next day someone else, or a man and a woman gave a talk. They taught us how we should talk to people about the organization. The commander gave out some books about the organization so that people could read them and write summaries and explain and express everything they could remember and stuff.

There were meetings to organize which people were going to do the talks, meetings and nothing else. Meetings were held about every two weeks, a meeting was held in a village and about once a week in the hamlets. I just had to make sure that everybody was paying attention to the person giving the talk and minding the radio because at those meetings I had to send messages to the other companions about the security situation and how things were at that moment.

Everyone in the group was equal. For example, the equipment that we had to carry was about 10, 11 pounds, everyone had to carry the same 11 pounds, everyone was equal. For example, when a girl was "ill," or like, at that time of the month, you said, no, she shouldn't have to carry so much because women will always be women, but then they said, no, everyone is equal, and so if one person had to carry three pounds then everybody had to carry three pounds. You had to do what they said, if someone was carrying ten pounds and they couldn't manage it... then to help them along the way... my equipment weighed just eight pounds.

I liked doing the cooking, and sometimes doing guard duty. I didn't like walking because that made me tired and they all walk fast and if you didn't move it then they started to tell you off and the commander said, the person who doesn't step on it tonight will do six hours of guard duty as punishment so that you learn to walk quickly, and if the army comes, well then those mothers are going to get left behind.

Guard duty was, we were put in a place and in that place you have to keep watch on all sides. And if it was at camp then you went and looked to one side and you went around the whole camp, making sure that the security situation was OK, in the case of anything then you run back to the camp and warn everybody so that everyone is ready. In the case of a fire we had to leave all our things and just get the radio out of there.

We were always a bit scared because if we lost that radio then maybe they'd kill us, because the commander used to say if that radio gets lost then you'll pay for it.

Pay with your life or with a punishment, for example, doing 30 trips to fetch firewood, 30 hours of guard duty and 30 days of cooking duty.

Other punishment, for example, we arrived at a house and then they said, OK, you're going to be cutting the grass for 30 days in all the fields that are around this house and you had to do that and then in 30 days they

came to collect you. If you were a woman then they (the community) felt sorry for you and they used to say to the commander, how can you possibly do that, I mean, imagine that, a woman doing something like that. And he would say that's so they learn to obey the orders that they're given.

In a road block, once, they (guerrillas) stole three cars and four motorbikes, and so in this road block I left with the commander and another lad in a truck and the other cars were shared out between the others and they followed right behind the truck that we were in.

I had to keep watch with three other girls and two lads, while the others were doing that down on the road, they took the cars off the men, who knows what they said to them. At least 30 comrades were brought together and they stayed on the road where the cars went past and the others, another 30 or so keeping watch.

And in case the people got very upset then these others would go down, and the others kept watch, just in case the army happened to be around, or someone kept watch and gave out warnings. And so you had to be looking out for all this, even if the operation took three hours, three hours of keeping watch, I mean really high security. Whenever they did that (planned an operation) I was sometimes placed on guard duty because I used to get nervous, and maybe some of the people there would have recognized me, and so I was never involved in any operation, just in the security.

We were all called to the meeting and we were asked what we thought. If the activity was to "extract," the boys used to ask if it was to "extract" money... yes. Well, I and another comrade we didn't agree with that, but since you couldn't... if there were two of us that didn't agree with that then we had to say that we did agree with it because if not then we'd have all of the others against us. For a bit I felt like, bad, because I wasn't used to seeing things like that, and I always felt bad, but what could I do, I had to get on with it and go with them wherever they took me.

They went out first, in a column and started moving off. Four went ahead and then the others closer together. They went separately, the four that went ahead, they went ahead to see how things were. Everything was planned. Everybody had to be on their guard, those in front and as well as those behind, they had to defend the people in the middle. There were ranks, like the commander, from the commanders someone was chosen to command the squadron, I mean a group of about 20 was trained, and then there was one who was better than all the others and so they put him in charge of the others, and the others... and that's how they trained the commanders, more, more and more.

If you had a good behavioral record and they could see that you were an enterprising person, so then they trained you to be a commander.

The commander decided everything, he was the one who decided, if you didn't like the person that was going to be made commander, you just had to put up with it because it was an order and you had to.

I didn't want to have any kind of rank. In one of those positions you have to... for example, if three companions are killed you're responsible, you have to go to the commander and say, look, in that battle three of my lads were killed.

No, I mean you had to have a security... I mean it had to be really high, once I was left in charge of three girls and the commander said stay here in charge of these three, and with all the guerrillas that were around there, they're all watching over you, and so I stayed there in charge of them. I mean, I was nervous, in case one of the girls should escape, and I'd have to pay for that... I would have to run after them, I couldn't lose one of the girls. I'd have to get them to go ahead and follow right behind. And there were a few that wanted to give themselves up to the army, they weren't happy in the group, at least two lads gave themselves up, and the army was close by there, and they gave themselves up and the army came and attacked the camp and killed about...

I didn't tell the commander anything, only if some of the lads were bothering me, then sometimes I told the commander, but like, important things, I didn't tell him anything.

The commander asked me if I had a boyfriend back home, about how I'd been treated at home, and they started to... and I didn't say anything. When.... well, one night I was keeping watch with another girl and a group of lads were right next to us and we didn't want to pay any attention to them, and then they tried to abuse us on guard duty, and so we got really angry and we started calling the commander and they were given 30 hours of guard duty and 30 at night. They wanted to have sex with us by force, they were hassling us, getting us to go with them, and we, well, we shouted and screamed until at last the commander heard us and came over and punished them hard, so that they learnt to respect the female comrades.

The commander got everyone together before guard duty, and he read out the turns and said, OK, this person's going to be punished because of such a thing, do you all agree? And everyone said that it was an order from the commander and you had to agree.

The commander said that the women had to respect themselves as women, because there were some girls that went from one boy and to another all the time and so the commander said that that was no good to be like that, and that he'd have to send them back home to work for about five months until they learnt to respect themselves as women, that in the guerrillas he wasn't going to make a brothel out of the guerrillas, but the women had to respect themselves and learn to do the best that they could.

If you wanted to have a relationship with someone then you went to the commander and you asked him, and then if he accepted that you wanted to go out together or have a relationship as a couple... he said that if you both respected each other, both the man and woman, then you could go out with each other, and if not then you couldn't. If he didn't agree with that, he talked to all the people there and asked if everyone was happy that such a person was in such a relationship, as a couple, and if they all said yes then it was OK, that's what women were for and that's what men were for. If the commander said no, then you had to abide by that, if you had to then you had to leave it, because if the commander caught you, if you carried on in secret, talking to the boy, he got angry and he punished you.

Sometimes when a man had already had a relationship there, he'd already had a companion, and if he'd gone with someone else during that time then he didn't allow it, he said that both the man and woman had to respect each other. And if he already had a woman, then he had to respect her and be faithful to her.

The commander, if he had another three girlfriends, then you couldn't say anything to him because, like, he was the commander.

A lad once told him, you've got your girlfriend and then others and some others, and he said, but that's me and no one can say anything to me, if I have ten girlfriends then I have to be with all ten of them. The women with the commander, they were next to him all day so that he wouldn't give them guard duty, because she was the commander's girlfriend, no one could say anything to her. And so being a girlfriend of the commander... you had to respect them more than the other girls.

When the commander arrived, and the other women, well, he said hello to them nicely, and then well, with the one that he wanted to be with that night, the others had to go off, go off and find a place to sleep somewhere else, now they couldn't be with him. He chose which one he wanted to be with. Sometimes they (the women) fought, and said, why did you take him away from me? He was mine, he wasn't with you, and they fought over him.

The commander used to say, OK, whatever you need, and don't be embarrassed because here everyone knows that you need sanitary towels, that you need such a thing, everyone knows that women have this once a month. And so we said, OK, and so we were given... we were always embarrassed to tell the commander that we needed sanitary towels, or something, but we had to get over that and tell him, OK com-

mander, we need this, and then he sent us to get it at once. Or if we were far away then another girl would lend you some and when you were given more you gave them back.

All the women there, even if you didn't have a boyfriend, had to use contraception, because the commander used to say that no one could get pregnant there, because if you got pregnant there, then that was your salvation because you were sent back home, but then when the child was born and grew up a bit, then you had to go back again, those were the rules of the organization.

If you were already (pregnant) some people, if they didn't want to tell the commander that they were pregnant, then some had abortions, but if you told him then he sent you home when you were about five months pregnant, he sent you home, and people used to come and visit you, and were keeping an eye on you....if you'd been approved by the commander, the man and the woman, if they had a serious relationship, then the organization would help them with that child.

And when the baby was older then you had to go back again, you had to obey that order, and after about six months, you had to do about six months, that was the punishment, you were there for six months and then if you wanted to carry on then you carried on, and if not then you could go back home again.

If the woman couldn't bring herself to tell the commander that she was pregnant, then she took pills or an injection or something and she aborted. You always get punished (for getting pregnant), but the baby's looked after. If you were pregnant without a partner you were sent home, but the organization wasn't responsible. You had to manage by yourself, and at home you weren't really welcomed. I mean, if you get home in that state then you're not going to be received like...and then you have to... and when you have to go back to the group they don't send anything for that baby, you have to provide everything yourself, and your family has to help you.

If you were in an established relationship the men acknowledged the child, but if not then they didn't. An established relationship is having talked to the commander, and if he had given you permission to be in that relationship or not. If the relationship wasn't established the men didn't acknowledge the child. That's why there were a lot of abortions because no one acknowledged the child, and at home the dad would get angry, or the mum, and they said what had you joined the guerrillas to get pregnant, to do that you should've stayed at home. The men didn't acknowledge the child because there weren't any orders from the commander saying that they had to recognize the child.

Because if the relationship had been established, then that was another matter, but just like that, they wouldn't recognize the child. The commander accepted it, because seeing as they hadn't spoken to him, well, then it wasn't his fault and so it wasn't their fault either, and why hadn't the woman bothered to talk to him beforehand about that?

As the woman you have to talk to the boy and say to him, OK, let's go and talk to the commander because if I get pregnant, even though I'm taking contraception... and so we have to talk to the commander, and if the boy says no, then you had to say no to him, and the girl that decides to carry on with him is a fool if she's not taking contraception.

When they (girl and boy) talked to the commander, OK, commander, I want to recognize this baby as mine, and I'll love it and I love the girl, and so I want to acknowledge that it's mine, and so out of the things that you buy for me, I want you to take a part of that and buy things for the baby, and you can reduce what you get for me, in like things for personal hygiene, and so he did without some of the things that he was going to be bought so that a contribution could be made to help the baby, even it was a little, but when the man agreed to it then they helped with the baby, but when they didn't agree to it then nobody cared.

In the guerrillas we weren't given anything (pay), just things for personal hygiene, I mean, you never went without those, but we were never paid.

When an illness was serious they sent someone out to the villages to get the doctor, to get drugs, and if it was serious then the comrade would be taken to the doctor.

I had a friend, I told her about everything that happened to me, and she told me all about the things that happened to her. It was a secret just between the two of us, no one else knew what we talked about. Sometimes we did guard duty together, when we had to cook, we used to cook together. She went with me everywhere, and since the commander liked that girl as well, and so since he was always close to me, the two of us always went where he was going, we were never apart. The commander looked after us, he kept the other boys away, because there were some boys, oh no, like, that girl, the commander likes that girl so let's go and bother her, let's say bad things about her so that the commander doesn't follow her around like that, and so he was keeping an eye out to see if what the other boys were saying was true or not.

And so when he read out the guard duty turns, he used to say, there's talk of such a person, and that's not true because I'm aware of everything and I haven't seen those girls do anything like that, that's a lie, because since I like her and like you're following her around everywhere, but I like her and I'm the commander and so leave her alone, I have different opportunities from all of you. My friend, she went out... the same day as I was caught, she went out with some other companions and I stayed behind, and they say that she was killed, but who knows.

When someone else was killed, that made me sad, that a comrade should fall, and maybe you'd die as well, or get injured, and you could... or if the wounds were serious that you'd got, then you could die from that, and you're in pain until you die out there. All of us went out, the ones that were killed were left there, and then you went back to the camp again.

My friend, I miss her because we trusted each other a lot, and we had known each other since we were young, when we were at school, we already knew each other there, so she, she was a good person, she was very good to talk to and you could tell her things and she wouldn't go and tell other people, if you didn't go and tell other people things that she had told you.

She was from a different village but we'd met at some fiestas, she had come over and that's where we met, and she used to go to my house and I used to go to her house. She said that there (in the armed group) you had to watch yourself a lot because there were some little kids that were very abusive, and so you had to be careful. She said that anything that they did to me, then to tell the commander, or to talk to her and because the commander trusted her quite a bit, that she would tell him. And to be careful on guard duty because that was a serious responsibility.

One day we went out on patrol, there were five of us, two women and three men, and we spent the night on a small savannah, and at dawn I was on guard duty when I heard a little noise, and I called the commander who was with us, and I called him and I told him that I heard something out there and I thought it might be the army, because I'd seen quite a few torch lights going by and you could hear quite a bit of noise.

And so when it got light, he said, OK let's go, and so two lads went on ahead, towards a little hill, and that's where the army was. And so the two lads said to the commander who was with us, they said to him, in case of a firefight, get the girls out of here, don't just leave them by themselves, and so the commander said, OK, and the two lads went out and the battle started and the commander went off with the other girl and I was left alone, and so I was next to the other two lads when they were killed, and I was left there, and I was looking all around me, and everywhere I looked I could see soldiers, and I didn't see any more guerillas there to save me.

And so I started running, and I climbed really high up, I climbed up some rocks and when I saw that I was trapped, there were soldiers on all sides, and I was told to give myself up and that I wouldn't be killed, and so I gave them what I had, just a pistol and the equipment. I wasn't carrying the radio that day because I'd

left it with another commander the day before.

They asked me how many of us there were, where were the others, and if I knew roughly where there was a camp where they were, and if I would take them there. When I was climbing up to that place, I was fine, I went up quickly, but going down, I couldn't, because I was so nervous, and so the army lads helped me down, so that I wouldn't fall or something like that.

They asked me if I knew where the others were, how many there were, about which people around here know roughly where the guerrillas are, or where some of their secret stashes are, and I said, I didn't know, that I'd been there for such a short time.

They told me to say what I wanted to, and since I was underage I wouldn't be accused of anything, even if you say things, and if you don't want to say anything then you don't have to. When I was surrounded, some of them shouted to me, it's because you're a woman, and underage, because if not we would've killed you, or you would've ended up like those other dogs over there.

And when I'd been captured and taken over there, then I saw the other friends of mine that had been killed, and they treated them badly after they'd been killed, they hit them and insulted them and did a whole load of things, and I saw one of them who had some information, papers from the organization, and so they got me and they asked me, look, do you know where this is? And I told them that I didn't.

They insulted them and they said, these dogs, I don't know what, it's because of them that the country's like this, because you lot don't do anything else but kidnap and kill people and they hit them and everything. And then they put them inside one of those black bin bags and they put them on a horse to take them up to where the helicopter was waiting to take us to the city.

I was afraid that they were going to kill me or something, I hadn't been killed in combat but maybe they would kill me.

And then after a while I felt happy because they said they wouldn't do that, that nothing was going to happen to me, that I was going to be with my friend in a short time, that everything was going to be OK and they weren't going to do anything to me.

And so I was happy because I was going to see my family. I believed some of it, and I didn't believe some of it. But then when I was brought to the city and they called my aunts to tell them that I'd been captured and they asked them to come and talk to me.

And then I was taken to a place where there were others street girls, and people, and I was held there for a week, then I was taken to court to be asked some questions... so that I would tell them everything I knew, and they asked my relative what I'd been like when I was at home and what I was like when I left and so she told them everything and so then they said, we'll give you the answer next week, and so I was in that place for another week.

And then after that week I was told that I was going to be moved somewhere else, and so I was taken somewhere else, and there there were more companions that had been caught, there were more boys and girls, but the girls and boys separate. The soldiers said look they've caught a guerrilla, a guerrilla. They shouted at me and said, tell us where those other sons of bitches are so that we can go and get them all.

I said, I don't know, didn't you see that I was just with five others, and I said that I didn't know anything else. I was scared because there were some that were, like, little shits, and they looked at you in a nasty way, and tried to treat you badly, but no... You're told in the guerrillas that when the army captures you then you get roughly treated, I mean the children, but you're not treated badly, the adults yes, at least a commander is treated roughly so that he tells them everything.

The guerrillas say that if the army captures you, then they ask you loads of questions, and that they hit you, they treat you roughly so that you tell them the truth and you can't say things that will be damaging for the guerrillas, you say to them, OK, yes there's a camp in such a place but when there's actually nobody in that camp at the moment, you can't say things that will be damaging for the guerrillas because otherwise they'll lose out as well. And if you say something like that then when you get out of where you're being held then they'll come and look for you and make you pay for what you've done.

People came there to interview us, to ask us questions, and we were helped, we were taught things, things that we had already learnt about but forgotten and so we went on like that.

Some girls are nice to you and others aren't. They say, err, are they guerrillas? You have to be careful with them, but no, then we made friends with the other girls.

You didn't really talk to the men there, because sometimes the women were punished and they were taken to another cell by themselves, and then men got in there and so... in this part they didn't, because there was a lot of security to prevent the men from mixing with the women.

I was asked if I'd been captured, in which place I'd been caught, how old was I, but my face wasn't shown, just my back, I was on the television and on the radio. I was scared, I said to myself, what if the guerrillas see me, umm, look at her, where she is, and what she's said about us, we'll have to look for her and look for her family to make her pay for this, because that's what the guerrillas say they'll do there.

I was afraid that they might kill me, or since those others had died, that maybe my friend might have died as well, my friend was captured as well, she was caught, but she went back to the guerrillas and there she was killed. And so I was afraid that I might have to go back as well, and as they'd killed my friend then they might kill me as well.

They (the army) said that if I should happen to come across strange people, that were going to, like, ask me things, or say something to me, then I should tell them at once and that if I helped them and I told them these things, then they'd help me in some way, they'd help me with something. With my studies, and if I needed clothes then they were going to help me with that, I had to collaborate with them so that they could then collaborate with me. I hadn't thought of helping them because maybe the guerrillas would find out that I was on the army's side and then maybe they'd take it out on my family or myself.

#### **Girl E:**

My friend was 15 years old and I was younger. I liked their guns (guerrillas) because, well, because the guns weren't very big and when you carried a gun it was like you had power, it makes you really proud to have a gun.

Well to feel something, well, to feel something, to do something in, in life, to have, well, to have something that, that people admire you for. To the people of the, of the hamlet, or if not, the people there.

I went with my friend and the two militiamen, and we went to another place which was a hamlet. We went to this hamlet and they brought the equipment, the two militiamen, and we took it and we went to where they were, there were, there were about 50, and well, well then we took our things and set off and it was already about six at night, well, six in the evening and so we set off and we walked, like, three hours and we arrived at a little house, and from this house we walked, well, we walked for three days to get to where they were, where the other 50 were.

There were 50 of us. The other 50, we met, well, we walked for three days and we, we arrived at a hamlet which was called, I can't remember, it was a hamlet and we arrived and, umm, there was a camp next to a river and we arrived, and well, and we met up and we, the next day we set off for the camp where they were doing the course, that's where we went.

The day after arriving at that camp, well, we went to another camp where they were doing the course. The course where they train you for everything, there in the... and so well, we arrived there and the others left to go to a battle. We arrived at the camp and well they gave us advice, they talked to us about it, that we had to behave well and that and so we told them that we would and so we were there. I felt, well, that I was very, very small to be there, and well, that I was, I don't know I felt, that I wasn't strong enough to be like them, to carry, to carry a rifle, so that was when I realized what all the training was for.

I was tricked. They told me, they told me, well, they asked me if we wanted to join the guerrillas, well, and we said yes, but, but that we weren't going to be there all the time, but, well, yes, but first we wanted to see what it was like there, and yes, well, we'd give it a go while we were there and if we didn't like it then we were going home and they said that that was OK, try it for three months. And after three months we told them that we'd had enough and we wanted to go back home and they didn't let us.

Well, well I thought that the, in the guerrillas, you didn't have to, well yes, you did have to fight, but not, not serious enough to get killed or injured, and I also thought that it would be great there because you could watch TV there and you could play, you didn't have to study.

I had a friend and well, she was the wife of a commander, she gave me advice, she told me to behave myself and not to run away, that's what she told me, so well, I got close to her and stuck with her. When the others arrived, they separated us.

I asked her if she had had any problems there and well she, she told me she had, that she'd had a problem because she'd deserted because there was a time when she was fed up and she left the, the camp, and they caught her and they held a council of war but they didn't do anything to her because she had been there for a while and she had been well behaved.

When I had just arrived, well I told her that well, that I had really wanted to come, to come here and so well, she told me that wanting to be there was well, great, and you had to be hard working and behave well and to be obedient.

I was friendly with X, he was a friend, he was a well, he was a good friend of mine and he helped me with everything he could, he defended me when I got myself into trouble and well, he defended me.

Well, living among so many men, I mean, when I was living in the hamlet I was scared when I was with men because they're really bad, they're, I mean they're really bad in the way that I was really small and so they rape you or do whatever they want to you. And so well, I felt, like, bad because I was afraid that they were going to do something to me.

When I was with the guerrillas I stopped being afraid for a while when I had to go around alone with, me alone with, with 12 guerrillas. I thought that perhaps they were going to rape me or do something bad to me, so I felt bad because of that, and they were men and I was a woman, well, well it also made me afraid that they walked really quickly and left me behind. Supposedly, in the guerrillas the men were really bad, but there are some that are and some that aren't.

When I had just arrived, well I only spoke to her and to X, but just after we arrived they separated me because, I don't know, she separated herself from me, from me. And so as time passed the only thing we talked about was how bad things were there and that well, they wanted the freedom to be women, they wanted freedom, but we didn't talk about anything else, like where they were from, nothing else.

We had to do training when about a hundred guerrillas died and they made us all train, the young ones and the old ones and so we were taken watch a training session, 50 were being soldiers and the others were guerrillas, some hid and others passed by quietly so that nothing would happen to them, and we were always falling, because we were the new ones, well that was when, well, we started to get some experience

and when we had done that training session it was much easier because we knew how to defend ourselves.

The military training lasted three months. First we had some training and after that, when we had to learn to handle the weapons, we had to shoot with a rifle and a revolver, well first with a revolver and afterwards with a rifle, and well, when I first started using the rifle I felt scared because when you are shooting, shooting it, you have to do a lot of things, like standing still, standing firm, otherwise you'll fall over. And so they brought me over me and they made me shoot and that was when I realized how to do it and what I had to do, what you have to do to shoot the weapons.

I felt proud and I felt that well, well, I felt that I'd got to have a gun like I said I would. I felt powerful and well, that they (civilians) were looking at me and I made them scared. When we went through the hamlet like that, some of the guerrillas were cocky and so they, they used release the safety catch on their guns, for whatever reason, and so the people in the hamlet were afraid and sometimes they hid or locked their doors.

It made me feel proud because they were scared of me. Well, during the training, well, we had to get up quickly and mealtimes were quick, for example three minutes to, to eat breakfast, they gave us two minutes to clean our teeth, and three minutes to pack up our beds, and whoever, whoever didn't do it quickly was punished.

What I liked most was doing the weapons training. I didn't like the attack training and we trained with, well, some were the guerrillas and others were soldiers and you had to crawl through barbed wire, streams and whatever.

There were about 12 children between 14 and, and 15 years old. There were more girls than boys. The guerrillas after they had just seen us said, who let you in here and that we were small, too small to be there. And maybe we weren't, maybe we weren't going to be able to carry the equipment and a weapon, but well, the others were also, were quite tall and they said to them that they were too weak as well.

They praised us sometimes because, because we were obedient, who wouldn't be? We were obedient, you didn't fight, you had to behave yourself.

The relationships between the men and the women, well there, a woman, you see, any man that wanted to have, to have a woman, he had to have been there a while and had to have behaved well, and so he was allowed, and he had to ask for permission and so they let them have a relationship, but the new ones and the ones who hadn't behaved well, well, no they couldn't have a relationship and they had to do it secretly, there were times when they were separated or if not, punished.

My first boyfriend, he was a good person and as I was new and he was as well, well he'd been there for two years, and so, well he was scared to ask permission because they might have said no and so that made him angry and so we went...we had a secret relationship and one day we were caught and then we were punished and they separated us and put us in different places and that was when he escaped.

He didn't like being rude to women. He was 19 years old. We were together for (less than a year) months. If a woman became pregnant they made her get rid of the baby through the vagina. They had an abortion.

One girl was 15 years old, and well, and well she got a, she had a boyfriend who was a commander and he was called X, and he got her pregnant and when she was three months pregnant they realized, she realized herself, and, well, she didn't want to have an abortion and, well, she had to have one. They made her. She didn't want to have an abortion and they made her have one.

When I had just arrived, after about 20 days they told me I had to have an injection and so I told him no, that there was no way I wanted that, that I didn't want to have that, then I kept refusing, because I didn't like the idea and I said never, never, never, and so well, they, the doctor told me that yes, I had to get the injection and well, they gave me one, an injection every month.

I thought, well, that if I happen to get pregnant then I wouldn't tell anyone and I would leave, this was what I thought because I thought, what poor girls, having to have abortions. Because well, because, as they say, God wouldn't forgive them, and also well, because this is a sin and well, you shouldn't do that.

I was, we were making a road and so that was when this commander decided to take me, to take me to look for a place, to, to make camp, and so we went to have a look and when we were on the way back, that was when he started to get tired, I, I told him no, and no, because I was scared and I didn't want to do it and so he told me, he said to me that yes, I had to, and that, and so, that was when to took me by force and, and he raped me and so... I, well, I was crying and he covered my mouth and he, he said that, well, that no that I shouldn't make things worse, so well, if I told the First-in-Command of the X, then they would take away his rank and maybe tie him up.

I didn't tell anyone. I was scared that maybe this other person was going to, was going to say something very... and so he would know that I had told somebody and maybe nothing would happen to him, and well, I had the impression that perhaps he would do something that was worse for me.

Time passed, and three months after this had happened, he asked me if I wanted to be his girlfriend, or his wife, but I said no, no, that... he told me that he was going to ask for permission, that he, he said a few things, then I told him no, that I didn't want to have anything to do with him.

There was one time when they were going to the hamlet, there was about, about 14 militiamen who were going, and so, he threatened me, he said that they were going and they weren't taking me with them, so I said to him no, that I wanted to go with them and so that was when I talked to the Second-in-Command and I told him, the commander that I wanted to go with them. Well I told him, the commander, the Second-in-Command of the X and so, he told him, he told him, well, the one that raped me, that yes, I was going with them, and so, well, so as not to have any hassle, he put me with, he put me with another commander.

He put me in with another commander, he left me in another, another group, they gave me another group and so when we got back together with them, well that was when, when he put me in that group and ordered someone else into the other group, I was left with him.

My other boyfriend, when we were in that group, and so he asked me if I wanted to be his girlfriend and so I told him, I told him to wait a while, a few days so, so, well so that I could think about it. And so I thought about it a lot, I thought about how he was a serious guy, that he didn't have bad habits, hardly, and well, well, I said yes and so that was when well, we went out with each other and it lasted for like, well we were, for about two weeks in this group without meeting, meeting the others and when we did meet the others, with the one that raped me, well then, this, they didn't know about this and, and they came to the place where we were, to the group where my boyfriend was and I'd told him a few things like... and he asked him if he was my boyfriend and my boyfriend told him that he was, to comrade X and so he got furious, he was angry and he put me back in his group.

I felt terrible, I felt fed up, I cried and so, and so well I felt bad, I cried, sometimes I didn't do as I was told and well, a time came when he said to me, he said to me that I had to go to the camp where the others were and I said that I didn't want to go, and so after two days we had a meeting and they wanted to send me and my boyfriend back to the camp because he was the third-in-command of the militia.

My second boyfriend helped me a lot and, and in every way that he could and, and well I felt that he loved me and that I loved him as well. And well there was a time when, I don't know he was hurt, he was really quiet and so I asked him what was wrong and he would answer me, and I lost interest with him, and so he was angry, and that was how he was, he was angry with me and that was when they heard that supposedly we, that was when they heard that we were going to desert with another guy, with my best friend, and that we were going to desert and so he informed on us.

When we went to the civilian areas, well when you, when you are a guerrilla and you have a boyfriend who's a guerrilla you can't hug, you can't do anything in the civilian areas because they would grass you up and you can't do that.

And so that was when the gossip started and also that was why I was sent to the camp. The duties were cooking, cooking and guard duty.

Guard duty it was for two hours, you used to keep watch for two hours, and you stayed behind a tree and guarded the ridge. We had to carry firewood, to wash pots and pans, to set up camp, to patrol, all that and attacks as well. Well I was in one battle. I felt nervous because I'd never been in a battle and I was frightened of the gunfire from the helicopters and, well, and battle was when we were in a camp and they discovered us, and they, the soldiers came and, and, well, we were fighting and fighting and we were retreating because that was when the three helicopters arrived to shoot up the camp and we retreated.

That was when we were in the village, when we were in a village, like, they had told us that when a helicopter flies past us low, that you open fire, and well, like, when, when I was doing the training I really liked, liked firing the 'K' 9AK 47. I used to really like it and so I fired at the helicopter and, and well, I fired, and I used up the whole round, so that was when they punished me and, and they nearly tied me up because of it.

They tied you up and held a council of war, and if they said that you were... that they would shoot you, then they shot you, and if they said they would punish you, then they punished you.

That was what I was most afraid of in the guerrillas, because every now and then there were infiltrators, and they tied them up and they killed them, and so that frightened me. There were training sessions like what you've just said, umm, because about every two days we used to get together, we watched television and they gave us, well they gave us a talk saying that we were guerrillas and we had to defend the people and that it was for the people, so the others said that, that if we were defending the people why was it that they killed the people, and so that was when the commander said that, that if we killed the people it was because they were either harming us or harming the civilian population.

We were in the mountains and that day we went out into the civilian population and, well we went out into this little hamlet, and so that was when we went out and, and well the commander came back, and I went forward, and well, well yes, I met my mum because we had to go out to this hamlet and we went with the commander and with five others, I mean there were five and the commander and me.

And so that was when they met us, well I met my mum, she was drinking a fruit juice as I was passing, and she saw me and called me and, and she started to cry and well I saw her crying and it started me crying and that was when, when the people saw all of this and the commander came and he realized that I had seen my mum. Well, I hadn't asked him permission to talk to my mum and so, so he told me to, to get away, to get away, I mean the commander told me to go ahead to where the other guerrillas were because, because he didn't want me to see her any more because I my was there and that the people had already realized, the civilians realized that I was there and that my mum had a daughter, well had a daughter in the guerrillas and that maybe they would do something to her. My mum hardly cried and, well, I too was crying but I went to where the others were and there I started to cry and when the commander arrived the next day they had a meeting and he really told me off. I started to cry because I couldn't do anything else.

The civilians were afraid of us and so we told them not to be, that they shouldn't be afraid of us, that we were doing things for the people and defending the people and that we were there for the people. And so they used to ask us if we were doing things for the people, then why were we killing the people. So I used to say that, that if the people were killed it was because they were harming civilians or because they were, they were paramilitary or they were grasses.

I used to like being in the civilian areas the best. You couldn't have little groups, to have little groups of women because they used to think that you were saying bad things, that you were going to leave or that you were fed up, and things like that.

Children, anyone underage wasn't allowed to join the guerrillas, that there, where he was, there weren't any underage children, that yes, there were 18-year-olds, 18 and over, and so what the commander said was that it was allowed but, that it wasn't allowed there, but here it was.

The thing that I liked best with the guerrillas was, was being able to have a gun and, and to feel proud that I had a gun and being a revolutionary. I had friends there and I thought, I thought they were cool because yes, I did have a friend there, I remember her well and I miss her, but she also got out. She was really nice she didn't like their ways, for example, she would advise you to do good things and not bad things.

If you said you were off, well, you were going to escape. Then she used to tell you not to be so stupid, that you should wait for a little while to see how things went, that was what she told me.

The most terrible thing that they ordered me to do was to kill. They ordered me to, but I only injured someone, I told them I didn't want to. Well, when he was already in the grave well, they made me go in and they made me untie the rope that he had around his neck, like they used to put on them, a, a cord that's like a rope, they tie them up like that so they can't get away, and also the handcuffs, how do you say that again, yes, some handcuffs.

There if they tell you to kill somebody you've got to do it because if you don't they accuse you of being an infiltrator.

When we had free time it was to clean the guns, to wash the clothes, to do everything, generally to do everything, to clean the equipment, to organize the beds, and when they had recreational activities it was at night, they told stories, jokes, if they weren't dancing. They only let us watch the news and, well, nothing else, because they didn't let us watch soap operas or anything like that.

For me it was really nice, and well I liked the weapons as well. I miss them. I liked the weapons and the uniform but after that I didn't, because it's a really difficult experience.

When we were all together in big groups I felt supported, I felt the smallest. When I was the only small one in a big group, I felt small, and when, when three were, well, when there were a lot of us in a big group, lots of youngsters, well I felt big. You feel big, you feel like you've got experience.

If you cried there, well, they said you were fed up and they wouldn't trust you, and they wouldn't send you anywhere, anywhere, because they didn't trust you and you were only put on guard duty. Well I felt terrible because when, I mean when I felt like crying or sometimes when I cried, I used to cry at night in bed. I had been there for two months in the camp and that was when they killed the, the girl that I told you about.

The girl they told me to shoot and, and well, so that night we both had to do guard duty, she had to do it on one side and me on the other, and so we both cried and we cried. She said it was because she was scared, well I was scared too, about everything, but I didn't go crying, go crying to the commander because it would have caused a problem because they wouldn't trust you. I was scared after I shot the guy, that young guy, in the leg, and I remembered that when I was on guard duty, but there, there wasn't much that scared me, but however, she was really scared and they had to send a guy to go with her, and he was an infiltrator and they didn't know.

When I had been there for about five months that was when I heard that my dad was nearby and he wanted to look for me and he wanted to find me. I prayed that he would come so that the guerrillas would get him and make him pay for what he had done to my brothers and sisters because he had never, never paid for it

Well, I remember how good I felt there, well, what happened to me there was, well, yes, well it wasn't everybody, there were some of us that got on well together and others that didn't, but some did love me and, umm, sometimes, sometimes they congratulated me, in the meeting we had because I was a little girl, well that I was fed up but I didn't show it, and I just got on with everything and when they told me to do something I just did it and well they congratulated me.

I felt proud because they had said I had done well and that I was a girl that well, there was no need to, well, I didn't feel, I mean that I didn't show them that I was fed up but that I felt happy, they told me I was really a part of them.

I wanted to be with my brothers and sisters and the fact that I was there and going to be there forever, I couldn't escape from there ever, I'd be there until I die. I didn't like the idea of being there forever.

**Girl F:**

The day they (new recruits) arrived, we greeted them, there were some that were just joining, there were some that had been with them for a while, I met them, I greeted them, I talked to them, have you just joined, I said yes, and everything like that. That was fun that moment, that day we stayed at the school on the floor. I'd never slept on the floor before, well, with a mat and blankets and everything, but never just like that, sleeping just like that on the floor. Because with the guerrillas we used to sleep in houses since they sleep in houses, we slept in houses, and so we stayed there, and the next day we left, we got up, we were there for a while.

The next day the two of us were given uniforms, we were given what we would need, everything, shampoo, everything that we needed, the equipment, everything straight away. In your equipment there are three changes of clothing, there's the shampoo, the deodorant, jumpers that you wear underneath, what else? Sanitary towels, well, personal stuff that you need. There wasn't any make-up, at that time there wasn't, I wasn't given make-up, later on, after about a year I was given some, if you wanted it then you were given it, if you liked wearing it.

OK, so that day we were brought everything, I was brought breakfast that was ordered from a restaurant, the guerrillas themselves ordered it, breakfast, and then we said goodbye on the bridge, as that was in X.

We left from there, all of us, we went by truck and we went out to the village on Tuesday. I didn't want to go there so that no one (people I knew) would find out, but that same day they found out. We were going out in the trucks and I didn't want to go. They were all in the village, going to see the village, seeing what there was, what it was like, looking at the police station that they had destroyed some time before, and so I didn't want to go there so that people wouldn't find out.

And so that man said, the old man said, the commander, he said come on X, as that's what I was called there, and so he said come on, X, come and show us what the village is like, as everybody knows me. So people saw me in uniform, they saw me, and the day before we left I'd been taught how to use a rifle, how to take it apart, how to shoot and everything, I was told all that on the way out.

I was 13 1/2. We were given some training (about two hours) and so that day, I was given one (gun). It was really just a quick explanation that day, a quick explanation, I was given one to go out in the village with. I was told how to use it and then given one, and told to take it apart and then shoot three shots into the air, that frightened me. We had never had guns, I was afraid, that day when I had to do that. I was happy, but scared at the same time, scared of firing it at someone. But that day I was told what to do, they gave me a gun and we went out to the village.

That day I dropped it, and I was so frightened to shoot it, no, I didn't want to pick it up again, and they told me, pick it up, it's just because you're new, because you're new, you'll get used to it, and so I picked it up,

and fired another shot. What's the matter with them? OK, so I fired another shot, and then the next shot and I felt calmer, and then that was when they gave it to me, here, take this, to go out into the village in a moment, to go out to the village, and I said I didn't want to go out there because everyone would realize, but he said that wasn't important, I had joined now, that didn't matter anymore.

I took the rifle and we went out all together into the village, we surrounded the whole village, we were in the whole village, we were there for about three hours, after that we left and we went to the camp, in the trucks, we left and we went in the trucks, and I saw my mum at the house. Imagine that, I was up ahead in the truck, up front with the old man, when I saw my mum, and I ducked down, and my mum stopped the trucks and everything, she saw me, and she started crying, didn't she, oh no, I felt like, I felt kind of fed up, and I was given time to get down, no, I didn't get down, and the old man says, are you staying or going, and I didn't say anything, I didn't know what to say, and so in the end I got down and talked to my mum, and since I was in uniform, with boots on, rifle and everything, and so I got down and I told my mum that I was going, but that I was going to look out for her, that was when the guerrillas helped her with money.

They used to give her money every so often, if she got ill or something, but she came to persuade me to leave several times when I was there. That day I didn't know what to do, in the end I told her, ciao mum, I'm going, and I started crying and I left.

When my sister was told, she wanted to join, she wanted to join and then after about six months I met up with her and she told me that she wanted to go with me, that she was going to go with me, that she wasn't going to let me go all by myself, my little baby sister, my little pet, yes, she wanted to go with me, because I was the one that spoilt her most, she used to go with me everywhere. I used to take her out all the time, when I had money, when I was working, I used to give her things, she said that she wasn't going to let her sister be alone, and she wanted to go with me, she wanted to go. I had to run away, I had to run away from her so that she wouldn't join up with me.

After I arrived there, there was a course, but that's for your physical abilities, just for personal defense, I was given training and at once a rifle, they gave me that afterwards. And then we were taken to the firing range, that's where you go shooting, we were there for two days, and I bashed myself with the rifle. I hit myself, well, I had it here, and I hit myself in the face because I wasn't holding it firmly, I hit myself the first day, and I didn't want to fire it again, those days I was really frightened, I was. And then in the end, the next day, I wasn't so scared, I was shooting and everything, and then we had five months of training, how to throw a grenade, how to throw it so that it doesn't get you, how to camouflage yourself, loads of things.

There were 200 of us on that course. We were in classrooms, during a talk, or we were shown a film or some other thing, we were shown that film about Simon Bolivar a lot, the one with Simon Bolivar when, when there was that battle, when all that happened because they say that many of their ideas are similar to them, to Simon Bolivar. They have many similar ideas. I used to pay attention, to see what they were saying, they talked a lot about them being there to defend the people, to give them the best.

For men and women it's the same for the people that are in training, if you have to carry 15kg, then the other person has to carry the same. Everything, everyone is equal. You have to walk a lot at night.

We used to get up at four, at four-fifty, we got up, we had... we brushed out teeth, we had a coffee, then it was gym, after brushing your teeth and having coffee it was time for gym, until they made, until the breakfast was ready which was at six, that was at six, at eleven, breakfast, you had to sweep the camp, pick up the rubbish from around the camp, you made the holes for the rubbish. At the camp the morning is like when you do the housework, you sweep, like you do there, tidy up the sleeping places, make everything tidy. Everybody, everybody did the same.

Cooks make the breakfast, depending on how many people there are, if there are 50, then just one or two, if

there are 100, or 200, then three or four cooks. There are turns, I mean, at lunch time they choose a person, OK? There's one at lunchtime that person has to do, lunch, dinner and breakfast, and then at lunch time the next day, it goes from lunch to lunch, when the shift begins. OK, we took turns at that, at lunch time one person finishes and the new one comes in.

I didn't have to cook more than twice, two or three times. If you do it badly then you get punished straight away, because you have to make the meals well, well cooked, not raw, nothing like that, you have to do it well. And if you let it burn then you 're given like 100 trips fetching firewood, or 20 or 50 trips, so you have to make the meals well. After breakfast we rested for about an hour, round about an hour, and then after an hour it was training again, doing activities continuously, and sometimes they didn't even give us time to sleep, because during the night, because you 're in training, they can blow the whistle at any time they feel like it, fits at three in the morning, at three, at twelve, or when you've just gone to bed and they blow the whistle and you have to get up and put on your full pack.

Training was like that, blowing the whistle at any time, even if we were having breakfast they might feel like blowing the whistle, and you had to run to fall in, with all the equipment, with your rifle and equipment. OK, so you fell in with your rifle, and if it's with everything, then that means everything, without leaving anything behind.

When they blow the whistle, you run to fall in, something had happened, or someone was coming, or we were going to be attacked or whatever. Even if you're having lunch right now and if everyone isn't at the camp then you have to be careful, because the training is between us.

For example, a hundred might leave, let's say a hundred of us are doing the training, so there are 50 outside and 50 in the camp and those 50 who are outside are going to come and attack the other camp, and if they blow the whistle then you have to be ready, but it's with staffs, you have to fight with staffs, so that you don't have to fire a gun, or you might hit somebody else.

I didn't like that you could be woken up at any time, we weren't allowed to sleep peacefully, or we had to walk all night long, or digging trenches, or staging attacks, siege maneuvers, whatever. Training is always like that, whatever you have to do, at any time, even if you had just gone to bed and you were really tired and they blew the whistle. There was never a moment's rest, there was a bit of calm and then the whistle, and run.

The first time was... I washed, I was wearing shorts, and I washed in shorts, and I was told to take them off, I was looking at all those girls, young women, women, all washing in knickers and bras because that's how they washed there. I was in shorts and T-shirt, washing in the river, no, no I wasn't going to wash like that, no, I'm sorry, but then in the end you just have to get used to it, the shorts were taken away and they told me, you're not superior to the other girls, the others' shorts were thrown away, and so I had to get used to washing in knickers and bra, everybody washes like that there.

The men washed in underwear, that was at about four and you're given ten, if it's just a quick wash, you wash everything, at least you're not going to wash really, it's just a quick wash you're given about five or ten minutes, we were given... and then afterwards you have to, you're sent in squads, you're sent by squad to wash and you have to remain silent in the river. If people aren't quiet then you're all punished, because you're in training, if you're not quiet, then you all have to get out of the water, you have to fall in how you are.

There are some regulations in a little booklet, and they call it the "four-comers." Punishments were, first degree serious offenses, the first degree serious offenses were, like, because there were so many people there, sabotage, sabotaging the camp, going to the toilet in the camp if there were field toilets, that was a first degree offense, a serious first degree offense, and you were tied up for that. I was only given one punishment for losing my cap, and that was 200 trips to fetch firewood, and I made them all in the end.

I saw lots of friends being punished, a guy lost his rifle in combat and he was given 500 trips to get firewood, 20, 50 turns at cooking and about 200m of trench digging. He finished after about a year.

Punishment depends on whatever the offense is, if you don't keep to the internal regulations, the internal regulations are, for example if you have sex with someone without permission, well, that's an offense, it's not that serious, but you'll be given at least 10, 20 trips to fetch firewood.

If a girl is raped, not just because they have had sex but because it's been forced, is it the same. Where I was there were men and women in both, there were two, there was the commander, that was a man and the second-in-command was a woman.

After the course I was transferred to... because I was doing well and everything, I did well at the shooting practice, I almost hit right in the middle of the target, and so I was transferred straight away to "public order" duty.

Of the 100 that were doing the training, and we were taken out, and I hadn't even managed to do the five months when we were taken away, there were about, about 15 days left to complete the five months, the best had to go already, everybody had to fall in, OK, you step forward, please, you step forward, all of us like that, about 20 of us were called out, get your campaign gear ready, we're going into combat, and we were taken out like that, straight off.

I felt good because I'd passed the training course and everything, and I hadn't had any problems, but then in the battle I got really scared, I screamed, and they said, shut up, I screamed at the beginning.

Help! I shouted, and then the rest told me not to shout, to keep well covered, if I kept well covered then nothing would happen to me, OK, the first one I was just so scared, we were fighting for a whole day, one whole day and a couple of hours during the night. I was firing non-stop.

I was firing all over the place, I mean with that fear, who's going to shoot well? But then the second time it was better, I didn't shout, but I was still frightened. Because from that battle we went straight to another. We spent almost three days walking, and we got to another one, there were 500 of us, 500 walking together, and then that one was better, I wasn't so scared then, but anyway, I didn't scream as much, that day was better.

You don't really realize, you know what you're supposed to be firing at, but you never really know if they died or not, or if they were injured or not. At that distance, who's going to know?

Afterwards, well, like we got to the camp, after we came out of that battle, I got to the camp and I was glad to be back in the camp, now we wouldn't have to fight anymore, and then we were given, like, a quick training course; it lasted about eight days, no more, a quick training course, to go over stuff again, to revise, revise everything. OK, so we went over all that again for eight days there, there was a party, it was great because there was drink, we drank, that's when I first started drinking.

I didn't use to drink. That's where I started drinking, we used to drink at every party, if there was a party we had a good time, we used to party until dawn, we were there for about a month.

My friend, the girl I joined with, because she'd also been chosen to go into combat. Twenty of us we were still together, and so since then, we got out of training together, she was also commended, we were given, at that time we were given an special gun. It's a rifle but it's not the same as the K-47. And so we were given those rifles and we went into combat, that was when the 20 of us were selected, and we were chosen, the two of us, we were together for a year and a half.

I had a boyfriend (21 years old) he asked for "association" with me, to be partners. The commanders said yes and so he said, he said that I was to join the "column" that he was in charge of and so I joined that "column." That was when we were in combat, afterwards we had the party and we had a good time. We were

always together, since he had asked for “association” and that's like being husband and wife, the two together.

We were always together, all the time, he helped me, he used to bring me things, he used to go out, since he's the commander of the “column,” he used to go out all the time to buy things for the “column” or something, he used to bring me shampoo, creams and everything, he was a nice lad. I liked how he was, because it was fun there, I mean, I liked him because he brought me everything, creams, sweets, when he used to get back late, he got back late at night, he woke me up and gave me sweets, if he had brought me sweets, he'd say, get up, I've got some sweets, and things like that, all that.

We were together for a year, since I had joined until they transferred him, they transferred him He was transferred there for about three, four months, and he told me that he wasn't going to come back, he said he wasn't coming back, and I was sad, but I carried on.

After about five months, I got another boyfriend, he was a different commander. I was in the same “column” and I carried the batteries for the radio, what you used to communicate to the other commanders and all that. And so that day we went into combat again, he had already been transferred, loads of people were transferred, loads, and so the “column” was just the “column” again, and so we went into combat again, which was near X and we had to go and fight. I was in about four or five battles.

After getting together with the commander I never went into combat again. I was dependent on him, and at least... then afterwards, because a commander of that rank doesn't have to ask for association or anything, because he's one of the high-ranking commanders, and so afterwards with him, I was going out with him, I was his bodyguard, and so then I was always going by jeep, always by jeep instead of on foot. I didn't have to go everywhere, to training,

I didn't go on training courses now or anything like that. I spent all the time with the commander, I didn't do anything, I spent all the time there. My friend, after that she was moved to another “column.” I stayed with him, we were together, there were six of us, seven people with him, bodyguards, we were the best out of the people there.

In regards to contraception I had an IUD. At the beginning I was on the injection, I can't remember the name of that injection now, and then afterwards I had an IUD fitted, and that really changed my period a lot. With the injection, first I came out in spots all over my face, that was terrible, and I got thinner. They just said they were going to give me a contraceptive injection so that I wouldn't get pregnant. I said what's this? And they said, it's OK, it's so that you don't get pregnant, come on, let's do it, and I was given the injection, that was when I came out in spots and got thinner, I had that for about three months, and then I was fitted with an IUD.

I was given an IUD, that was when I was with the... when that commander was transferred, the one that was in charge of the “column,” I'd been alone for a few months, and then I got together with one of the second-in-command, and he sent me to have that taken that out, because it looked bad, he sent me to have it taken out and gave me the injection again. I was OK with the injection, the other thing hurt a lot, and so he sent me to have it taken out. There are doctors, specialized doctors, there are nurses, all kinds of people to help. It was obligatory to have the injection.

As far as you know, within the group, did people believe in God, did they have the opportunity to... .There, no, at least, the ones that are Catholic or Adventist, or whatever, they were going to prohibit that, that's what they said.

But those, those that believed, well they did what they liked. They were allowed to pray? Of course.

On Saturdays, at the weekend we had free time. At the weekend, I thought that was just great, because you

could play five-a-side football, and we used to play five-a-side, we used to make little ovens, when we first got to a camp we'd make ovens, and we played with clay it was good fun.

Sundays and Saturdays were for resting, for resting, and it was good fun because we could play what we wanted, whatever game, because what we had in that "column," where I was going out with the commander. Because I didn't have to do much, because of that, because I was going out with him, yes, I didn't have to do a lot, we had footballs, basketballs, we had about five balls in the "column" to play with, and we used to go and play five-a-side, yes, we played hard, really hard.

The first battle really affected me a lot, it always affects you a lot, and it must affect them as well, yes, really difficult, I mean, as soon as we realized that our comrades had died, we were made to retreat at once, or at least if many people are being killed, at once the columns are withdrawn.

If someone dies or is injured, if they're badly injured, or whatever little scratch, the nurses have to be present. The nurses are given training courses. They go and do nursing courses, or artillery courses, or for firing mortars or whatever, and whichever one you want to go on, like, with nursing, if you want to go on that one, they ask who wants to go on the nursing course, and those people go on the course. People are sent to a special place where they hold the nursing course, or at least with nursing they're sent to the Secretariat, and since they have their doctors there, that's where these old doctors are and so they are sent there and they do the course and then afterwards they come back.

What the people are like often depends on the commander. If the commander is heavy on them, the people are the same, and if the commander is good then the people work well, it's like that there. Or at least, if a commander is doing things that shouldn't be done then a letter is sent straight to the Secretariat.

Before I was captured, well, well, like I was saying, two months had passed since he went, he was transferred, and I started going out with another commander. I went everywhere with him in trucks. We had to go on an exploration. An exploration was to go to a village, find out how many there were, how many weapons they (army) had.

The number of support personnel, everything, how much of all that, and to see where the people can enter and where they can retreat, from where they can fire mortars, everything. We got ready, we left at, at about four in the afternoon, we stayed in a house, we carried everything apart from the equipment, without equipment, but we were dressed in camouflage gear and we had our rifles and everything. Further on we changed into civilian clothes, we left at four and walked for about two hours and we got to a house, and we stayed there.

The next day we got up early, at about three in the morning, we left, we set out to where we were going, we walked until about half six in the morning, and we got to a large corral, and the commander went up a hill near there so that he could call, not him, but another one who was with us who was a commander, and so he walked over to the corral and we started messing around, the five of us.

We still had our uniform on at that point, because we were caught in uniform, we were caught in uniform and everything. OK, so we were in this corral, they fired three shots into the air, we didn't take any notice of them, and we didn't really take any notice of them, and then we all started fooling around and making jokes with the commander, I don't know, he looked to one side when he saw that enormous number of soldiers, and that's when it happened, when he saw that huge number of soldiers.

There were 200 hundred, so he warned us, OK lads, get ready, when that firefight began, I mean, look, it just started straight away, I mean we didn't even have the rifles loaded, we were just carrying them, just carrying them, not even loaded, we were just looking at that, I don't know how I loaded the rifle, there were such a small number of us, I don't know how I loaded that rifle and we began to advance, we passed barbed wire fences, just like before, I didn't really know where we were going, we jumped over those poles and we

didn't even realize where.

I didn't feel anything, you don't, you don't feel anything, you just run, at that moment I didn't feel anything, just concentrate like on the objective, where could we retreat to, where, I didn't feel anything. I jumped over something, when I looked behind me, those rifles, we already knew that the one up front would cover for those behind, and so we ran like that, I was jumping over things and you're, you're, when they get you by surprise you don't know, at least it seems that when you're... when you've seen those little children that take crack and all that, they do things without thinking, that's how it is at that moment, that's how you feel at that moment, you don't know what you're doing, with that surprise you just don't know what you're doing.

I was jumping, I jumped, when I jumped over one of those things, then the commander said, cover me. I copy you, I replied, and that was when he jumped over to the other side and I started covering for him, and when I started covering for him and I turned round, and they had already injured him, they had hit him in one leg and in an arm, in both legs they'd got him, and in an arm.

Then he called me, come back, and so I went back because the others were well ahead, they were well ahead of me, and that was when they injured him, and he said come back, and so I went back, and I said OK, I'm coming back, wait and I'll get the other guy to cover me, and so I said to the other one, cover me, I'm going back because he's been injured and I went back and he said to me, take my rifle, I took it, making it more difficult for me, I already had my rifle, my rifle and his as well, the equipment, he told me to take all that, take the radio, take that and don't worry about me, go, go, as best you can with all this, and I said OK.

I put his equipment on and his rifle and the rifles that I was carrying, at least mine didn't weigh so much, but it wasn't light. Everything was heavy altogether, because the rifles weren't so heavy, what weighed the most was the ammunition, the ammunition.

He told me to get away, and call the old man, and so I said the code name and I was answered, but since we were going they didn't get a chance to hear us because we were... the other guy had gone down ahead, and I followed, and he said go, when suddenly, bang! and he died.

I was angry, I don't know, I picked up the rifle, like emboldened, and I only had two cartridges left in mine, and so right, I carried on, I said, guys, cover me and they began to cover me and we began to cover each other, all of us, and then that's when further up ahead, when they were covering me when someone else was killed, and the more that get killed, the more comrades, the angrier you get, I was like, I don't know, I was furious at that moment, that's what happened to me, I was really angry, I had this anger inside me.

That day I was with my best friends, and I liked them a lot, the ones that went around with the old man, with the commander who was my boyfriend, he, he had chosen all of us, my best friends, since he loved me a lot, so he chose my best friends and that time I was with my best friends, and so that made me really angry, and I just went on, like I didn't feel anything, I didn't even know where we were going.

We were both hit, and then finally I felt, I was left alone because I was the, I was the last one. OK, so I advanced about five, six meters, climbing up, next to each other, so that we wouldn't get hurt, climbing, that was when I got shot in the stomach. I was hit, I carried on walking, I didn't feel anything, well, at least you feel the shots, at the time you feel them, after half an hour, and I carried on, I carried on.

I advanced some five or six meters when I was shot in the leg, that's when I fell over. In my right leg, in my right leg, I was shot there as well, and with that I was on the floor, and I tried to get up, to continue, and when I fell I let off the rounds in both rifles, because I had one on each side of me, I let off both rifles, and it was when I was firing so much that I got shot here, this one in my right hand and that was when I got shot, and they saw me on the ground, that was when....about 20 of them jumped on top of me, and started to hit me, saying I don't know what, kill her, and then two medics, they're two soldiers, told the others not

to, told them not to touch me, they said they wouldn't let anything happen to me.

They told me to be calm and that they wouldn't let the others do anything to me, X and X are going to help you, take it easy now, girl, but I'm not sure, I wasn't crying or anything, I don't know, I was so angry, and they were saying, easy now, easy now, girl, we won't let them do anything to you, and the others there, right next to them, and they weren't letting the others touch me, because the others were there saying nothing but, kill her, that little bandit I don't know what, kill her, they were telling them to kill me, but the others, the two medics didn't let them, they told them, no, no, don't touch her, and I say that when you're ready to die you die, but these two lads didn't let any of the others touch me.

Later they (the medics) came to visit me at the hospital, later they... X and X, they both came to visit me, and they brought a load of things, because of that they won a medal, I can't remember exactly, but because of that. They came to see me and they told me that because of me they'd won a medal, he talked to me a lot and we became good friends.

I kept up with one of them, and I don't know, we got on really. Well, after that, we got on well, and we became really good friends, and I've even got one of their telephone numbers, both of theirs, actually, I keep in touch with them. But they were good people, because I said that that wasn't my time, and it was them that called the helicopter, the medic, since he was the General of that battalion there, and so he called a helicopter to come and pick me up, don't worry now, girl, nothing's going to happen, they told me, because I was listening, don't worry, nothing's going to happen to you, and we'll come and visit you and then the helicopter took off. When I arrived at the X, I was unconscious, I was in a bad way, almost without blood, there they washed me at the X and called an ambulance at once and I was taken to the hospital.

When I got to the hospital, yes, at the hospital, the day after the operation people arrived to interview me, but that time they got the information out of me easily, they got it easily, it was the same soldiers, and they asked to see me, but since the medics were there and all that, they wouldn't let me be interviewed, neither of them accepted that, they said that they'd talked to the human rights person and they'd talked there and so no, they couldn't interview me.

Sometimes I miss life with the guerrillas. I was completely used to it, I used to miss it loads. I felt really good, really relaxed, I felt really good. With the guerrillas I never felt that I had power. I felt that, those days that we were with the commander, or when we went somewhere with him, I saw poor people that didn't have anything, because we'd been through there when I was with him, people that didn't have anything, and I, I said to him, look at these people, they don't have anything, nothing, and so he ordered things to be bought for them, food to be given out to them.

The best thing (in the guerrillas) was that surprise that he arranged for me, the time that I was with the those people, yes, because my relationship with them, my friends, because we were part of a group of friends, we messed about, we chatted in our spare time, at least at the weekends, that we had free, I mean it was a good time. Like all my life I've got on better with men, and I've got more male friends, I've got two girl friends, the rest are men, I get on, I associate more with men than with women. I had a good relationship with them, at least I got on well with the group that I went around with, I was the only woman there, the bodyguards of the old man, I was the only girl, I was the old man's girl, and I was the only girl that went around with them, I got on well, I'm with men a lot more than with women.

We never celebrated birthdays, we had parties, though, each month, every two months, or every six months, well, whenever we could, or when the army wasn't around there, but about the guerrillas I miss that commander, the best were those two commanders, three with the other one, that stayed behind there.

What I didn't like was having to get up at any time of night, "public order" duty, having to go hungry, being cold, wet, being wet, stuck in a trench, that's what I didn't like.

But anyway, it was good, the last one, the two commanders, the three commanders that I had were fun, they were good to me.

## RECONSIDERATION OF THE DECISION

When the girls joined the guerrillas they did not appreciate or fully realize what would be asked of them and how they were going to be treated. Some had joined as the only way to escape a terrible family situation. Because they were children, no one listened to them or made an effort to improve the family situation, so they joined the guerrillas hoping to improve their life. After the girls were educated in the philosophy and politics of the movement they felt some sense of pride about being a part of the movement and helping to bring about a better life for the people. There were times when they enjoyed being in the movement. Eventually they discovered what they had dreamed about and imagined for themselves in the movement did not exist. The longer they stayed with the movement the more they grew up and matured, which enabled them to see things differently. Over time they came to realize they did not know what the guerrillas were fighting for or what they were fighting for. In the beginning it seemed that the guerrillas wanted to help the needy people. Later it seemed that they did not care for the needs of the masses. The girls observed people being killed just for the sake of killing. They observed young children being forced to participate in the movement and small children being brutally mistreated and sometimes killed. The girls never knew from day to day if they were going to live or die. They felt like they were living on borrowed time. They lived in fear that they were going to be told to kill someone and if they did not obey they would be killed. Because of the battles, life became hell. It was the fighting, the battles and the brutal killings that made them want to leave the movement.

### **Girl A:**

After having joined I understood that it was hell, that this has nothing to do with this life, and that I had made many, many mistakes, a great mistake in having joined them.

What hurt me most of all was that you lose so many of your principles. Principles that you see in other people, in the other women... you lose the principle of respecting people because you see that the women aren't respected by the men.

Nothing special ever happened to me, nothing with any other man, nobody was disrespectful towards me.

The things that I had dreamt about in the guerrillas didn't exist.

What changed especially was that I was given another opportunity to be able to study (after leaving guerrilla group), because really, when I was little, the opportunity I had, I threw it away, because I couldn't carry on studying because of my situation.

### **Girl B:**

... the guerrillas really changed my life, and that's where I grew up really, and everything. I'd look for a different kind of support, for example with Family Welfare with charities, I'd look for help, but at that age, people don't pay attention to those problems, because people don't take any notice of children, so, that's like, the only way that's left for you, and you take it.

There are times that you enjoy, and there are moments when you suffer, but you suffer more than you enjoy it.

The ideology from before is very different to that now. I mean, before the guerrillas said that, when I was with them, that we were fighting for the people, for a socialist country, and now, it's like totally different.

People are killed just for the sake of it, fighting just for the sake of it, now it's not the same as before. The guerrillas used to be, I don't know how, they had more good will, they used to help the needy people more and now, now they don't, and now it's like I don't give a damn if people suffer or not.

They didn't think, they just, I mean, everyone for themselves, defend themselves, right? I mean, we used to hold meetings, we talked, but they were, everyone takes care of themselves, practically no one had been to school.

**Girl C:**

I was bored all the time I was there, I was really bored. After joining I regretted it. I was hoping to get on and do well, I mean I hoped to get used to it, settle in, I was hoping that I would like it.

That I had made a mistake in joining, because, I mean, my whole life there.

**Girl E:**

At first, yes, I felt proud and, well, I said that I had everything, everything, everything, that I wasn't missing anything, but after that I was looking at things and, like, I was reflecting and, well when they had those meetings, and what I remember most was, why did they accept underage children in the guerrillas, how they answered was, that they weren't forced to join or anything, nor that they made us stay, but that they also want to come. So X asked them, but why do you accept the children? They said because they do and there were times that they forced the children to come, they forced the children to join the guerrillas.

There was this boy called X, and he was 13 years old, and he was in a hamlet where there was a "Front" of about 300, that was when they were using bombs and killing people. And so they said to the boy that if he didn't join the guerrillas, then they would kill this family, and so the boy told them well, to save his family, he told them that he would go with them, and when he got there he was fed up and he was desperate, he didn't know what to do and he talked to me and said that he wanted to kill himself.

What scared me was when they caught the infiltrators and killed them. They tied them up and they did things to them that were, well to kill them, they held a meeting there and they decided to execute or punishment and they all said execution. It seemed, well, horrible because they tied you up. The first one was an infiltrator that had joined us and she didn't do what she was told, she didn't do anything, so in the end they caught her and went to her bed and they surrounded her and they tied her up and after a week she was shot. They took her to where we used to watch television and we had a meeting with her, and everyone said execution, execution and execution.

So they told X, another girl, to kill her and she went and she shot her once, but she didn't hit her, then X's boyfriend told her to give him the gun and he shot her five times, twice in the head and the other two in the body. X was thirteen years old.

I was also scared and it upset me, but, but what could I do if she was an infiltrator and she was going to kill the people in charge, and she only had two months before she was going to leave, but she didn't know how to do things well and, so, that's why they killed her. I was present at three other executions. You were forced to be there.

**Girl F:**

Of course, sometimes (I miss the guerrillas), I was completely used to it, I used to miss it loads. At the end I felt really good, really relaxed, I felt really good.

I saw poor people that didn't have anything, because we'd been through there when I was with him (commander), people that didn't have anything, and I, I said to him, look at these people, they don't have anything, nothing, and so he ordered things to be bought for them, food to be given out to them.

Well, out of everything that I've experienced, what I would emphasize from that life is that I've had an additional experience, OK? If you now know what it's like there, and you know what things are like there you'll never make the same mistake again.

The reasons for saying that it's a mistake, the reasons why I'd say it's a mistake is like you join the guerrillas and you don't know what it is, at least you don't know how you're treated there, or whether it's going to be difficult there or if it's not going to be difficult.

It's bad because, right, you're in combat, right, it's not good for you because in a battle, you don't know if you're going to live or die, I mean you just don't know, I mean there you're living on borrowed time, literally.

Some things that I was given, the surprises that the commander gave me, or like sometimes I was treated very well, I was always with him, I never had to carry anything heavy, I carried my own clothes, that was all I had to do. How to be responsible for things, it's like you grow up a bit, right?

Now, in spite of being there from a really young age you grow up, you mature, you begin to see things differently, not from a child's perspective, despite the age, despite being underage, but now you understand things better than a child of, of 14 or 15.

What I had clear when I was with the guerrillas were the training sessions, for example, you knew that you had to do a training course every so often or that you had to go into combat.

What wasn't clear for me was why they were fighting, I wondered what they were fighting for if they kept attacking the police stations with gas cylinder bombs, with a whole load of things, why do they do that? And so I... I didn't... I didn't understand, I mean, I still don't understand why, I don't know, why they're fighting, I really don't know why they're fighting, and so, that's what you don't understand, it's like you can't find the reason.

And you join because, well, I joined to see what it was like, do you understand? To see, to see what they did, what they said, why they were fighting, but when it comes down to it you join and then you never understand any of that.

Well, they used to pass by near where I lived, and they used to say that they were fighting for the people, but I've no idea. I might have been treated badly at home, because at home I was never treated badly or beaten like that, well, yes, they told me off, and I was hit, but not very much, but not since I was very young.

I think about what they did to them (the lads) when they were dead, they were kicking them, they were really laying into them, and so you remember that, and straight away you say, you remember when they were kicking the lads even though they were dead, because they were dead, but they were kicking them anyway, and you remember them, why did they do that to them, after they were dead, why did they do that to them?

Well, at the beginning, no, because I'd never done that before, that was when the battles, that was when I was told that I had to kill someone else, and you get scared, that you might be killed always makes you scared, that you might die, you're always afraid of that. Well, at least the day, the day that I was captured, that I was injured, I said, whoa, I'm dead, right here, yeah, now I'm dying, I thought that, I'm not getting out of this alive.

## SENSE OF SELF

All the girls acknowledge that their sense of self is to some degree tied to other people. Sometimes their

sense of self is modified by feeling close to others. It is also modified by how distant they feel from others. Several of the girls mention that they are distant from others. They feel lonely because they are not close to anyone. They feel it is difficult to be close to others because once it is known you have been with the guerrillas, others have a hard time trusting you. Others are also afraid of you and in some instances they distrust you, as well as being afraid of you. One girl says she had high regard for herself and feels she can be successful in her studies. She indicated that respecting others her respect for herself increases.

**Girl A:**

In some ways I had a lot of regard for myself and I think that I was capable of being successful with my studies and I've got what it takes to achieve.

I know that human rights are very important. A child should be respected and valued. I've read a lot about people's rights and children's rights. I myself tried to find important books to read.

I feel lots of strange things (when reading), as if I was in the clouds, like it's something different, I feel very strong emotions. This makes me like reading even more and want to be somebody who likes reading even more, every day I read more and more and more.

For example, (you learn) you have to respect other people, to regard yourself highly, many, many things.

**Girl B:**

I've never really had a good friend. I never really liked that, I don't know, maybe just to be alone. OK, I didn't really talk much to the other women, right? Because the majority of them aren't, I don't know, they aren't that serious.

I got on better with the boys, they told me not to hang around with the girls because they might get me in trouble, because some of them didn't behave themselves well, and so they would have made me behave badly, and so no, I didn't have much to do with them, I was best off alone, or talking to the men because they were a bit more serious.

Well, sometimes I feel OK, as some people don't know that you've been in that (armed group), you know, they have a really low opinion of the guerrillas, and for me, this is hard, because I was there, and it's not how they think, sometimes I feel like talking to them and telling them the truth about how it really is and explaining to them and sometimes I feel OK. I look at them like, I mean now that I feel a bit more normal.

A while ago, years, because now life has changed, and so you say what will people think, what am I going to do, what do I do, because you're not used to being in the city, only out in the country, oh, what should I do, what should I tell them and things like that.

Now I'm learning to get on with people because I wasn't used to that. (Where living) is where I learnt to live together with lots of people, because there were 10 or 12 girls all sleeping in a little room, and so the first few days were difficult, and I felt bad, I was angry because they made a lot of noise and everything, but then after that I began to get used to it and now it's different.

We were moved to (a woman's place) and now she's like our family. Like, affection, an understanding towards you, she's like a mother, more than a mother because my mum never did that with me, she helps you, she hugs you, she spoils you, you can speak to her and she understands you, but above all she gives you lots of advice and helps you with everything.

Now there's no one that's treating me badly or anything like that, and here we get a lot of affection, and I forget all about that, I don't think about, I forget that I have a family. I think that it was these people that were the ones that brought me up and everything. I don't know, in spite of her being crazy sometimes, for me she was, despite all the defects that she had, for me she was perfect, she helped me a lot. She was the

first friend that I ever had in my life, she was the only one.

And it was in welfare that she, well, I cried a lot, and she used to tell me not to cry, she used to say, I had a boyfriend, the one I had in the guerrillas, and so when he was two-timing me.... and she used to say, come on, sister, it's not worth crying over a man. She said that I was in love with him now and then later we would split up, I'd fall in love with someone else, and then the same again, she gave me lots of advice as well, because she almost, her life was very difficult too, and I don't know, but the two of us didn't really get very attached to anyone.

When I was at home I had nightmares, that was, at night I used to get up, still asleep, under the bed, or I shouted, well, what wouldn't I do? When I was in my house, before I had joined the guerrillas, but then after I'd joined, I didn't dream again, well, I didn't have those horrible dreams anymore, nor sleepwalk, or anything like that, after that all those dreams stopped, I don't know why.

### **Girl C:**

I didn't have any girl friends. I'm not really very sociable. Well, they used to tell me things, and I also used to tell them my problems, I mean, between us, not everyone, of course, but there was a lot of trust.

Sometimes I felt lonely, I was bored, once I almost killed myself, I almost killed myself. I locked myself into the room, but one of my sisters realized and she opened the door and came in as I was about to shoot myself, and so she came in and kicked the butt of the rifle and so the shot passed me here, it just missed me by this much... I almost shot myself. I was bored and fed up, I thought that that was the best thing to do, the best thing, in that way the problem would end, everything would end.

Sometimes you feel lonely because you don't have anyone to talk to, someone to share your problems with, and so that's why it's important to have a boyfriend....to tell them things. Having a boyfriend is, well, not feeling lonely. Sometimes you feel lonely because you don't have anyone to talk to, someone to share your problems with, and so that's why it's important to have a boyfriend to tell them things.

At the center there were very good friends. They told me to reintegrate, they were afraid of me. Because they say that the guerrillas can be dangerous. I felt bad because that lack of trust makes you feel bad.

I mean the commander told me to try to convince the girl there to join. I talked to her and asked her whether she liked the guerrillas and she said yes. I told her that things were tough and that she should think hard about it before joining, because if not, once she was there she'd regret it. But she made me look bad, because then she immediately went and told the commander what I'd said. Because of her I was told off. They asked me why I had done that, instead of encouraging her to join, I'd scared her off so that she wouldn't join.

I think that sometimes they don't trust me, or they're afraid of me. Yes, because I was part of that life they don't trust me completely, or they're scared. It's not that they don't trust you, it's that they're afraid. I feel bad, because my own friends are afraid of me. Instead of trusting me, they're afraid. Maybe they're afraid of telling you things, things that happen to them, I mean they don't trust you enough to tell you their problems.

### **Girl D:**

I was really nice to everybody, I wasn't proud or anything, because people said to me, go and get me such a thing and I went and got it for them, go and get me this, look after your granny and since I was always with my granny, and it was my granny this and that and everywhere, and so people said that I was a good girl at home, I wasn't just out in the streets all day.

How I am at the moment? I think I'm OK, I think I have to go further to be able to be able to get along, to begin to express myself more, to talk to other people, and be successful in everything that I can.

**Girl E:**

I was quite quarrelsome and so, well, that's why I was a bit distant from my friends, and so I used to get together with them, like, because we used to fight a lot.

I think it was because, it was because I used to be more childish. I got, I got angry for no reason and I was fed up, bitter, and so I got angry for no reason and began to fight. I used to fight a lot at school.

I was told not to be like my sister, not to be like that, to study, to think about things better, not to be like my sister, she let herself be, well fooled so easily, I told her that I would. There were six girls like that, 13 years old and pregnant. Terrible, I said how awful that they're so little and, or so young and that, to have children, to have to be a mother... at 13 years old.

**TIME AND THE FUTURE**

The girls' experience the time following their release from the guerrillas as a new time.

Life has changed for them and so has their way of thinking. Fighting every day has been hell for them and they want to organize their life. Even though life with the guerrillas was hell, they were often treated better in the movement than their families had treated them. They are now able to think about their own self, their family and what it is they want to accomplish in the future. They see it as a time to begin constructing a new life. It is in many ways an idealistic time. The girls want to have more freedom and make their own decisions. Some of the girls want everything to change, not just their world view but everyone's world view. It is suggested that everyone, all parties to the conflict, give themselves up so that everyone can live together in peace. Once out of combat the girls begin to consider how they would like to contribute and help others who have just escaped. They do not want to continue to do bad things. They also have aspirations for their own development in regards to work and further education. They are respectful of the fact that they have a second chance at life and they want to make good use of it.

**Girl A:**

The institution came to pick me up, after a week, and I carried on with my life as normal, I was returned to my family.

At the moment, I feel free and that I'm able to study, that I can achieve what I've always wanted to do, that I can be someone in life, that I can be a philosopher.

Death for me... I've never thought about death because it's something you're really afraid of as a human being. For me it was very important that my family came to pick me up and that I began a new life. I'm happy about my new life, I like being free like before, not having to do bad things, and I feel very happy about being free now.

My desire has always been just to study, to be someone in life, to be successful. I'm starting tomorrow I've already got a place at the school. I did the exams and thanks to God I did well.

What I learnt there (in the armed group) has no meaning for me. What I'd like to change (about the armed group) is to change everything. There's nothing really that they have a good way of thinking about, to change... well, at least the way they respect women, that the men should respect the women and hopefully that they really change, that they all give themselves up one day and that we can all live together in peace.

They (the institution) promised us food, and they've given us that and also, they're paying the people that... like for living at home, and I hope they give us what they said they would, like clothes and all that they haven't given us so far. And things for personal hygiene.

I'm studying, and I'm going to start studying because my aunt and my grandpa have paid for that, really the institution hasn't complied in this respect. They promised us schooling, that's what they promised us when we first arrived at the institution, they promised us an education, that they would provide us with school places and that never happened.

Maybe it's because of all the problems in this country, so much war, so much conflict. I didn't expect the institution to help us with that many things. I feel OK with what they've given us, because for me, at least, the important part was that they got me out of there, and they didn't leave me for such a long time and that was like a present, the biggest present I've ever had.

In my free time, at the moment I'm doing oil painting and charcoal drawings, I used to paint before and I've carried on painting because this is something that I like a lot. In the armed group I wasn't allowed to paint. I was told that painting was something for little girls, that it was something stupid.

I haven't felt rejection from some people, people that know I was with guerrillas, because some people say that they don't do anything apart from exploit other people. For example, several people that have come to visit us, well, not several people but some, they look at you as if you were different from everybody else. These people that come to visit the institution, that need some kind of favor or something, people that haven't really belonged to a group, and they look at you in a strange way, because, I mean, they think you're not a good person for having caused so much harm to these people.

I've always wanted to live in the city so I can be successful in life. I like everything about the city, I've adapted a lot to the city. About the countryside, I miss the peacefulness. The noise, here in the city, you have to get used to the cars going past the house and everything and in the countryside you're not used to that.

I don't feel safe, because the problem that we had was very difficult for us, and if some day they find us, if they find us we'll have problems because of that, but really at the moment there aren't any problems. I mean, we know that there's no problem with them and with us, and we're relaxed about that. I'm very, very careful, for example when I go out, it's like they taught me, I'm like, I'm looking everywhere, I mean if you see someone right behind you, like, someone who's following you, I'm really very careful about that. When I'm about to go into the house I look around everywhere, and that's something that you should do because if they find you, if someone is watching you, then that's where they'll find you. If an armed group finds me... the first thing that you have to do, so that maybe nothing will happen, is to tell the truth, to say that you weren't happy there and to ask them for another opportunity.

You feel that you'll be able to fight for (ideals), something that you want and for something that you've wanted. I've never lost faith that one day I'd be able to study, to be someone in life.

Children should be treated in a very special way. Let's say, parents should treat them like these people... like your very best friend, like everybody's friend... like, I mean they should tell them everything, so that the children can also...tell them everything... so that they don't join the guerrillas. If all parents were like this then one day there would never be children in the conflict again.

Well, if they were studying, if they had the things that they wanted, I mean, not like, expensive things like cars or those kind of things, but if they were able to study... and that children from now on just thought about studying and that their parents helped them to be successful.

I think it should be the government that helps the poor children, children whose parents can't pay for their education.

The friends that are with me now, they haven't really been so good to me, because there are things that they say to me, that, that, they compare themselves to me, they want to be the same as me, and I say, no, com-

pare yourselves to yourselves, and sometimes I don't get on with them, but I like them really, as if they were sisters, because in the past we were all in the same armed group. I mean, they want to achieve what I have wanted to do, to study, and I've told them that, yes, do these things and you can study, but they, like, get angry that I tell them to study because they say that it's... I don't know... I was born with something that isn't easy for them because I belonged for longer than my other companions, it's not easy for me to tell them things.

For me, my future is studying, I'm going to be successful in my studies and I'm going to study as much as I can and I think that by studying you can be successful as long as you really want to be. At the moment we're thinking about a project for the future, I've thought about starting up a small shop. Everything that I've wanted to do these days, I've been able to do.

I'd like to give some advice to children, to see things from a different perspective, to take things... not to join the conflict because one day the conflict...will destroy us all, and if they have some kind of problem, then to sort it out with their families, and to look at things from a different perspective, and so one day, we'll all be happy and one day we'll all live in peace.

Thank you very much for interviewing me and for letting me say the things that I wanted to say, thank you very much.

**Girl B:**

(Since leaving the armed group) sometimes I feel good because you, I mean it's different, you look at people in a different way.

Like putting a project together (apply what learned in armed group) to help all the street children.

I don't know, doing a project and getting the government to help in setting up this project, and to help all these children, the people, all that, that's what I think.

At the moment the only thing I know is that, I mean, my family is the woman who is with us now, and that's like my family, and her two children that live here in the house, they're like my brothers and sisters, I get on well with them, and with her husband, it's as if they were my whole family, I mean, I don't need another family.

I'd like to live in the city, and have a house in the country, somewhere I could go, I'd like to be a doctor, and what else can I say, I'd like to study computers. At school we're being taught about computers a little.

For the moment I'd like to stay here until I'm 18 and then see if the reinsertion program helps me to set up a project, and stay as long as X wants to have us here in her house.

Sometimes I feel OK, as some people don't know that you've been in that, you know, they have a really low opinion of the guerrillas, and for me, this is hard, because I was there, and it's not how they think, sometimes I feel like talking to them and telling them the truth about how it really is and explaining to them and, sometimes, I feel OK.

I look at them like, I mean now that I feel a bit more normal, because a while ago, years, because now life has changed, and so you say what will people think, what am I going to do, what do I do, because you're not used to being in the city, only out in the country, oh, what should I do, what should I tell them and things like that.

Yes, so now I'm learning to get on with people because I wasn't used to that. And at X (housing after release) is where I learnt to live together with lots of people, because there were 10 or 12 girls all sleeping in a little room, and so the first few days were difficult, and I felt bad, I was angry because they made a lot of noise and everything, but then after that I began to get used to it and now it's different.

We were sent to a family house, and it was difficult, right? And it wasn't like being here, in the other house, because we were treated like servants, we were given all the housework to do, come here and do this for me, then do this for me and we weren't happy, yeah?

But anyway, then we came here to the reinsertion program, we found it, and we were asked how we were, and so we said OK and we told them about that house, and they got really angry, and the people at the reinsertion program, they said how could they do that, we weren't anybody's servants. And so they said how could they use us like that if we weren't anybody's servants, and so we asked them to take us away from there and to take us into the program and they knew about us since we started that and so we were taken out of that.

And then after about three days we were sent to X's and there it was different. We were moved to X's and now she's like our family. Like, (we receive) affection, an understanding towards you, she's like a mother, more than a mother because my mum never did that with me, she helps you, she hugs you, she spoils you, you can speak to her and she understands you, but above all, she gives you lots of advice and helps you with everything.

Now there's no one that's treating me badly or anything like that, and here we get a lot of affection, and I forget all about that, I don't think about, I forget that I have a family, I think that it was these people that were the ones that brought me up and everything.

My biggest dream is to have a big house with a really big living room, and invite all the children, old people, that you see out on the street, the ones that they call "disposable people," and take them all to this big room with loads of beds, like a room with beds and help them all, I mean to make it, like, a home for them, that's what I'd like to do, but who knows?

Perhaps, I'd tell the girls who are with the guerrillas to get out of there, to think carefully and make a good decision, one that they know will help them, and that they should get out and give themselves up because it's not how they say it is. Of course, if the army captures you, then they maltreat you, but if you give yourself up voluntarily then they won't do anything to you, it's not a place for girls to be, nor for those under age, or even men and women.

Children should have some kind of freedom, be free and do what they want to do, for example, study, to progress, and not be there with the guerrillas. And if the parents treat them badly, then I don't know, they should find a way of speaking to them, so that the parents also think about it. They should put themselves in the children's position, and maybe, with God's help they won't treat them badly.

They (the government) should help all the children involved in the armed conflict and the ones that get out as well, they should give us lots of help to get on with our lives, and to have an opportunity of a different life.

They (girls) shouldn't go (to an armed group). If they have problems at home, then they should talk to someone at the Family Welfare office. I don't know why they talk to their parents because they don't listen to the children. And so if they have problems in their family they should find a way to talk to someone older, or to get in touch with Family Welfare, and so Welfare can help to solve the problems with the family.

The most important thing to help isn't so much the money, nor anything like that, but that the children get sent to a family that really is a family, right? For example where we are, the woman feels affection for us. They shouldn't be seen as a business opportunity, but should be shown love and affection, as if they really were their own children.

If the government accepted the ten points of the manifesto, then I think that there wouldn't be so much fighting, so much war, would there?

Because what the guerrillas want is that the government provides free education for all children, to help the people in the country, the peasant farmers, tools for them to work with, for those that don't have, take away land from those that really have a lot and give some to those that don't have any.

But I don't think that the government is willing to, but maybe negotiating the government will come round and accept that. because what you're told there, in the guerrillas, is that there won't be peace by easy means, that it will only be achieved through armed conflict because, for example, if the guerrillas weren't armed then nobody would pay any attention to them, just like the people who organize strikes here, nobody pays any attention to them, but if you're armed then it's different, that's what X says, people listen when you're armed because if you don't have a gun, then anyone can come and knock you down and that would be it.

Well, I think it's the same because if you don't have a gun, then you're just like all the rest, aren't you. The government doesn't pay so much attention, but it's because they're armed that the government sat down there at the negotiating table holding talks, because if not, then it would be just like all the rest, wouldn't it?

And now if the guerrillas give up their weapons, say, give up their weapons like the M-19 did, they gave up their weapons and the only ones that got anywhere were the commanders. If that's the case and the rest get left behind, I don't think the guerrillas will give up their weapons, because they are where they are because of their weapons.

No (would not go back to combat), it's, like, that fever leaves you now, now that you're out of there, and I'd like to be, I don't know, like a director of a Family Welfare office, you know, get into something where you have contact with people involved in the conflict, the ones that have got out, and talk to them, explain things to them, all that kind of stuff.

It was worse being at home than being with the guerrillas, because with them, in spite of having to suffer and sometimes do what you don't want to do, or what you can't be bothered to do, well, I think it was worse being at home than with the guerrillas. Because there, above all, there is a lot of affection, love, they help you at difficult times, it's not like being at home where you're alone, there are several children but you have to bear the brunt of the work and then you're treated badly as well, but there, if you're passing through a difficult stage, then there are 20 or 30 that are going through the same thing. If you're hungry, then there are 30 people going hungry as well, if you're soaked for a week, then there are 30 people also wet through for a week, without anything to eat. Everything with the guerrillas is equal for everybody, but at home it's not like that, if you were beaten then it was just one person, but not with the guerrillas.

I think for me it's worse being at home then there.

I'd like more freedom, and I think then the people wouldn't run away so much. Give them more freedom or at least buy clothes, I mean new clothes, because there at Welfare all the clothes you get are all second-hand and they're not clothes that are suitable for us. I mean they're from older people, and so you have to mend them, to alter them and you don't feel right doing that because with the guerrillas you're not used to doing that and there with the guerrillas you get underwear bought for you, but it's good quality, right?

But there, those bras, we used to say that those bras, they were the ones that come in those bags, and you put them on and by the next day they've already broken, what's the good of that? Second-hand clothes, we used to wear second-hand clothes at home and because of that it also affected me, and so because of that I ran away.

And so to avoid that it would be good if they gave you more freedom, or if they're afraid of that, then they should have a house just for those that have deserted, and another house for the people that were captured, so that they don't have problems with that, because at the end of the day the deserters got out of that and what they want, we want to be free, OK?

And we should be given education because there we weren't studying or anything like that.

**Girl C:**

I think my life has changed in that I've changed my way of thinking. Because now I've stopped thinking about the guerrillas, and I have to think about myself, my family, about what I have to do to get on with my life.

I want to work, study and do well so that I can help my family. First I want to finish secondary school. I want to live in the city. I don't like the country anymore, I'm scared to go to the country. Because maybe they'll (guerrillas) get me.

The new things that I've done here are that I go on trips, I have fun, I meet people.

Other people I think that sometimes they don't trust me, or they're afraid of me. Because I was part of that life, they don't trust me completely, or they're scared. I feel bad because my own friends are afraid of me -- instead of trusting me they're afraid. Maybe they're afraid of telling you things, things that happen to them. I mean, they don't trust you enough to tell you their problems.

Life is just so false, I mean, each one... like I said every day seems like it's hell, fighting every day.

My plans for the future are to work, I want to get on with my life. In a few months I'm going to be an adult. Then I can do what I want, I can make my own decisions. I want to do what I think, what comes from within me and not what I'm told to do or anything.

Maybe I want to get married, to start a family. It's a desire that I just have in mind.

I went to have my cards read and it came out that I was going to get married, that I'm going to be a millionaire, that I'm going to have problems. I'm going to travel. I want to organize my life. To get married.

Being alone you feel alone, bored, without anyone to help you, and especially when you get older, when you get to the age when you stop being a child and you become a grandma.

I want to study, I want to work and I want to go to university. I'd like to study home sciences. I would like to own a small supermarket and sell food.

I would like to live by myself...wait until I'm of age and then get on and succeed...when I feel capable of making decisions by myself.

**Girl D:**

I wanted to be a computer scientist.

When I joined the guerrillas all my dreams went up in smoke. But now I want to get back to that, I want to get further ahead in what I can... not to retrogress. I have a special dream that I was going to be a computer scientist and have a good husband, and I was going to be rich and have lots of money and many things, I wasn't going to be lacking anything. I thought that maybe the boyfriend I had was going to be my future husband.

At the moment, I think I'm OK, I think I have to go further to be able to be able to get along, to begin to express myself more, to talk to other people, and be successful in everything that I can.

We have to respect children's rights, decisions, for example, if I say something then you have to respect the decision that I made, no one should violate other people's rights and to learn to regard yourself highly so that others respect you and also regard you well.

And here, where I am, they tell me that I have to respect myself so that others respect me and to learn to

respect and be with other people, and to learn to get ahead with what I want, not to retrogress and despite all those upsets that I had, I have to get up again and carry on.

Like being in the guerrillas, that problem I had (lies about her), and just now the illness that my X died from, it's sad but I have to get up again and carry on, although the person that I loved the most isn't here anymore and who helped me with everything, but I have to carry on and one day someone else will arrive who I'll love as much.

**Girl E:**

I mean to be a singer. I plan to study again and make the best of things and help my mum.

My ambition is to finish primary school and go to my aunt's house and live in the city. The city is big and there are loads of cars and it is pretty, a hamlet isn't like that.

**Girl F:**

I used to dream about being in X, I used to dream a lot that I was in X, I don't know, mum used to say I wanted to go to X, and we didn't have enough money to go, it costs a lot to go there. I used to say I wanted to go to X, last night I dreamt, and every so often I'd dream about going, with big islands, playing with all my friends there.

At the beginning, when I was told that I had to kill someone else, and you get scared, that you might be killed always makes you scared, that you might die, you're always afraid of that.

Well, at least the day, the day that I was captured, that I was injured, I said, whoa, I'm dead, right here, yeah, now I'm dying, I thought that, I'm not getting out of this alive.

Now, I value it (life) a lot, at least in moments like that when you stop thinking, but then afterwards, at moments like that you don't think about anything, and then later you begin to think, wow, for me this is... you have to value things, you have to value what you're given, at least like here, at least I'm given, given, support, like studying, you have to make the most of it to be able to get ahead.

Yes, of course, with an experience like that, of course, you, you, with an experience like that, you learn to value things more, you didn't appreciate what you had at home, but, then you begin to realize, I didn't appreciate what I had at home, the schooling that I was given at home, and so now that I have the opportunity again, the, this second chance, I'm going to make the most of it and value it more.

What I want now is to be with my family, to help them, to work and study.







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