

Yes, There Are Children

Introduction This is an October 6, 2005, CPTNet (Christian Peacemaker Teams) release by Suzanna Collerd and is used with permission.

When we CPTers left the Nasa land reclamation action in Caloto, Cauca, Colombia, police stopped us at a checkpoint. (For more information on the action see CPT Colombia release “Walking the Word.”) A group of young soldiers asked us to get out of the car. I, quite honestly tired of these random checkpoints (especially as I was trying to enjoy a fruit popsicle), got out a little less than willingly. Greeting the young men with “Good afternoon,” I realized just how young they were, all probably less than 20 years old. When they asked where we were coming from, we explained that we had visited the action on the farm to support the community.

While we greeted each other, they looked through our bags. We obviously had more experience at checkpoints than they, they were not sure of what they were looking for, or which bags they had checked. Faces looked at me, almost for affirmation that they were doing their job correctly.

One young soldier curtly asked, “So what are they [the community members] saying?” A teammate responded, “That they are going to stay put for the long haul. What are you guys saying?” “We wait for orders,” he answered, disappointed by his own response. His eyes got big and sad, and he asked, “Is it true that there are children? I heard there are children. Babies carried in the arms of their

“I would like
you
to give a message.
Please do your best
to tell the world
what is happening to us,
the children.
So that other children
don't have to pass
through this
violence.”

mothers.” “Yes,” we said, “the whole community is there together.”

What he did not say with words, his eyes and body said: “I’m scared of hurting children. I am a low ranking soldier and follow orders, and now the consequences of those orders frighten me.” The other officers stood hunched as well, quite possibly thinking the same thing.

This conversation came back to my mind the following day, when we heard the news that a young boy had lost his eye in an attack by the police.

Yes, there are children:

- Children on that farm claiming their rights to have land that will produce food and help them grow.
- Children that are heirs to 500 years of resistance to colonization.
- Children who want a future that does not include the guns of the police, army, paramilitary or guerrilla
- Children who deserve land where they can play without the fear of stepping on an anti-personnel mine.
- Children who should be able to go to bed at night without fearing that the next morning the guerrilla will violently take over their town, or the army will attack to take it back, or the paramilitaries will take control.
- Children who want their grandparents to live more than the average 40-year lifespan so that they may have the time to learn their history, traditions, wisdom, and language from their elders.
- Children who should not be required to carry arms against their own people.
- Children who should get to be children.



“Faces of the Children” graphic: Fran Gregory, a CSJ Associate. Used with permission.

CPT is featured as an inspirational story on Hill Connections.

For other CPT-related stories on this site, search for “Christian Peacemaker Teams” using Google in the masthead.