

**CHILDREN'S MEMORANDUM ON CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION
IN PEACE BUILDING
(Guatemala, July 1st, 2008)**

Since 2007, three groups of children and young people from the organisations Utz K'aslemal, Young Men's Christian Association, Talita Kumi, EDECRI and ADEBQ'I have participated throughout the process of the Thematic Evaluation on Children's Participation in Armed Conflicts, Post-Conflict and Peace Building contexts. During the workshop to validate the results of the TE, held in Guatemala City from July 1st thru 3rd, 2008, children and youth representatives from these organizations discussed the five main issues that children face to achieve a true participation in peace building.

Please read this memorandum and support children in these issues:

Five significant issues

1. Children's opinions are not taken into account and they are considered as unable persons
2. To learn about the causes of the internal armed conflict
3. To include the true history of the war in the school curriculum
4. Lack of security and increased violence as a result of *maras* (gangs)
5. To promote respect for cultural differences

1. Children's opinions are not taken into account and they are considered unable.

Adults do not consider important or worthwhile children's opinions, and do not take them into account. As a result, children feel unable to express their ideas.

What do we want? For children and young people to diffuse their ideas and enable other children to express themselves. Thus, it is important to select interesting themes. Adults can accompany them during talks and the authorities can facilitate spaces for children to perform this kind of activities to enable us to communicate.

What do we expect from adults? That both adults, as well as authorities, enable us to talk about these topics anywhere we want.

2. To learn about the causes of the internal armed conflict

In general, adults avoid talking about the internal armed conflict, especially the government, probably because they think that, in that way, everything will be calm, without memories of violence.

What do we want? To hold meetings to present key ideas on the internal armed conflict in order to help persons who continue being victims of the violence that occurred then.

What do we expect from adults?

- Ministry of Education - to address the issue and for it to be taught at a national level. Moreover, that other entities join us and support us in diffusing this information.

3. To include the true history of the war in the school curriculum

The issue of the Internal Armed Conflict is not addressed in schools; teachers do not want to talk about it, because they do not consider it is a good topic and they think it belongs to the past; there are some teachers who are afraid to talk about the issue, they have no knowledge of it, and do not want to get involved or think about what happened. Some parents who did not suffer as a result of the internal armed conflict are afraid that teachers will tell their children about it. The internal armed conflict is not included in the history books used in schools.

What do we want? As children, we want to continue participating in training activities on the issue of the internal armed conflict, and we would also like to talk to their children about what happened back then. We would also like to continue having dialogues with our relatives on this issues. It is important to find people who lived then, so they can tell us the true story. Non-governmental organizations can provide materials on the issue to other children.

What do we expect from the adults?

- Ministry of Education - to include the issue in the school curriculum.
- Parents - to tell us what they lived, and learned about the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC).
- Organisations - to talk more about this issue.
- Teachers - to address the topic and to diffuse it to other children.
- Authorities - to promote assistance programmes for those persons who were affected by the IAC

4. Lack of security and increased violence as a result of maras (gangs)

The increased number of gang members (*maras*) is linked to social problems such as family disintegration, poverty, unemployment, child abuse, lack of education, limited spaces for public recreation, bad influence of friends and lack of affection from parents to children, which they replace with money. The society in general is responsible for this situation.

What do we want? It is necessary to strengthen the family and to create public recreation centres, as well as to implement prevention actions in education centres to prevent children and youths' participation in gangs. To offer children and youths other participation opportunities, such as in community groups, church groups, to become volunteers for non-profit organizations. It is also important to provide recreation through workshops, camping activities, and creative and artistic activities. It is necessary to convince more youths to leave gangs (*maras*).

What do we expect from adults?

- Ministry of Education - to include instruction of values in the curriculum in an experience-based manner and the prevention of crimes.
- The State – to fulfill its obligation of providing education, health and a dignified, full life for Guatemalan children and adolescents.

5. To promote respect for cultural differences

Discrimination is the result of the people's lack of education and that they have not learned to accept the different ways in which people live, it is an issue that is also related to violence. We acknowledge that in school, we do not learn about the different cultures that exist in the country, nor about the respect for them. It is important to promote respect so that all of us can build peace and to achieve equity in the Guatemalan society

What do we want? For children to learn about the different cultures, for parents to show and tell their children about respect, to talk to our friends and relatives about the culture in which we live in, and for there to be radio and TV programmes that talk about culture.

It is important for us, as children, to respect our parents and grandparents, and the Mayan culture they belong to and practice, as well as to respect the customs of our community. It is important that we do not make fun of our peers when they speak in their mother tongues, and for us to become examples of respect and role models.

What do we expect from adults?

- Community Development Committees – to include the issue of respect for culture in their communities.
- To create entities that hold workshops in the communities on non-discrimination, for children & adults
- Ministry of Education – to include intercultural issues as an important topic in schools.

Children and youth representatives from
ADEBQ'I
EDECRI
FUNDEMI / Talita Kumi
Utz K'aslemal
Young Men's Christian Association

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