

# *Colombian Conflict Affected 250,000 Children Since 2013: UNICEF*

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Bogotá, March 21 (RHC-teleSUR), -- Hostilities in Colombia have displaced or otherwise disrupted the lives of more than 250,000 children since peace talks began three and a half years ago, the United Nations children's agency said on Sunday.

Among them, are the over 230,000 children that have been displaced, at least 75 killed and 180 injured by fighting, according to a new report by Unicef. Landmines and unexploded ordnance have killed or injured another 130 children, it added.

"As peace negotiations to end half a century of war in Colombia continue, it is crucial to make children's interests and protection a priority," Roberto De Bernardi, UNICEF representative in Colombia, said in a statement. "No child in Colombia today knows what it is like to live in a country at peace."

Some 1,000 were recruited or otherwise exploited by non-state armed groups during the talks between the government and the left-wing FARC rebels, added the report.

At least 180 children were victim to sexual violence, Unicef said, adding that displacement, fear and presence of landmines are also causing children to drop out of school

“Even if the peace agreement were to be signed tomorrow, children will continue to be at risk of all kinds of violations,” De Bernardi said. “Unless these children receive the material and psychological assistance they need, the prospects of long-lasting peace will remain elusive.”

The government’s peace talks with the Marxist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebels are aimed at ending five decades of conflict, which has also involved right-wing paramilitary groups.

Although a settlement is expected soon, the talks have stumbled over the details of an eventual truce, negotiators said last week.

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