**Born into Conflict: Child Soldiers in Colombia**

For the past two years I have been photographing and interviewing current and former child soldiers throughout Colombia. What I have come across is a silenced latent crisis that has devastated the lives of the estimated 6,000 young men and women currently enlisted in illegal armed groups. It is estimated that a quarter to nearly half of recruited combatants are women including girls as young as nine years old. Girls receive the same training as their male counterparts, they are taught to handle weapons, collect intelligence and take part in military operations; but they are also victims of sexual abuse at the hand of their commanders and in most instances forced to have an abortion if they get pregnant from these abusive relations.

These young survivors are faced with the hardship of returning to their families living in extreme poverty, communities that shun them—or both. Moreover, they are stigmatized by the collective fear of Colombian society at large, which views them as criminals, hence facing economic instability because of discrimination, lack of education and little family support. As a result, most of these children are forced to enter a cycle of violence and criminality that perpetuates this social conflict.