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Summer Peace Program for Single Mothers, Immigrant Mothers and Children
Bogotá, Colombia

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

After the Peace Agreement between the Colombian Government, for which I have worked in the past, and the FARC guerrillas, a series of issues related to common living, education, and competences for peaceful resolution of conflicts have arisen. At the same time, and because of the repression of Venezuela's Government, more than one million immigrants have entered Colombia, causing an unparalleled humanitarian emergency. The project here described aims to propose a space for both peaceful living, hospitality, and learning for mothers who have been displaced by violence inside Colombia or who were displaced by the Venezuelan emergency and who have come to Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, looking for security and new opportunities. The program will target both those mothers and their children, in different yet connected activities. My particular background in Human Rights Law, Student Leadership, and Public Service in Colombia is fundamental to the program success.

My project aims to create an opportunity for reflection and learning for a group of around 35 young and disenfranchised Colombian and Venezuelan children who have been affected –directly or indirectly– by the armed conflict and by the Venezuelan dictatorship, either by the conflicts' repercussions on inequality and wealth concentration, or by the forced migration itself. It will also offer a space for their single-mothers or caregivers to learn a basic set of skills to navigate Colombian welfare programs and also to learn skills for job-searching. It will also train some high-school students in the necessary skills to replicate the program in the following years. The project, "Summer Peace Program for Single-Mothers, Immigrant Mothers and Children: Peaceful Playing, Peaceful Thinking, and Common Living", will create a space for thinking and playing for young and disenfranchised Colombian and Venezuelan children (10-12 years old) during the Summer of 2019. The project will offer also a series of masterclasses and workshops for their single-mothers or caregivers about access to public services (education for their kids, technical formation, health and economic subventions).

During the Summer, most Colombian and Venezuelan kids are left by their own in their houses or are taken care by their mothers, neighbors or other family members. My project will offer to a small group the opportunity of spend their Sundays in a controlled space in which they will be able to play, discover new experiences and reinforce some of their academic skills while they discuss and learn about peace and conflict resolution. While they escort their children, their mothers and caregivers (usually an aunt, an older sibling or a grandmother) will attend free seminars and workshops about basic abilities that will be useful to answer different needs. The program will be set during six to seven weekends. For the children, the program will be throughout the whole morning (from 8 to 12) and will include breakfast and lunch. For their mothers (1 per children), the program will include a session from 8-9 am and a small refreshment (plus an optional activity for those who want to stay for all the morning, that can include extra sessions, academic reinforcement, or learning to use computers). The program will take place at a safe space in Bogotá (probably a private high-school) that has sports facilities and libraries where the activities can take place.

Partnerships: The project will be developed over a series of partnerships with public and private actors. In the public sector, we will have contacts with the Colombian Agency of Social Prosperity and with the Victims Unit of the Presidency of the Republic and of the city of Bogotá, in order to find a group that fulfills the conditions that were specified before. My previous experience in Colombian Government will be extremely useful to navigate these processes. We will contact the Colombian office for Refugees and also the Office of Colombian Migration in order to find and recruit those kids and their mothers. Strict protection for their personal data and information shall be the norm. As a Human Rights Lawyer, I understand the necessity of avoid any revictimization: the persons involved will be treated with the respect they deserve and all the common procedures –from informed consent, to strict protection of the children– will be a priority. The program is for those victims and not for the group that organizes it.

On the private sector, we will find both partners and service providers that will fulfill some important roles. We've been in contact with a group of Colombian social psychologists who have been trained in work with immigrant children and with victims. They will provide the special company that these persons will require. We are counting on the partnership of Sinestesia, an NGO devoted to social improvement in transitional processes and to training in conflict resolution. I have started communication with the school where I wish to organize the program, and with a group of women artists and yoga trainers that will offer the sessions on meditation and related activities of mindfulness.

Activities for Children: There will be six sessions lead by professional social workers. Each one will be divided into three sections. During the first session, the kids will have one hour of sport activities (soccer, basketball and other games). During the second session, they will have a (surprise) activity: a botanical/ artistic walking, a Yoga/ Meditation session for kids, a concert, an artistic session, and a theater production. All these activities will be devoted to explore and explain a relevant concept for peace-achieving and conflict resolution: common-living, environmentalism, fair-play, creativity and team-work. During the third session, the kids will discuss their daily experiences and they will speak, guided by a trained facilitator, about what it means for them to be a citizen in a peaceful community, what it takes to get and protect peaceful living, and what are the abilities that they, as children, have to learn to successfully managing conflicts in their daily life. Emphasis will be placed on the value of Hospitality, so dear to the mission of the International Houses. With this part of the program, we hope to create peaceful yet plural communities from childhood.

Activities and Workshops for Mothers and Caregivers: We will offer eight seminars on the following subjects led by persons who are professionals in each field. 1) Access to education (basic and higher); 2) Access to the public health system and to the social security; 3) Public and free cultural and ludic activities for children and grownups; 4). Work-finding abilities; 5) Keeping and thriving at your job. 6) Workshop against domestic violence and abuse; 7) "Know your human and labor rights". With this part of the program, we hope to create lifelong abilities to improve socio economic conditions; 8) Ludic activities in a similar vein that the children ones. We will also offer an option for caregivers to attend sessions of academic support in math, reading and writing, and use of technology, led by high-school students, who at the same time will learn the skills to organize the project in following years.

As has been expressed, Colombia faces two great moral and humanitarian challenges for the near future. Firstly, the final reconciliation and the end of its armed conflict, and the peaceful integration of the Venezuelan diaspora. These challenges are addressed with the proposed program, targeting two especially vulnerable demographic groups: single mothers and children. By fostering their capabilities, we hope to create a model of social intervention that will serve as an example and will impact not only the future of those children and mothers, but also of the institutional capacity of our local partners, including new actors –such as the very mothers and children who will participate in this first chapter– whose comments will be useful to replicate and improve the program for future years, of the high-school students who will learn from the senior members of the team. This program will not only foster peace and hospitality values, but it will provide an actual space where peace and hospitality will appear, amidst vulnerable people who have a lot of things to learn but also who have a lot of things to teach to us and their peers. In the short term, it will provide a summer of learning and wellness for children and mothers. In the long term, the results of the summer program will be multiple yet variable. The teaching and seminars that we will offer to children and mothers will provide an opportunity that will may have life-changing outcomes for the participants: from the soft skills on conflict resolution and fair play to the academic reinforcement that we will offer to the children to the practical skill set that we will provide to the mothers about public services can, both in the long and in the short term, improve their lives and the lives of those around them. In the case of mothers, the experience of the program will be translated in a series of documents –from booklets, to YouTube videos– that hopefully will enhance the reach of the program to other persons.