



## **ASIA/SRI LANKA - The plight of child soldiers continues even when the wars are over**

Colombo (Agenzia Fides) - When it comes to child soldiers it is hardly ever referred to girls and to girls enrolled, although 40% are involved in those wars. They have different roles, those who have just been kidnapped are the maids to soldiers, they cook, collect supplies and, once they reach puberty, they are forced to marry the leader of the guerrillas. Others will become slaves of soldiers, who abuse them; others fight with weapons, they become spies and informers. Unfortunately, the problems of these youth do not end at the end of the war, but on the contrary, once they return to their country, these children, often with children in tow, are still seriously marginalized. They suffer from severe psychological and physical problems, and even when they can return to their families, they are marginalized because they create a cause for shame and embarrassment.

This serious problem affects almost all countries experiencing conflict, from South America to Africa to Asia. In Sri Lanka, torn apart by civil war for 25 years, the conflict started in 1983 and concluded in 2009 generated over 280 thousand war refugees, mostly young children. They are boys and girls born during the war and trained to fight. In Vavuniya the Salesian Sisters of the Daughters of Mary Help deal with these unfortunate girls in the "Home for combatant girls and former soldiers." There are currently 173 young people among the most vulnerable, poor and marginalized. Of those 77 attend schools and 80 are orphans. The youngest is only 3 years old and attends kindergarten. A girl studying at university, 20 follow professional courses and 2 physiotherapy courses. Ten of the oldest work. The initiatives of the Salesian Sisters aim to protect their physical and mental health, education and spiritual formation, and work jointly with other international non-governmental networks, such as the International Red Cross, Unicef and the World Food Programme, and national such as SHADE and SEED, that weekly collaborate with the Don Bosco Children's Home. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 21/2/2012)