



## **AMERICA - 600 million children are victims of violence, forced to marry to survive**

Bogota (Agenzia Fides) - Of the 600 million adolescent girls living in developing countries, many continue to be invisible to the structures and national programs. Millions of them live in poverty, victims of gender discrimination and inequality, are subject to various forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, including child labor and early marriage. Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region where some countries have adolescent fertility rates which instead of decreasing, are stable or increasing. Currently, the average rate in the age group between 15 and 19 is 70.5 per 1000 born. Many become pregnant prematurely, are devoted to raising children, get married or live with their partner. Most come from rural and poor areas, many of them are victims of sexual violence. Some pregnancies, marriage or at least the union of the couple, are the only way to survive. All of these girls and adolescents are very vulnerable and most leave school, thus limiting the possibility of finding a job, as well as their autonomy, and becoming more and more dependent on others, often their own tormentors. Child marriage is another serious phenomenon that affects many children seriously. According to the latest UNICEF statistics, 70 million young women between 20 and 24, one out of three, married before the age of 18, and 23 million before age 15. Worldwide, 400 million women between 20 and 49 married when they were very young. In Bolivia, more than 800,000 boys and girls from 5 to 17 work under the parameters of national and international legislation, among these 364 000 are girls, most of them involved in hazardous work. Over one million girls do housework, exposed to dangers such as fire, gas, chemicals, dangerous tools. The families still prefer to send their sons to school and keep the girls at home. Among the main reasons of early school drop-out there are long distances from home to school, the need to work for economic problems, delayed enrollment at school, domestic work, and commitment with children and pregnancies. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 24/10/2012)