

***Truth and Non-repetition:***

**THE LEGACY FOR  
COLOMBIA AND  
TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE  
GLOBALLY**

.....

**RECENT REFLECTIONS  
FROM THE VOICES OF  
PRACTICAL AND ACADEMIC  
EXPERTS**

COMPILATION:

∴ *María Prada Ramírez*  
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∴ *Stefan Peters*

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UNITED NATIONS  
MULTI-PARTNER TRUST FUND  
FOR SUSTAINING PEACE



**Truth and Non-repetition:**

# THE LEGACY FOR COLOMBIA AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE GLOBALLY

RECENT REFLECTIONS  
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EXPERTS

**PUBLISHED BY:**

German-Colombian Peace Institute, CAPAZ  
(for its acronym in Spanish)  
Carrera 8 # 7-21  
Claustro de San Agustín  
Bogotá, Colombia

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**FOR USE BY**

COLOMBIA'S TRUTH COMMISSION LEGACY

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COOPERATION AND ALLIANCES

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**ENGLISH VERSION**

United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund  
for Sustaining Peace in Colombia (MPTF),  
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

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<https://www.instituto-capaz.org/>

*This publication was created on the basis of the Truth Commission's closing event with the international community: 'Truth and Non-repetition: The Legacy for Colombia and Transitional Justice in the World', which took place on August 8 and 9, 2022, in Bogotá, in the Esmeralda room of the Hotel Tequendama. With the support of the European Union, the Embassy of Norway and AECID, in partnership with Redprodepaz, UNDP and Opción Legal.*

Colombia, 2023

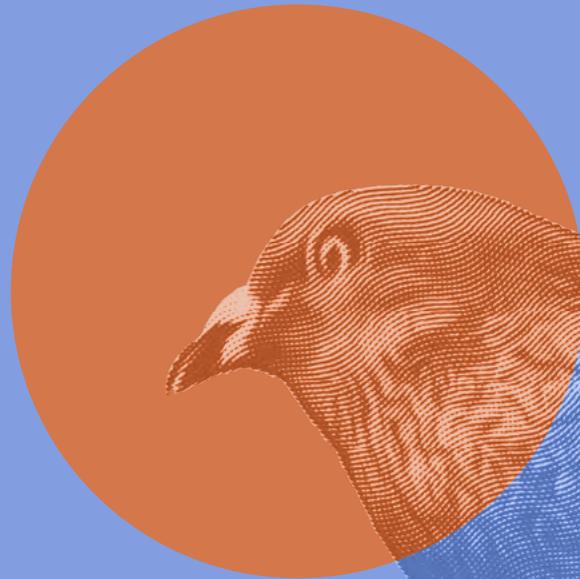
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# INTRODUCTION FROM THE GERMAN- COLOMBIAN PEACE INSTITUTE, CAPAZ

BY STEFAN PETERS

Director of the German-Colombian Peace  
Institute, CAPAZ (for its acronym in Spanish)



Colombia's Truth Commission has made history. Its Final Report represents a milestone in the current peace process, receiving plenty of attention globally, and shaping the debates on Transitional Justice, both in the academic sphere and in practical terms for restorative justice over the coming years.

This publication seeks to contribute to the debate on the work carried out by the Truth Commission and the support provided by national and international actors in its execution. It will also contribute to the discussion of the Truth Commission's results both inside and outside of Colombia.

Facing the past is a fundamental step in the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, and from war to peace. Today, the importance of addressing the past with a critical eye

**COLOMBIA'S TRUTH COMMISSION WAS BASED ON THE CONVICTION IN THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CRIMES OF THE PAST. AND SO IT OPENED UP NUMEROUS WOUNDS WITH ITS FINAL REPORT, SETTING THE BASIS FOR URGENT SOCIAL DEBATES.**

is widely recognized; however, historically, properly tackling the past has been the exception, not the rule. And that is not surprising: after all, dealing with the crimes of the past implies facing uncomfortable truths that, at best, 'complicate' the construction of a positive self-image of the state and the nation.

This apparent complication can become an opportunity, given that a historic consciousness and the consolidation of democratic values can rarely blossom on the basis of the affirmation of violent events or the denial of the crimes of the past. This is especially true in the case of the state's crimes against human rights.

Colombia's Truth Commission was based on the conviction in the need to understand the truth about the crimes of the past. And so it opened up numerous wounds with its Final Report, setting the basis for urgent social debates.

Given the extreme political polarization in Colombia, as well as the various social debates, it comes as no surprise that the results of Colombia's Truth Commission were not only received with widespread approval, but also with plenty of skepticism.

However, it is vitally important that the social debate does not stop at the simple exchange of already-established and well-known opinions, but that it proposes a contribution to a discussion – necessary for society as a whole – of the past and the mass violations of human rights that occurred under the mandate of democratic governments. These matters are of spe-

cial interest to the CAPAZ Institute.

The CAPAZ Institute was founded in late 2016, early 2017. It is dedicated to the academic support of the Colombian peace process. For this task, the violence of the past occupies a central position. The analysis of this process, from an international and comparative perspective, has two main objectives: on the one hand, ensuring that the experiences of other contexts serve to strengthen the Colombian peace process; and, on the other hand, ensuring that Colombia's results encourage other peace processes in various regions of the world.

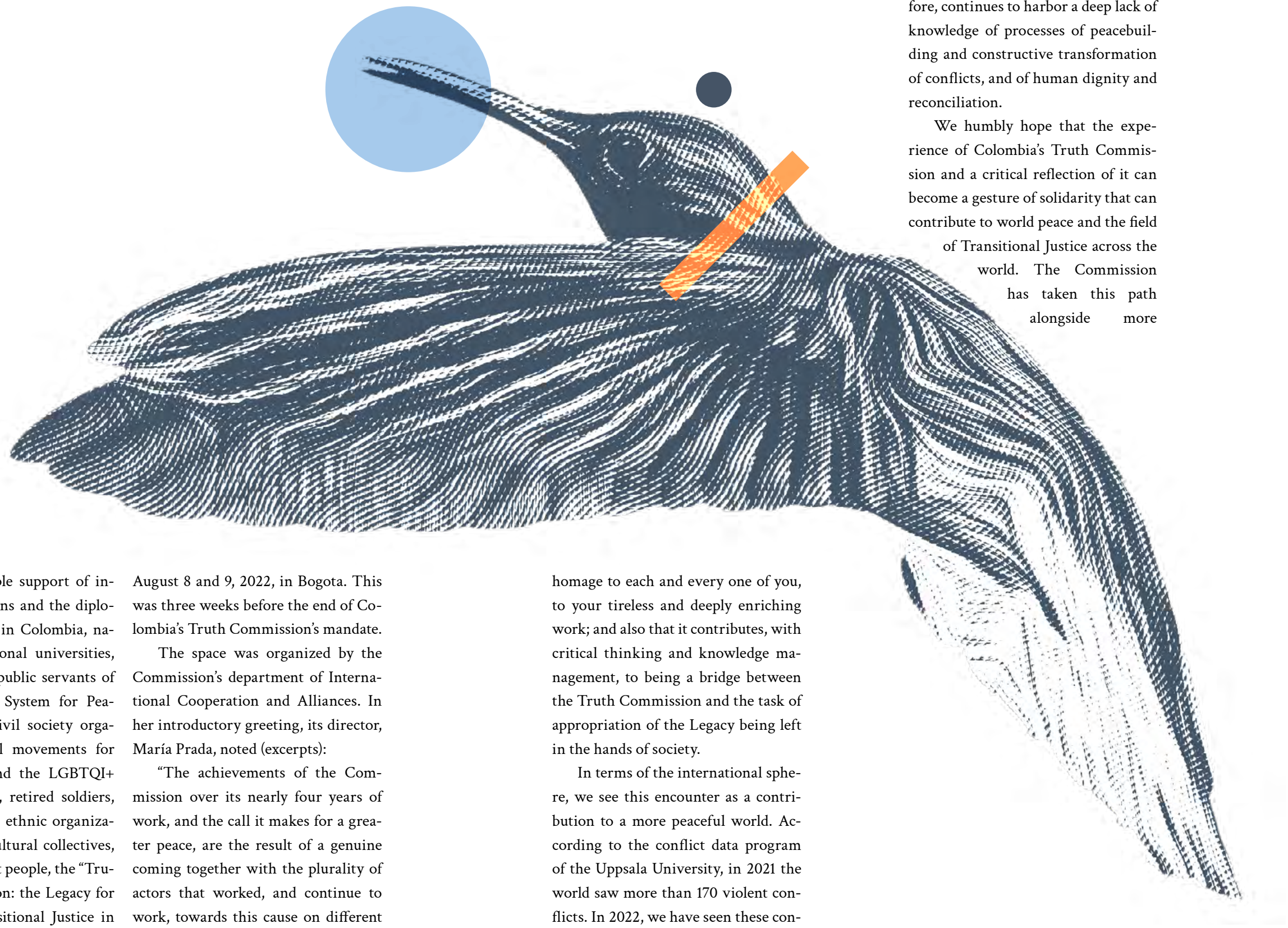
All of this requires an open academic exchange, appropriate spaces for debate, and interactions between the academic sphere and practical spaces. This publication seeks to contribute to these points and to the discussion of the work and results of Colombia's Truth Commission, with the backdrop of previous international experiences and also current and future experiences. All of this aims to support the promotion of peace in Colombia as well as the development of international discussions within investigations on peace and conflict. We hope that it is to your liking and of use to you.

**IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT THE SOCIAL DEBATE DOES NOT STOP AT THE SIMPLE EXCHANGE OF ALREADY-ESTABLISHED AND WELL-KNOWN OPINIONS, BUT THAT IT PROPOSES A CONTRIBUTION TO A DISCUSSION.**

# INTRODUCTION

BY MARÍA PRADA

Cooperation and Alliances Coordinator,  
TRUTH COMMISSION



**C** With the valuable support of international delegations and the diplomatic corps present in Colombia, national and international universities, district authorities, public servants of the Comprehensive System for Peace, media outlets, civil society organizations and social movements for children, women and the LGBTQI+ community, victims, retired soldiers, youth organizations, ethnic organizations, artistic and cultural collectives, and also independent people, the “Truth and Non-repetition: the Legacy for Colombia and Transitional Justice in the World” encounter took place on

August 8 and 9, 2022, in Bogota. This was three weeks before the end of Colombia’s Truth Commission’s mandate.

The space was organized by the Commission’s department of International Cooperation and Alliances. In her introductory greeting, its director, María Prada, noted (excerpts):

“The achievements of the Commission over its nearly four years of work, and the call it makes for a greater peace, are the result of a genuine coming together with the plurality of actors that worked, and continue to work, towards this cause on different levels. We hope that this space is an

homage to each and every one of you, to your tireless and deeply enriching work; and also that it contributes, with critical thinking and knowledge management, to being a bridge between the Truth Commission and the task of appropriation of the Legacy being left in the hands of society.

In terms of the international sphere, we see this encounter as a contribution to a more peaceful world. According to the conflict data program of the Uppsala University, in 2021 the world saw more than 170 violent conflicts. In 2022, we have seen these continue to emerge; in some cases, with

devastating effects. Humanity, therefore, continues to harbor a deep lack of knowledge of processes of peacebuilding and constructive transformation of conflicts, and of human dignity and reconciliation.

We humbly hope that the experience of Colombia’s Truth Commission and a critical reflection of it can become a gesture of solidarity that can contribute to world peace and the field of Transitional Justice across the world. The Commission has taken this path alongside more

than 200 international partners and 24 countries; in return, we hope to give in the same way that we received.

On a national level, we are experiencing a renewed air with the new government, which has committed to building peace and respecting, and generating respect for, the National Constitution, among other priorities.

It is a commitment that puts the implementation of the Final Peace Agreement, signed in 2016 between the Colombian state and the Farc-ep guerrilla –which gave birth to the Truth Commission–, at the center of the political agenda once again. Fur-



thermore, the government led by Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez has committed to follow, to the letter, the implementation of the recommendations for non-repetition that the Truth Commission presented to the country on June 28, 2022.

We hope that this space acts as an opportunity to collectively renew our commitment to peacebuilding and the rejection of violence, as well as the chance to identify in the dialogue and synergetic and complementary work of state and civil society a path towards the implementation of the recommendations for non-repetition.

From an institutional perspective, we hope that this is a collective opportunity for knowledge management, for discerning the facts and causes, and making critical reflections, as well as sharing the lessons relating to public management for peace.

If we want to live differently, if we want to live in peace, we must also think, feel and do for peace. Beyond the content, methodologies and experiences unraveled during the Truth Commission’s process, the Commission’s Legacy remains in the hands of partners and many of you. We would like to highlight your role in the impact, spreading and ownership of the Legacy in society.

Finally, on a more personal level, we would like this space to also act as an homage to the nearly 3,000 people who contributed to the Commission, as public servants, contractors or interns. We want the words and relationships that flow through this space to act as

thanks to our group of commissioners who, for four years, taught us that this cause was bigger than any one of us, and that peace is built on a daily basis, by recognizing differences and always holding human dignity, especially that of the victims, at the center of each decision. Thanks for your commitment and dedication.

We also have a deep sense of gratitude and nostalgia for the three people who, during our mandate, ceased to accompany us physically, leaving behind their imprint of knowledge, deep commitment and warmth during their time at the Commission: Alfredo Molano, Ángela Salazar and Elena López. Let this be a moment to collectively remember them and acknowledge their talent. You will forever be in our hearts!

We convene here with an agenda that tackles various subjects, beginning with a reflection on the Final Peace Agreement and its implementation in relation to the Truth Commission, before a conversation on the contributions that the Commission received from the international experience of Transitional Justice. We will also hear about the work with the network of partners, reflect on the implementation of the recommendations, before finishing with a conversation on the Comprehensive System for Peace in Colombia and the lessons that this could provide for international contexts.

All of these conversations will be supported by the presence of the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee

(CSM, for its Spanish acronym) that is being left by the Commission, with its seven members being officially presented here. There will also be a screening of two audiovisual pieces produced by the Commission and the presentation of two virtual tools born out of the work with the network of partners to support and leverage the sustainability of the Legacy.

Today we can say, filled with hope and anticipation, that with this window of political opportunity, the proven commitment of so many diverse partners, and with the results delivered as a Legacy to society, we find ourselves on the path towards a greater peace and reconciliation. A path full of challenges and lessons to learn, sure, but with all the social and political awareness and willingness necessary to advance.

Welcome to this space, a collective offering for peace and non-repetition!

SEE MARÍA PRADA’S OPENING REMARKS HERE: [https://youtu.be/j\\_Wuq3JsHQ4](https://youtu.be/j_Wuq3JsHQ4)





WORDS FROM  
FRANCISCO DE  
ROUX, MARIAN  
SCHUEGRAF AND  
CARLOS RUIZ  
MASSIEU



“EVERYTHING THAT YOU, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, HAVE GIVEN TO THE TRUTH COMMISSION, THE WAY THAT YOU SUPPORTED US AND BELIEVED IN US, HAVE BORN FRUITS. YOUR SUPPORT CONTRIBUTED TO THE CREATION OF AN ENVIRONMENT THAT, TODAY, MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO TAKE A MORE HOPEFUL VIEW OF PEACE IN COLOMBIA. JOIN US IN CELEBRATING, BECAUSE THIS IS A JOINT ACHIEVEMENT. WE LEAVE THIS LEGACY IN YOUR HANDS AS WELL”.

**FRANCISCO DE ROUX**  
PRESIDENT OF THE TRUTH COMMISSION:



“WE CAN ONLY BUILD A BETTER FUTURE IF WE LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES OF THE PAST. THE TRUTH COMMISSION’S REPORT IS THE STARTING POINT OF THIS FUNDAMENTAL DEBATE AND THE BOLD FIRST STEP TOWARDS COLOMBIAN SOCIETY’S DISCUSSION ABOUT ITS HISTORY”.

**MARIAN SCHUEGRAF**  
GERMAN AMBASSADOR TO COLOMBIA



“THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAS MAINTAINED ITS FIRM SUPPORT FOR THE COLOMBIAN PEACE PROCESS, POLITICALLY AND FINANCIALLY, OVER THE YEARS, AS A CLEAR VOTE OF TRUST IN THE COUNTRY, WHICH TODAY IS REAFFIRMED WITH THE TRUTH COMMISSION’S LEGACY. I AM HERE TO REITERATE OUR SUPPORT IN THIS NEW BEGINNING”.

**CARLOS RUIZ MASSIEU**  
HEAD OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
VERIFICATION MISSION IN COLOMBIA



# CONVERSATION *and* REFLECTION SPACES



**T**ruth and Non-repetition: The Legacy for Colombia and Transitional Justice in the World’ included conversation and reflection spaces on the work of Colombia’s Truth Commission and Transitional Justice. These spaces included a main presenter, a moderator, and various voices for the conversation, including members of the Truth Commission, representatives from various social sectors, and international peacebuilding and Transitional Justice experts. For each conversation and reflection space, you will find its title, the complete list of speakers, an article that summarizes the conversation,

and some highlighted phrases. You can watch each space in the link to its YouTube video. The following video is an overview of the encounter:

DISFRUTE EL VIDEOCLIP CON LA GENERALIDAD DE TODO EL ESPACIO, EN: <https://youtu.be/0Y4KdhM5kpI>



# CONCRETE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PEACE AGREEMENT: FROM THE SIGNED DOCUMENT TO PRACTICE



**PRESENTER**

**MARTA RUIZ**  
TRUTH COMMISSIONER



**MODERATOR**

**GLORIA CASTRILLÓN**  
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MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT DELEGATION AT THE NEGOTIATIONS  
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**RODRIGO LONDOÑO**

PEACE SIGNATORY, FORMER MEMBER OF THE FARC SECRETARIAT AND  
PRESIDENT OF THE COMUNES POLITICAL PARTY



**MARÍA JACKELINE ROJAS**

SOCIAL LEADER AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE IN THE MAGDALENA MEDIO  
REGION



**JOHN PETER OPDAHL**

AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF NORWAY IN COLOMBIA, A GUARANTOR  
COUNTRY OF THE HAVANA, CUBA, NEGOTIATION PROCESS

TOPIC

# CONCRETE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FINAL PEACE AGREEMENT: FROM THE SIGNED DOCUMENT TO PRACTICE



BY MARTA RUIZ  
TRUTH COMMISSIONER

There are three important milestones in Colombia's history: the 1991 Constitution, the signing of the Peace Agreement between the national government and the former Farc-ep guerrilla group in 2016, and the delivery of the Truth Commission's Final Report. They all prove that the calling for peace has been gradually heard, not without its bumps on the road.

In his inauguration speech, President Gustavo Petro quoted the first article of the 1991 Constitution: "Colombia is a social state under the rule of law, organized as a sovereign, decentralized, democratic, participatory, pluralist, unitary state, with the autonomy of territorial entities, founded in respect of human dignity, the work and solidarity of the people who conform it and in the prevalence of general interest". The validity of this first point of the Constitution is such that it seems as though it had been written today, specifically for the future that we continue to dream of.

The same is true of the Final Peace Agreement of 2016: in spite of the attempts to slow down its implementation, and the fact that it did not have the required depth and coverage, its historic process has not relented. This is because peace does not depend on governments, but rather on the people, and we Colombians have been gradually building this peace.

For the Commission, it was a real revelation to see how the peacebuilding process in Colombia has

been progressive. It isn't simply an epiphany that arrived at the Teatro Colón on November 24, 2016. It is a path that we have been travelling since the time of the National Front, with different moments, comings and goings. "And yet it moves", said Galileo Galilei when he was sentenced for claiming that the Earth revolved around the sun and not vice versa,

and was forced to retract his claim in order to save his life. Something similar happens with peace in Colombia: however, its seed has always been there. Even in times of despair, the path to peace continues to be forged, with difficulty, by the strength of the great congruence between these three milestones that have kept it going.

The Final Peace Agreement in 2016 was seen by many as a development of the 1991 Constitution; as a second moment of that Constitution. The same is true of the Truth Commission's Final Report. These are three documents that, themselves, do not change history, but which mobi-

lize change; they allow us to lift our gaze to the common crises and start to truly see ourselves as a nation.

Colombia is known for being a country with a short-term culture. The Truth Commission was created for a very short process; three years was very little time for the immense task of providing clarity of the

*When the Constitution was written in 1991, there were those who claimed that it seemed more fitting for Dinamarca (Denmark) than for Cundinamarca (Colombian department). Yet, that Constitution helped us shape the current political culture and mentality. Today, nobody would dare to question its strengths*

truth in a country whose citizens have trouble addressing the past. We did not claim to be the holy grail of truth, but the catalyst for a process of truth that will keep on beating in the hearts of the Colombian population.

The Truth Commission is backed by a wealth of experiences, which allowed us to recognize that we are only part of the change. There is even some beauty in the fact that we have to come to an end, because that ending is an inevitable part of all that is vital: they are born, they leave behind a legacy and they die. Yet, the task continues, because truth will take on new meanings over time.

When the Constitution was written in 1991, there were those who claimed that it seemed more fitting for Dinamarca (Denmark) than for Cundinamarca (Colombian department). Yet, that Constitution helped us shape the current political culture and mentality. Today, nobody would dare to question its strengths, and society values the instruments that have almost always guaranteed the extension of rights. Similarly, the Final Peace Agreement has evolved. We experienced the anguish of having 50% of the population in favor of it and 50% against it (in fact, we are born into such a political cli-

mate in Colombia). A 50/50 was not favorable for peace, because there was a correlation of forces that made its implementation very difficult.

The Commission came into existence in the face of many difficulties, with campaigns against it, and it needed to insert itself into a process that was already ongoing. Going back to the process, and to Galileo Galilei, I wonder how much time a denied truth needs in order to burrow into a society, to become part of the common meaning of a country and a nation.

I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to the president of the Commission, Francisco De Roux, because our first task was to find meaning, to understand why we were set up, and we managed that with the help of Francisco. I mentioned to him on a number of occasions that I felt like I was in the Big Bang, in a galaxy that is being created by energy moving around without any matter yet. And we spent a lot of time in that Big Bang, and Pacho [nickname for Francisco] would tell us that “something will come of this”. We needed the patience that our president instilled in us in order to have the freedom to find meaning in our daily lives and the everyday actions of the Commission.

With regards to that aspect of the task, there is an initial temptation, when one is handed a decree rife with functions, to make a plethora of bureaucratic plans for indicators and so on, which we were aware that we would have to show the public for accountability purposes. But we also knew that the country was not going to measure our success by how many activities we carried out or by how we executed our budgets. The real measure was the depth of meaning that we gave the task. In that regard, I will highlight three elements.

While we initially felt rejection of the idea of a Commission, from early on we could see that listening was the key to change in Colombia. The first, fundamental part of dialogue is listening to each other. I was recently recalling in the Camilo Torres auditorium at the Universidad de Antioquia, that those of us who made up those combative generations of student movements would go to the assemblies to give our speeches but not to listen.

In Colombia, we need to listen more; to hear each other in all our diversity. The experience of listening was transformative for each and every one of the members of the Truth Commission and each and every one of those who took part in the listening processes.

Another fundamentally important element in the Truth Commission was not only focusing on the central role of the victims – which was part of the mandate given to us – but also on that spirit which runs through the Peace Agreement and the 1991 Constitution: territory; this immense motherland that we have to listen to. The Commission, with its territorial rollout and the return of that experience of listening, has left behind a ‘dialogue mode’ on the ground.

And the third element is that, by finding that sense of purpose in the task and sowing the seeds of listening, the Truth Commission did not only aim for its results to be measured by a Final Report, which without doubt is very valuable, but also for this process to take place between victims and perpetrators from all sectors, with whom it weaved and promoted a dialogue.

So there is a part of the Commission’s Legacy that is intangible and, just like with the 1991 Constitution and the 2016 Peace Agreement, becomes more tangible as it converts into something that gives meaning to the fight for and construction of a nation in Colombia.

We saw the reality change before our very eyes over these four years; we saw how that 50/50 faded; we saw how the will for peace expanded; we saw how the truth began to be instilled as a demo-

**SO THERE IS A PART OF THE COMMISSION’S LEGACY THAT IS INTANGIBLE AND, JUST LIKE WITH THE 1991 CONSTITUTION AND THE 2016 PEACE AGREEMENT, BECOMES MORE TANGIBLE AS IT CONVERTS INTO SOMETHING THAT GIVES MEANING TO THE FIGHT FOR AND CONSTRUCTION OF A NATION IN COLOMBIA.**

cratic value. Not born out of revenge or retaliation, but as part of reflection and learning. The most important thing is that the message be written in the hearts of communities. We are at a moment of hope that is yet to be written.

The Truth Commission navigated the complicated world of listening, mistrust, lies, secrecy and the fog of war. We have fulfilled our mission, but the process of truth is just beginning. The President and his cabinet have to define which of the state’s institutions will take on that task. The international community, the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee and the network of partners are here with the will to continue. We need this spirit to live on so that, as we have mentioned in our recommendations, truth and peace become a national project, a project that spans generations. This does not end here.

**IN COLOMBIA, WE NEED TO LISTEN MORE; TO HEAR EACH OTHER IN ALL OUR DIVERSITY. THE EXPERIENCE OF LISTENING WAS TRANSFORMATIVE FOR EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE TRUTH COMMISSION AND EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THOSE WHO TOOK PART IN THE LISTENING PROCESSES.**



# REFLECTIONS

Alongside Truth Commissioner Marta Ruiz (who is a journalist with more than 15 years' experience covering the armed conflict, and who led processes for acknowledgement of responsibility in the Commission), this conversation brought together voices who were previously on opposite sides of the war: Rodrigo Londoño, the last commander of the former Farc-ep guerrilla, who explained that, following the death of Alfonso Cano, the leader of the guerrilla until his assassination, he succeeded him in heading the peace process; and Óscar Naranjo, retired police general and former police head, political scientist, and state negotiator in the peace process with the Farc, who, as part of his work with the Commission, acknowledged the police's responsibility for stigmatizing students. His intervention is marked by this historic phrase: "I wondered why I never thought about ending the war, but only about winning the war".

It also included the participation of John Petter Opdahl, Norwegian ambassador between 2018 and 2022, one of the guarantor countries in the peace process with the Farc, and a political ally that contributed politically, technically and financially to the proper implementation of the Truth Commission's mandate. This conversation took place on Opdahl's final day working in Colombia.

And, at the center of it all, there is the victims' representative, María Jacqueline Rojas, who was at the talks in Havana, Cuba. Hailing from Barranquilla, she is a teacher and human rights advocate in the Magdalena Medio region.

A rainbow of ideas and standpoints that were once so contrary, now with the same overriding goal of peace which brought them to sit on the same page.

The following are some excerpts of their statements:

A RAINBOW OF IDEAS AND STANDPOINTS THAT WERE ONCE SO CONTRARY, NOW WITH THE SAME OVERRIDING GOAL OF PEACE WHICH BROUGHT THEM TO SIT ON THE SAME PAGE.



## GLORIA CASTRILLÓN

We are going to discuss the concrete implementation of the Final Peace Agreement: what was agreed upon and what remained. That is why it is so important to have two participants that were at the negotiation table.



## ÓSCAR NARANJO

First, I would like to greet the victims, who give meaning to this whole process and institutional setup. Thanks to them, and to Francisco De Roux and the truth commissioners, we have a report that marks a turning point in the political, ethical and emotional history of Colombians. I would also like to thank Rodrigo Londoño, who was an adversary in the past. We sought each other out. We were in the midst of a bloody war. Rodrigo had the valour to lead an organization like the Farc-ep in a process that led to the signing of peace.

I would especially like to thank him because, in spite of the human cost of more than 300 men and women who have been killed since the signing of the agreement, people who had said goodbye to war and laid down their arms, people who we were obliged to protect, Rodrigo stands firm to his commitment to democracy and to Colombians, as president of the Comunes

THE PEACE AGREEMENT THAT PUT AN END TO THE FARC-EP IS NOT BASED ON TRADITIONAL PARADIGMS, THAT SIMPLY SOUGHT TO END THE WAR WITH THE LAYING DOWN OF ARMS AND THE DEMOBILIZATION OF THE COMBATANTS. IT IS AN AGREEMENT THAT AIMED TO BRING UP THE CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT AS THE BASIS FOR NON-REPETITION.



*“From the age of 18 I had been part of the police corps, rising up to be general and director of the police force, but it is only recently that I began to wonder why I had never thought about ending the war, but only about winning the war. Hopefully the Commission’s Final Report will generate this change: that we Colombians think about ending conflicts rather than winning them”.*



political party. This commitment has been taken on with humility.

And Mrs. Jackeline, thank you for choosing a life revolving around the protection of the most vulnerable and around human rights.

The Peace Agreement that put an end to the Farc-ep is not based on traditional paradigms, that simply sought to end the war with the laying down of arms and the demobilization of the combatants. It is an agreement that aimed to bring up the causes of the conflict as the basis for non-repetition. That is how it gave birth to the institutions of the Comprehensive System, within which the Commission sits.

When we spoke about the Truth Commission during negotiations, we were not conscious of the transcendental nature of its meaning, not only in terms of seeking the truth, but also of using that truth to change the destiny of the nation down to a personal level. I imagined a Commission producing reports that were insightful because they told the tragic story of the conflict and the war, but I did not imagine that it would produce such profound feelings and reflections across an entire country.

On a personal level, it led me to a consideration that I had never had in my life: from the age of 18 I had been part of the police corps, rising up to be general and director of the police force, but it is only recently that I began to wonder why I had never thought about ending the war, but only about winning the war. Hopefully the Commission’s Final Report will generate this change: that we Colombians think about ending conflicts rather than winning them.

In Colombia, there is a reconciliation deficit. Six years after the signing of the Agreement, the state is not reconciled with its citizens; the urban world is not reconciled with the rural world; the institutions are not reconciled with each other. Complying with the agreement solely in terms of its mechanisms is not going to change the reality. What will change it is ensuring that everything we do to implement the agreement takes us closer to that evasive reality of reconciliation between Colombians. At a moment like this, when peace is no longer embarrassing, but rather transformative, I ask that our commitment be to persistently seeking reconciliation.

**IN COLOMBIA, THERE IS A RECONCILIATION DEFICIT. SIX YEARS AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE AGREEMENT, THE STATE IS NOT RECONCILED WITH ITS CITIZENS; THE URBAN WORLD IS NOT RECONCILED WITH THE RURAL WORLD; THE INSTITUTIONS ARE NOT RECONCILED WITH EACH OTHER.**



**MARÍA JACKELINE ROJAS**

I salute what Mr. Óscar Naranjo has just said; I am surprised that a former member of the police force would say that. I admire his words; this is how peace is built! I am a victim of the conflict, of all its armed actors, both legal and illegal, because they all mutilated lives. I have spent more than 25 years defending human rights in the territories.

From a very young age, growing up in North-Eastern Barrancabermeja, I felt that urge to reclaim and defend the meaning of our rights as a people; women, men, young people. In Havana, I felt a great sense of responsibility, because we were told that we were the model, the example. I do not want to be egocentric, but we set the standard for what the dignity of the victims meant. Going to Havana was not easy, my family said: “you are crazy, why are you going there to talk to the people who stole half our lives?” But I went to heal, and I returned without a weight on my shoulders.

On the ground, those from the Commission were our equals, they were brothers, not at all pretentious; they walked alongside us on the search for the truth.

The president said that the Truth Commission’s recommendations would be followed to the letter. If that is the case, then we will truly comply with the Peace Agreement.

To the international community, I would like to convey all the gratitude of the victims. The paramilitaries declared me a military target; then they

said that ‘we couldn’t touch that woman because she spent all her time, day and night, with those international guys’. That’s why I was not assassinated. That is the extent of what you, our brothers from the international community, have achieved: saving a lot of lives in the territories!

**IN HAVANA, I FELT A GREAT SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY, BECAUSE WE WERE TOLD THAT WE WERE THE MODEL, THE EXAMPLE. I DO NOT WANT TO BE EGOCENTRIC, BUT WE SET THE STANDARD FOR WHAT THE DIGNITY OF THE VICTIMS MEANT.**

**THE PARAMILITARIES DECLARED ME A MILITARY TARGET; THEN THEY SAID THAT ‘WE COULDN’T TOUCH THAT WOMAN BECAUSE SHE SPENT ALL HER TIME, DAY AND NIGHT, WITH THOSE INTERNATIONAL GUYS’. THAT’S WHY I WAS NOT ASSASSINATED. THAT IS THE EXTENT OF WHAT YOU, OUR BROTHERS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, HAVE ACHIEVED: SAVING A LOT OF LIVES IN THE TERRITORIES!**



### RODRIGO LONDOÑO

I second the gratitude to the international community for all the support given to Colombia from the outset of this process; it has been the mainstay that has helped us survive these years following the signing.

I joined the Farc at the age of 17. One day they sent me and Pablo Catatumbo, who was more senior than me, to fetch some firewood. He told me: “whatever the task is, you have to try to be the best at everything”. And that is what I did when I took on the leading role for the Farc in peace negotiations. I had the task of taking on the leadership of the Farc during the peace process, not in times of war; the process that Alfonso Cano began to build. Time has shown that this was a well constructed Peace Agreement.

The years following the signing of peace have been difficult, from the very outset of the process, because there was nothing when people started arriving in the territories. The normalization zones were, in many cases, empty plots, pasturelands with hostile temperatures and mothers carrying children; and the people asked us what had happened... We tried to encourage each other, give moral support, but upon seeing that you would wonder: “Have we made a mistake? Is this just going to be another Guadalupe Salcedo, Pizarro situation, or the same as all of Colombia’s accumulated history?”.

Then the deaths began. I would go to sleep wondering if we had been right to sign. Then I would say “no”, there were people supporting us, and that

is the value of the international community and millions of Colombians; thanks to their support, and even more so since the start of this new government, I no longer had any doubts that this was the right path to take.

The meetings with the victims in Havana had a very significant spiritual impact. They had an impact on the firm decision that we could no longer continue with the confrontation. There was a committee for the creation of the System, with six members: three from the Farc and three from the government. We concluded that the victims had to be at the center, and that the backbone of the entire System should be the truth. That is what we defended. Not even we knew, when the Commission began to reveal the testimonies, that there had been so much crime, so much barbarity on our part, in the name of some ideals.

That is why the encounters with the victims in Havana were so important. They stripped us completely. As Pastor Alape said to the Jep, they placed us in front of the mirror to look at our real reflection, not the one we believed we had. We saw the harm that the conflict had caused.

Merit must be given to those six people who sat down and spoke to the victims, both in Havana and Colombia, because they convinced us of the effectiveness of the System. It was not easy to trust in it initially as it was something different, totally novel. But today, practice shows us that it was the right thing to do.



### JOHN PETTER OPDAHL

There is still a lack of understanding in Colombia about the magnitude of your achievement. You have not yet fully realized how huge what you created in Havana is: an architecture that the world had never seen before in a peace process. It was brave and daring; it was like jumping into a swimming pool without knowing how deep it is. It included complicated issues, which did not have any similar prior examples. I would like to highlight the efforts of Dag Nagoda, who was part of the process of constructing that architecture that you created with a system of three entities.

Those of us from the international community, who work to support this implementation, need to remind you of how proud you should feel for having created the exemplary system for the world. It is an “export quality product” that the new government will have to present as such.

It is clear that you are going to go so much further than other peace processes. This very debate today is an example of that. One very smart thing that the Commission did was not just to ask us for financial help, but it also asked us to be involved in the process; that is to say to provide moral and financial support.

This whole task, and the Final Report, has been carried out in such a short space of time that, I repeat, it should be cause for international pride in Colombia. In Norway, we are committed to supporting this process in the long-term, as long as it takes. The

Report has been written, but a figure such as Pacho De Roux should continue to inspire the international community to continue the task of implementation.

**THOSE OF US FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, WHO WORK TO SUPPORT THIS IMPLEMENTATION, NEED TO REMIND YOU OF HOW PROUD YOU SHOULD FEEL FOR HAVING CREATED THE EXEMPLARY SYSTEM FOR THE WORLD. IT IS AN “EXPORT QUALITY PRODUCT” THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO PRESENT AS SUCH.**

**BUT UPON SEEING THAT YOU WOULD WONDER: “HAVE WE MADE A MISTAKE? IS THIS JUST GOING TO BE ANOTHER GUADALUPE SALCEDO, PIZARRO SITUATION, OR THE SAME AS ALL OF COLOMBIA’S ACCUMULATED HISTORY?”.**

**WE CONCLUDED THAT THE VICTIMS HAD TO BE AT THE CENTER, AND THAT THE BACKBONE OF THE ENTIRE SYSTEM SHOULD BE THE TRUTH. THAT IS WHAT WE DEFENDED. NOT EVEN WE KNEW, WHEN THE COMMISSION BEGAN TO REVEAL THE TESTIMONIES, THAT THERE HAD BEEN SO MUCH CRIME, SO MUCH BARBARITY ON OUR PART, IN THE NAME OF SOME IDEALS.**



### GLORIA CASTRILLÓN

What value did the commissioners add to what was achieved in Havana?



### MARTA RUIZ

A lot. I grew up in the generation of the great epics of social change, where revolution was like a Hollywood movie. The experience of the Commission taught us the value of small revolutions, born out of simplicity. If changes do not affect our lives, our day-to-day, they are not sustainable. What may seem small, in reality corresponds to a large transformation. I believe that we were able to do that through the Commission: touch lives, only just, in order to start to move people.

Furthermore, those who thought up Point 5 of the Agreement in Havana had the model of the South African Truth Commission in mind, based on collective catharsis. When the Commission began we would be asked where the catharsis was. We had to think about what our objectives were and the context within which we had to carry out this task; we were constantly trying to read that context.

With that in mind, I would like to stress that this was a process, and processes are hard to measure. They involve human beings, and we cannot control all of the variables. No model was an exact fit because we had to solve unique problems that were coming up.

**THE EXPERIENCE OF THE COMMISSION TAUGHT US THE VALUE OF SMALL REVOLUTIONS, BORN OUT OF SIMPLICITY. IF CHANGES DO NOT AFFECT OUR LIVES, OUR DAY-TO-DAY, THEY ARE NOT SUSTAINABLE. WHAT MAY SEEM SMALL, IN REALITY CORRESPONDS TO A LARGE TRANSFORMATION.**

The responsibility acknowledgment processes were key. They were the healing balm for many people in this country, calming rage, hate and skepticism. They were about taking responsibility, not as a form of humiliation, but rather the opposite, as a way to dignify the victims. That acknowledgment of responsibility is the main thing we have to highlight. ■

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COLOMBIA  
Y PARA  
LA JUSTICIA  
TRANSICIONAL  
EN EL MUNDO

# FROM TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN THE WORLD TO THE TRUTH COMMISSION IN COLOMBIA



**PRESENTER**

**CARLOS MARTÍN BERISTAIN**  
COMISIONADO DE LA VERDAD



**MODERATOR**

**MIREIA VILLAR-FORNER**  
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**ALEJANDRA MILLER**  
TRUTH COMMISSIONER

TOPIC

# REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF OTHER TRUTH COMMISSIONS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH COLOMBIA'S TRUTH COMMISSION



BY CARLOS MARTÍN BERISTAIN  
TRUTH COMMISSIONER

We have learnt from other processes that the impact of a truth commission depends on a number of factors, not just on how well it works or functions; especially the political conditions that have created the space for the commission's creation. Let's use Peru as an example: there was a political crisis that created the opportunity for a truth commission. It wasn't a crisis resulting from a violation of human rights, such as in Colombia, but due to the "Vladivideos" scandal (taking its name from Vladimiro Montesinos, advisor to the former president, Alberto Fujimori, between 1990 and 2000). That crisis created the space for the important task of setting up a truth commission there.

Also, in the cases of Guatemala and El Salvador, there was a crisis in the state apparatus which turned into an ideal context for the creation of their truth commissions. In the case of South Africa, the fall of the Apartheid regime generated the conditions for the truth commission to carry out its task. These differ from the Colombian context, where there was a peace agreement, rather than a crisis, that opened the way for the work of discovering the truth. And that has been one of the reasons why Colombia's Truth Commission had to operate for a while in a context of its work being questioned; the lack of a "perceived crisis" that would make a truth commission necessary.

Perhaps that is why, from the outset, we understood that Colombia's Truth Commission's report should generate a "healthy crisis" with a forward-thin-

**WE UNDERSTOOD THAT COLOMBIA'S TRUTH COMMISSION'S REPORT SHOULD GENERATE A "HEALTHY CRISIS" WITH A FORWARD-THINKING PURPOSE, WHICH WOULD ALLOW US TO UNDERSTAND AND CHANGE THE CONDITIONS THAT ALLOWED FOR THE ARMED CONFLICT.**

king purpose, which would allow us to understand and change the conditions that allowed for the armed conflict. So this Commission had to operate in a post-conflict setting, which had been spoken about for almost 18 years, which is not yet precisely a post-conflict.

Aside from the distinctive features of the Colombian case, we see that a truth commission is an important exercise in listening; that has been a universal factor in all truth commissions. And, based on that international experience, we began to make progress on that, especially with regards to the reconstruction of a historic memory. I had the

challenge and honor or coordinating the report, ‘Guatemala: never again’ (or Report on the Recovery of Historic Memory, REMHI, for its Spanish acronym); that was the first unofficial commission carried out by the Catholic church.

Then came the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth, which was Guatemala’s official truth commission, backed by the United Nations. It was the first to listen to and work with a wide array of testimonies, that were not just limited to determining what types of violations of human rights had occurred, but which delved into the experience of the victims. It was the first truth commission that asked the victims what impact the events had on their lives, what they did to deal with the situation, why they thought it happened, and what needs to be done to stop it from repeating itself.

Thus work began on not only collecting information on events that violated human rights and identifying responsibilities, but also on collecting what is fundamental for truth commissions: the impacts and consequences, social ruptures, what it all left behind in a society. That is part of what we are trying to deal with when we talk about reparation. Not a generic reparation, but one that is focused on the impacts on different demographic groups. That is something we incorporated into the task of the Truth Commission’s interviewers in Colombia, and to its work in different contexts.

Another lesson from the international sphere was the importance of a presence on the ground. Such was the case with the commissions in Guatemala and Peru, where there were teams in the different regions. In Colombia, 28 Truth Centres were opened in the va-

rious territories and we took on the task of listening to Colombians outside Colombia. Such international listening took place in Liberia’s commission, but not to the same extent as was the case with Colombia’s Truth Commission, in 24 countries; an important exercise in hearing the truths found outside the country.

The Commission’s mass rapprochement was key in understanding the experiences of the victims in their territories, as we are talking about an armed conflict that has both a national and local dimension. Fractures often appear as a result of how the dynamics of the armed conflict tore apart the social fabric in communities, and that is different in the Bojayá massacre, the attack on the Noyal Club, the massacre in Naya, the persecution of the Unión Patriótica party, etc.

Another lesson taken from elsewhere was that of public hearings. These were inaugurated by the Truth Commission in South Africa, through its Amnesty Committee, a sort of Jep within the Commission (in the case of Colombia, we have the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Search Unit for Missing Persons and the Truth Commission; so the Truth Commission’s hearings were different to the JEP’s hearings, which are focused on the individual acknowledgement of responsibility in order to lead to restorative sentences).

In the cases of Guatemala and El Salvador, it was impossible to carry out public hearings due to the level of fear that people had of speaking out. In Latin America, Peru was the country that took on the public hearings. There, the hearings were limited to hearing testimonies that had never been shared in a public setting.

In El Salvador, which handled approximately 30 cases which it considered to be paradigmatic, and

that were intended to represent the rainbow of victimization that had taken place in the country, we knew that the public impact was very important. In the words of one of the mothers from CoMadres (the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Prisoners, Disappeared Persons and Political Martyrs in El Salvador) on being asked what she wanted from the Truth Commission: “Look, we victims know the truth; those responsible know the truth; what we want is for society to know the truth”. In El Salvador, this took time because the report was not published until 17 years later, because those who took control of the political transition had no interest in that truth being spread.

As a result of these lessons, Colombia’s Truth Commission was extremely interested in taking into account the public impact from the outset; ensuring that the message reached society, through teaching and spreading the message. This led us to put forward the hearings we call ‘encounters for truth’, which were initially a recognition of the victims by the Truth Commission, and later by the perpetrators. So we spoke with the members of the Farc and the military who were appearing before the Jep to see if they were willing to make some form of acknowledgement, and with what guarantees for the victims. It was not simply about carrying out any recognition process, it had to be based on the standards set by the Commission, and within a process that included psychological support in route, both for the victims and those who participated in the events.

We focused on ensuring that those processes of coming together helped to recognize the dignity and good name of the victims, by explaining the mechanisms that made the large-scale horror possible: why the Farc’s indiscriminate attack on the civilian population took place, or why the so-called false positive cases took place; what the institutional context was, or the rules or stimuli that led to these types of actions for so many

**AS A RESULT OF THESE LESSONS, COLOMBIA’S TRUTH COMMISSION WAS EXTREMELY INTERESTED IN TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE PUBLIC IMPACT FROM THE OUTSET; ENSURING THAT THE MESSAGE REACHED SOCIETY, THROUGH TEACHING AND SPREADING THE MESSAGE.**

years and on such an enormous scale.

We also took into account the Colombian context of social polarization, in which it does not matter so much what somebody says, but rather which side they are on. For the Commission, this meant speaking to very different sectors, from business people to victims, those in exile, those responsible, those who had demobilized, those who-

*In the cases of Guatemala and El Salvador, it was impossible to carry out public hearings due to the level of fear that people had of speaking out.*



se voices had been heard and those who had gone unrecognized. We call this far-reaching exercise “social dialogue” a huge national conversation. Colombia’s Truth Commission worked with more than 30,000 people in its processes of listening.

For this exercise, we also considered other aspects that were gaining momentum in the work of commissions. For example, the gender focus. The first report that included this topic in a specific fashion was the REMHI, which has a chapter on violence against women in a context where people did not want to speak out (we had little more than 100 testimonies on something that we knew had happened on a much larger scale). In Guatemala, we had a meeting with interviewers and Monsignor Gerardi (Juan José Gerardi Conedera, priest and human rights advocate in Guatemala,

murdered in 1998) and we asked them if there were many more cases of sexual abuse. They lowered their gaze... and the meeting ended there. In that moment we realized that the greatest impact of sexual violence in the Mayan communities was silence.

That led us to ask ourselves, for Colombia’s Truth Commission, how to shine a light on issues with strong subjective, human and political implications. And we understood that this had to be carried out working closely with organizations. We had already had some prior experience with the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres which, before the existence of the Truth Commission, gathered 1,000 women’s testimonies. When we went to Havana, it was that organization that said: “We need a gender focus here, a feminist focus on the impact of the violence on women and

the LGBTQI+ community”.

And that is what happened. A differential perspective was also included on the impact on ethnic communities, children and young people (the experience of different commissions varies in each country; in the case of Guatemala, 84% of the victims were indigenous and, as such, almost the entire report deals with indigenous communities). In other commissions we were able to include some sections on children and young people, but only Colombia’s has an entire volume that speaks of the impact on this demographic group and how that has been a factor in the persistence of the armed conflict for so many years.

Another distinctive feature of the Colombian case was that we started off with an extremely wide base of investigations previously conducted by organizations, institutions, NGOs, the National Centre for Historic Memory, etc., and we had to decide what type of report the Truth Commission would produce in order to not simply reproduce the information that was already there and be able to delve deeper into what we call the persistence factors. For example, for other truth commissions, non-repetition meant ensuring that the dictatorship did not return. In Colombia, we traced those mechanisms of persistence, that continue to be relevant in the current context.

Coming back to the issue of fear of speaking out, which occurred in many countries (as was the case with the truth commissions in Africa, Peru and Guatemala, where the main problem was the depth of the silence that had been ins-

tilled, both as a form of protection and terror), in Colombia we noticed a difference: there were voices that, although they were afraid, wanted to speak out.

The issue, then, was to work out how to generate spaces that inspired trust. That has been the experience of all commissions, but in the case of Colombia it was especially challenging because the violence continues. Thanks to the design of the Colombian system, with the Jep and so many people participating in it (some people undergoing penal processes who had denied what had happened began to acknowledge it once they entered the JEP), we were able to set up favorable settings to gather the voices. Due to its mandate, Colombia’s Truth Commission could not pass information to the JEP; our role was not to report, our character was not judicial, and that allowed us to receive another type of testimony from the perpetrators.

In the case of Guatemala, we barely had a dozen testimonies from the perpetrators, and they were very low level; paramilitaries who had practically been forced to participate in massacres on their own communities. The same was true in Peru, where there were very few voices who spoke about how they participated in the events.

In Colombia, we collected more than 250 in-depth testimonies, from the Farc as well as other ex-guerrillas, members of the state apparatus, armed forces, police, paramilitary groups, the demobilized Auc, etc. This all generated a very important dimension of acknowledgement, and allowed for a much wider understanding of the conflict.



**WE LEARNED FROM OTHER COMMISSIONS THAT POLITICAL TRANSITION PROCESSES ARE LENGTHY. IT TOOK SO LONG IN ARGENTINA! AND THAT IS AN EXAMPLE OF A COUNTRY WITH A POSITIVE HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY.**

We were able to weave our way into ‘the labyrinth of violence’ in order to see not only the military facet of the conflict, but also the armed impact on the civilian population, which makes up 85-90% of victimization, as well as the relationship between armed groups and business and political sectors, and the impact of drug trafficking. Colombia’s is the first truth commission that makes an in-depth analysis of the impact of drug trafficking on the armed conflict, not just on the Farc, paramilitary groups and state machinery, but also on the general political system. This is a determining factor in the current violence in Colombia and other countries, too.

Finally, we held discussions on an international level on the topic of non-repetition and the recommendations; what would the Commission have to say in a country where there have been so many recommendations from United Nations committees, the Inter-American Commission, etc.? What type of recommendations could Colombia’s Truth Commission make in this regard? What type of structural recom-

mendations would avoid the persistence of the conflict?

In that sense, we learned from other commissions that political transition processes are lengthy. It took so long in Argentina! And that is an example of a country with a positive human rights policy. From the report written by Conadep (National Commission on the Disappearance of People in Argentina) in the mid-1980s, we went through the laws of Due Obedience and Final Point, the denial of the dictatorship during Ménem’s government, and the mothers of Plaza de Mayo became the grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, who mobilized precisely in order to widen the political transition space.

These processes spanning extended periods took place in various countries. It was important to learn not to have tunnel vision. Colombia’s experience in dialogue with the international sphere has been that it has suffered a certain level of “navel-gazing”, with the feeling that “what has happened here has not happened anywhere else; it is difficult for anybody to understand”. And that is not the case. Colombia has had a complex conflict, not a confusing one; and we have to move on from confusion to the complexity.

We can see that Colombia’s Truth Commission’s experiences leave behind lessons for other commissions. I would like to highlight the lesson that international support is decisive. For example, what would the process in Caguán have looked like if there had been international support to protect the negotiation space and push for a transformation?

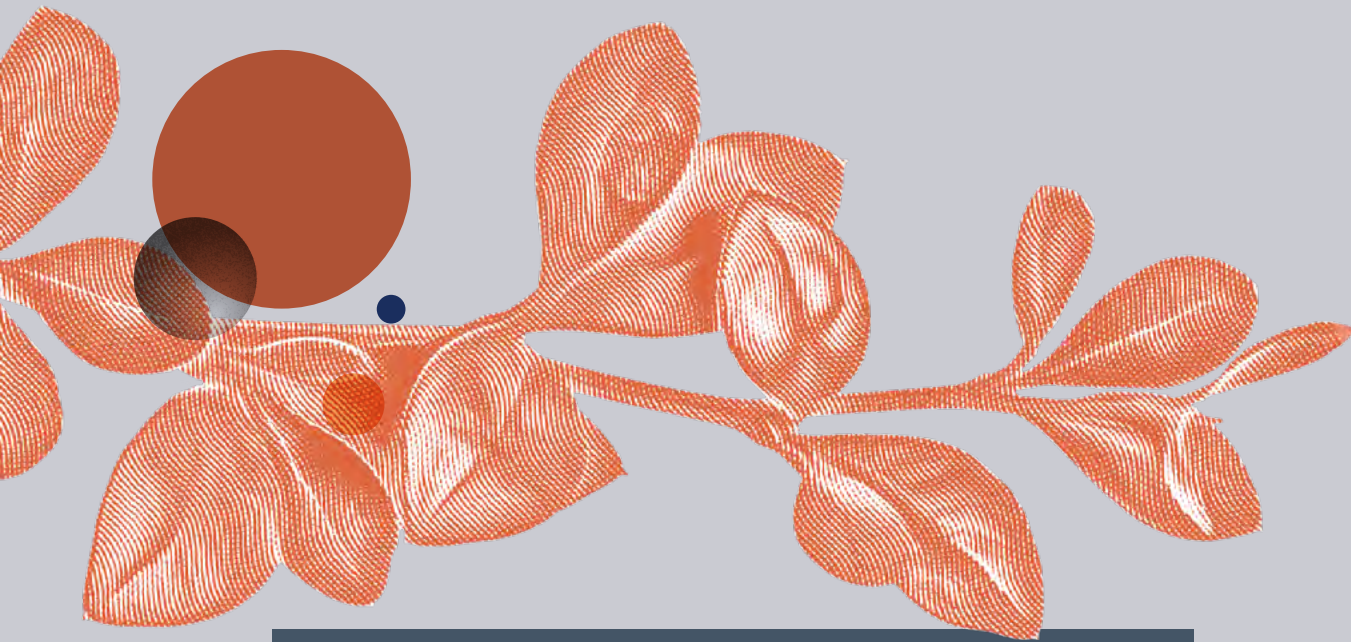
The presence of the international community was decisive in the peace process with the Farc, as it has been in the work of the Commission.

Without international support, it would have been very difficult to continue in a context in which the spaces tended to become more and more reduced, where people’s fear and denial take center stage. However, we managed to carry out our task with a territorial focus, with numerous, different local actors with varied ideas and ideologies; and with alliances and a focus on peacebuilding. We achieved significant results together.

In the midst of all the hard work, you do not have time to stop and appreciate all the big things that are happening. Suddenly, out of the “aggregate of helplessness” comes a surge of strength, and when it seems like this or that are not going to work, or this other thing will not work... those ‘it seems like this will not work’ feelings come together to lead to the Truth Commission being able to deliver its work within a setting of political change in the country.

Maintaining that energy and hope has been fundamental, not only for the work of Colombia’s Truth Commission, but also for the moment that the country has reached. And much of the thanks must go to the international support, that this space is recognizing today. ■





## REFLECTIONS

According to the voices who took part in the conversation on the report, of all the truth commissions that have been created in different countries in modern times, the Colombian commission is one of those which has covered, in the greatest detail, the testimonies of the victims and perpetrators of the violence, both inside and outside the country, in an attempt to gather the greatest quantity of information possible on the Colombian conflict.

Insomuch as the Colombian Truth Commission was able to help define its methods and actions based on the examples of other commissions in countries with equally critical histories, such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, South Africa, Chile and Argentina, it was able to make great strides, spurred on by its own experience, on the search for the

‘why’ and ‘what’ of what happened in the armed conflict, and what consequences that had. To do that, it was necessary to delve deeper than a forensic and factual analysis, into the in-depth context in which these events took place.

It also encountered unprecedented difficulties, such as the effects of the pandemic, overcoming them and innovating with technology in order to continue gathering testimonies in isolated territories. It managed to continue in a polarized and politicized environment, which became even more complex with the coming to power of a government that was opposed to meeting the mandate stipulated for the Truth Commission in the Peace Agreement and the Constitution.

The international voices gathered here in this space acknowledge that the Colombian peace process and the work of the Commission, in particular, act as

an example for other countries and other truth commissions with similar situations. With that in mind, we predict that the next country that might need a similar model to explain its violent processes is Mexico. While every country and each period of history has different characteristics and delimitations, the Colombian model offers useful characteristics for similar processes in other countries and situations.

The first such characteristic is that the signing of the Peace Agreement laid out the work of three entities coordinated within one Comprehensive System for Peace: the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (Jep, for its Spanish acronym), the Search Unit for Missing Persons (UBPD) and the Truth Commission. It also stipulated their duration, functions and continuity. It has been rare for these processes to involve the creation of a special court, such as in the case of Colombia. The existence of the Jep allowed the Commission to carry out its role as a state entity with no legal function.

Following on from that comes the second characteristic, which is that, from the outset, the Peace Agreement gave the Commission concrete functions and roles as a mechanism of Transitional Justice without legal powers, with the role of clarifying the truth, and promoting coexistence and non-repetition of the violence. For this purpose, the Commission compiled and passed on a concrete body of information to the country’s present and future society and the world, with the aim of helping to understand and interpret Colombia’s armed conflict and create a narrative of

reconciliation and forgiveness.

The apparatus for hearing and collecting testimonies covered the entire national territory, as well as 24 countries where the voices of exiled victims were heard, in an unprecedented effort to gather all the evidence possible for the most accurate reconstruction of the country’s dark past, under other authoritarian or triumphalist narratives.

Those participating in this space highlight these characteristics as an example of the political will to shed light on that elusive human good known as ‘the truth’, with the aim of aiding with reconciliation and the non-repetition of events, in spite of the fact that, during the collection of testimonies, we could note a rewriting of the elements of the conflict that was still going on across Colombia.

Javier Ciurlizza pointed out that the work of Colombia’s Commission has been enormous and extremely complicated, but with mass results in transmedia information, data, testimonies and interpretation. “It is necessary to work on this information from here on in with policy-makers. We must ensure that, from this body of knowledge on the violence, real political reform is derived, just as the Peace Agreement and the recommendations of the Commission have requested. Otherwise, we run the risk of the effects of the social efforts of the Commission (which correspond to a social outcry expressed in the protest movements of 2019 and 2021) becoming diluted into oblivion with the passing of the years”.

The following are more excerpts of the involvements of participants in this space:

IF WE HAVE LEARNT ANYTHING FROM THE TRUTH COMMISSIONS THAT HAVE EXISTED IN THE RECENT HISTORY OF THE WORLD, IT IS THAT THEY REQUIRE QUINTESSENTIAL COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES.



MIREIA VILLAR-FORNER

If we have learnt anything from the truth commissions that have existed in the recent history of the world, it is that they require quintessential collaborative processes. Processes of Transitional Justice never operate in a political vacuum. They have a national and international context and certain circumstances that can act as a brake or an engine. It is necessary to manage knowledge and combine the resources and experience of many, varied actors, so that the truth and reparations can become a reality.



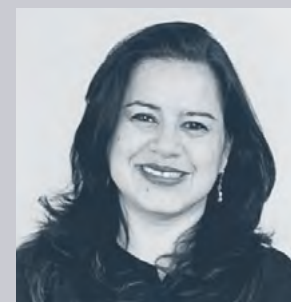
PRISCILLA HAYNER

It was crucial to plan the work of this Commission from the very beginning of the Peace Agreement, outlining what it had to do and for how long, as well as looking at the work of the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee which is going to begin now. The rollout of the Truth Commission's work, with its listening hubs throughout the national territory and abroad, has been very important. There are very few cases of other commissions that have tried to gather testimonies in other countries. Reaching 24 countries, including 10 in Europe, and including the Latin American region, is a striking example of how to take the work further.

REACHING 24 COUNTRIES, INCLUDING 10 IN EUROPE, AND INCLUDING THE LATIN AMERICAN REGION, IS A STRIKING EXAMPLE OF HOW TO TAKE THE WORK FURTHER.

The Colombian Peace Agreement is very different, very original. It is rare to have a peace agreement that includes the creation of a special court for war crimes. It is also very unique to have a Comprehensive System that includes three different institutions that all function at the same time. The opportunity to make an agreement like this has changed things, and reflects different circumstances to other countries that are considering Transitional Justice.

In that sense it is also very valuable that the reports are going to be translated into English. It is an enormous, but important, task, so that the Commission's findings and recommendations are heard throughout the world.



ALEXANDRA MILLER

I remember the first and only visit by the then-president, Iván Duque. The first and only question he asked us was: "When will you be done?" This sums up the environment and the expectation that was placed on us. His worry was when the report would be delivered above all else.

THERE WAS A VERY SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL CONTEXT: THAT OF THE SOCIAL EXPLOSION OF THE COUNTRY'S YOUTH.

We saw in the four years of Duque's term how the conflict began to repeat itself, especially in some specific parts of the country: in the south, in Nariño, Cauca and Chocó, and in the north, in Catatumbo, for example. Those territories that had been most affected by the conflict are today experiencing some very difficult circumstances. That was an enormous challenge for us, because it meant working in the midst of fear, as the conflict was still going on. It was very difficult to get people to talk. And the work of the teams on the ground was extremely valuable because it meant that we could hear the voices of the people in those territories amidst a hugely difficult situation, which was exacerbated by the pandemic.

I REMEMBER THE FIRST AND ONLY VISIT BY THE THEN-PRESIDENT, IVÁN DUQUE. THE FIRST AND ONLY QUESTION HE ASKED US WAS: "WHEN WILL YOU BE DONE?"

There was a very significant political context: that of the social explosion of the country's youth. On the surface, it had nothing to do with the Commission or the armed conflict, not directly, but it ended up being related because we had been dealing with findings on the historic stigmatization of social protests in Colombia, which repeated itself in the context of the social outbreak of 2019 and 2021.

We asked ourselves: "How are we going to prepare society for the presentation of this report, so that it is embraced by society as a whole?". I say to young people: "You helped with the task, you helped this society want change and transformation and demand the truth". Those young people and members of society that were out on the streets were not only willing to hear the truth, they demanded to hear it.

In international terms, there was a similar circumstance. The international community present in the country backed the Commission and the peace process. The United Nations Security Council placed the issue on the agenda, constantly following up on the implementation of the agreements and the Comprehensive System for Peace. They helped us to keep the doors open, for the Final Report to be embraced.

With regards to the victims, from the outset a differential focus towards ethnic and social minorities was considered. There was, for example, a specific chapter on the effect of the conflict on the LGBTQI+ population. That represented significant progress compared with other commissions in the world, and obliged all methodologies and investigators to ensure that they collected the voices of women. We made up a technical working table which brought together more than 80 women's organizations and LGBTQI+ organizations. This increased the number of testimonies from these groups.





JAVIER CIURLIZZA

My dear commissioners would remember the first uncertain conversations, when nobody knew what to do with this mandate or where to start, there was so much uncertainty. The task at hand was extremely complex. The international experience and the enormous historic collection that the country already had were giant's shoulders for the Truth Commission to rest on, giving it a solid base for its development.

There is no one formula or standard treatise on how to set up a truth commission; there are recommendations, guides, principles. Context is not everything, but it is nearly everything. The pandemic meant that Colombia's Truth Commission had to take on and adapt to new communication technologies.

Each commission is a world in itself, but there are common ideas that run through them all. In the case of Colombia, those recommendations are reflected in the final report in four aspects: i) Carrying out an analysis of the ideology of war; that means challenging the discriminatory narrative of war, with an unconditional condemnation of totalitarian ideologies, regardless of their origin; ii) identifying impunity as a cause of the sustained violence; iii) making a call to humanization, turning to IHL, as was the case with commissions in Central America and other countries; iv) and finally, moving from defensive memory to the inclusive truth.

In other truth commissions, especially in the Peruvian one that I worked on, there is a law of diminishing returns. When the truth commission is created, there is usually a positive context, a Pro-Truth environment; there is the demand from society, a government that supports the process and an international community that takes action. These are diminishing returns, because once the commission's work is complete, all political actors turn pale. They ask questions like the one posed by former President

THERE ARE THINGS THAT A COMMISSION CAN HELP TO DETACH AND OTHER WHICH IT CANNOT. POLITICAL PROCESSES WILL CONTINUE AND THE COMMISSION WILL BE AN IMPORTANT EVENT, BUT AN EVENT WITH A LONG JOURNEY AHEAD.

THERE WAS A DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE EXERCISE OF TELLING THE TRUTH AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF POLITICIANS. TODAY, POLITICS IN PERU IS NOT ONLY A DISASTER, BUT WE HAVE ALSO RETURNED TO VERY DARK TIMES OF ENORMOUS INSTABILITY.

Duque. I remember when we presented the report by our Peruvian commission in Lima, in 2003, President Toledo asked two questions: "When do you finish?" and "Who is on the list?". Because, unlike the Colombian commission, the Peruvian one named the perpetrators.

Colombia's Truth Commission benefitted from a unique characteristic. Its returns were increasing. The Peace Agreement in itself is a work of literature that is hard to understand; although it is a wonderful roadmap, it is complex too. So these increasing returns have to do with a specific political context, the social protests in 2019. Back then, I felt a rupture, a moment similar to when a rocket detaches a segment. The social protest of 2021 filled what the Commission was doing with content; it gave it a legitimacy which it already had at the beginning, but much stronger.

There are things that a commission can help to detach and other which it cannot. Political processes will continue and the Commission will be an important event, but an event with a long journey ahead.

In the case of Peru, there was undeniable progress in the recognition of victims and changing the fundamental narrative of Fujimori's anti-terrorist "winning" mentality, conceptualizing it in a new way, starting with the victims. I think that was a great achievement. But there was one great failure: the commission had no impact on the legitimacy of the political system. There was a disconnect between the exer-

BEYOND STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS AND VICTIMS' ORGANIZATIONS, IF THIS DOES NOT PERMEATE THE SYSTEM, IF IT DOES NOT CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR THE POLITICAL REFORM THAT YOU MENTION IN THE REPORT AND WHICH IS MENTIONED IN THE PEACE AGREEMENT, IT IS LIKELY THAT THE ACHIEVEMENTS WILL BE SHORT-LIVED.

cise of telling the truth and the responsibility of politicians. Today, politics in Peru is not only a disaster, but we have also returned to very dark times of enormous instability.

So this treasure that currently exists in Colombia, the Truth Commission's Report, needs to be worked on with politicians or policy-makers. Beyond strengthening human rights and victims' organizations, if this does not permeate the system, if it does not create the conditions for the political reform that you mention in the Report and which is mentioned in the Peace Agreement, it is likely that the achievements will be short-lived.



PABLO DE GREIFF

The simple fact of placing Transitional Justice in the public agenda and making it a topic of discussion automatically has the capacity to include and exclude certain groups and social formations. This started around 2013 with the Justice and Peace Law, which acted as a catalyst for the organization of victims' groups and completely changed the country's view of the conflict, especially for the elites.

They saw the conflict as essentially something that threatened the country's economic infrastructure. But the victims were nowhere to be seen throughout this process. Thanks to their own, massive efforts, they managed to occupy a space in the public sphere, which has been beneficial to what has followed.

It is important that this does not end with the Commission completing its job and delivering its report. It must have the effect of bringing together new groups of civil society and generating the awareness that they have rights; which was never the most important thing in the Colombian identity.

I have focused on studying the history and taxonomy of the truth commissions around the world, and I see that the Colombian Commission made a significant effort to delve deeper than just the factual and forensic verification of what happened, and wandered into the realm of reconciliation. It went much further than other commissions. It has not been the only one, but it has been a pioneer in this area. It is too early to know if it is an effort that will prove successful or not, because reconciliation depends on many factors; but it is a distinguishing feature of the Colombian Commission, that of taking the task of reconciling Colombians and preventing the recurrence of the violence very seriously.

I would like to highlight the effort the Commission made to overcome the striking social segmentation in a county that has become used to it, that has historically always been classist, racist, sexist and divided by region. If we manage to modify this, that would be an absolutely extraordinary change.



JOHN PAUL LEDERACH

I see parallels between what it means to make peace and to search for the truth. What unites them is listening. You have to listen to search for peace. Why is listening important? How do you listen to an entire country? How do you remember and arrange history, understand the past and imagine a different future? How do you listen to 60 years of trauma and ensure that all parties understand each other?

KNOWING HOW TO LISTEN IS A CHALLENGE, AND COLOMBIA'S TRUTH COMMISSION TRIED TO LISTEN TO AN ENTIRE COUNTRY AND CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT HAPPENED ON A LOCAL LEVEL AND WHAT HAPPENED ON A NATIONAL, POLITICAL LEVEL.

Knowing how to listen is a challenge, and Colombia's Truth Commission tried to listen to an entire country and close the gap between what happened on a local level and what happened on a national, political level.

The Commission has laid the tracks for earnest listening, unhurried listening, with human kindness. It is the only thing that can create bridges between knowing and acknowledging. We know, we remember what happened, but we do not always acknowledge it publicly, legitimately and collectively; that is what provides dignity and creates empathy. Patient and considerate listening is the basis for creating and maintaining peaceful co-existence. That is what Colombia's Truth Commission did, and it is something that the world should be grateful for and learn from. ■

▶ WATCH THE VIDEO WITH JOHN PAUL LEDERACH'S SPEECH, SENT AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE EVENT, WITH HIS REFLECTIONS AS AN ACADEMIC AND EXPERT PRACTITIONER. HE HIGHLIGHTS THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KIND OF LISTENING HE EXPERIENCED DURING HIS WORK WITH THE TRUTH COMMISSION: A DEEP, TRANSFORMATIVE AND QUALITY LISTENING.

[https://youtu.be/TOTM\\_tQKsJo](https://youtu.be/TOTM_tQKsJo)



*Patient and considerate listening is the basis for creating and maintaining peaceful co-existence. That is what Colombia's Truth Commission did, and it is something that the world should be grateful for and learn from.*

# WHAT MOST STANDS OUT FROM THE WORK OF COLOMBIA'S TRUTH COMMISSION IS:

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- **JAVIER CIURLIZZA:**  
*The territorial work and the synthesis it achieved.*
- **ALEJANDRA MILLER:**  
*The differential approaches, and the fact that the findings are looking to the future, not backwards, considering the persistence factors of the violence and looking towards non-repetition.*
- **PRISCILLA HAYNER:**  
*That it partnered with local organizations; no other truth commission had done that and it is very valuable for what has been achieved and what is to come.*
- **DE GREIFF:**  
*The Truth Commission's attempt to overcome the historically classist and racist nature of Colombia.*

# WE FORGE THE PATH TO THE TRUTH TOGETHER

BY MIREIA VILLAR FORNER  
: *United Nations Resident Coordinator*  
: *in Colombia*

Healing the wounds of war through truth, justice, forgiveness and reconciliation is possible. The collective learning left behind by various peacebuilding processes in different continents has helped us better understand the way in which these concepts can be interpreted and brought to life in society. This is all part of the paradoxical realities of armed conflict and peacebuilding; on the one hand, we have irreparable damage and decades of immeasurable human suffering, and on the other hand, immense demon-

strations of resilience, resistance and reconciliation by the victims, survivors and perpetrators.

The progress of Transitional Justice and, why not, its bumpy road in various countries, including Colombia, deserves plenty of our attention. Not simply as a case study, but as a sign of respect and admiration for the resilience of the victims that make up part of those processes. And also with genuine curiosity with regards what it can contribute in terms of lessons and transformation towards societies that are

more peaceful, empathetic and open to dialogue. In these “improbable conversations”, a divided society must take on the often uncomfortable and risky position of speaking about what happened, why it happened, the suffering it caused, the responsibilities of all the actors and the disproportionate effect on the most vulnerable population groups. These are just some key truths to establish, as well as the factual realities of the events that took place in the heat of armed confrontation and the patterns of violence and indifference

that allowed them to occur and persist over time. Only the answers to these questions can create the conditions for events not to repeat themselves, and for building a sustained and inclusive peace that materializes in the present and the future.

For all these reasons, the truth has taken on a vital role in processes to end armed conflicts. It is not possible to end a war, put down a full stop and turn the page without delving into what happened. A consensus has been reached globally on the obligation to

guarantee a minimum set of standards in terms of justice, truth and reparation, given that moving towards a society of peace and coexistence requires a knowledge of what happened during the years of war, finding explanations for the complexities of the conflict, defining responsibilities and sanctions for the different actors, and repairing material and symbolic damage caused.

Given the relevance of the search for the truth as a central element in post-conflict contexts, the United Nations supports 17 countries in carrying out processes of truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition<sup>1</sup>, including Colombia, Yemen, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Ivory Coast.

The evidence left behind by the experiences of truth commissions that have existed over history demonstrates that this is an arduous and collaborative process, during which it is necessary to manage the emotions, interests, knowledge and resources of all actors involved in order to lead to a wide, varied debate that does not stop with the publication of reports. Beyond the written documents and the raw, beautiful testimonies that motivate us, the main objective of this collective effort is managing to permeate different political, economic and social entities in order to transform the actions that made the armed conflict and its worsening possible, and to contribute to a society that is more open to dialogue, empathy and collective actions that respect our differences.

## INSTITUTIONS FOR PEACE

The reach of this effort in Colombia required the construction of unprecedented institutions for peace, emanating from the Final Peace Agreement between the national government and the former Farc-ep guerrilla group, signed in 2016. This outlined the Comprehensive System for Peace, with the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (Jep, for its Spanish acronym), the Search Unit for Missing Persons (UBPD, for its Spanish acronym), and the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth, Coexistence and Non-repetition (Truth Commission).

In order to make this institutional framework a reality, the coordination of efforts has been fundamental, such as, for example, those that led to the mechanism that is the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace in Colombia (hereinafter The Fund). This is an alliance between the Colombian government, the United Nations and its peace funds, 18 donor nations and philanthropic organizations, which are coordinated in order to carry out actions that contribute to the consolidation of peace in the country.

Reaching this consensus represented a monumental effort that holds a lot of value for a society looking to move from war to peaceful coexistence. The Fund has channeled almost 14,5 mi-

llion dollars in resources to the Truth Commission, as well as offering the know-how and political support of the international community since 2017.

The aforementioned has included: the financing of the Commission's preparatory phase; the strengthening of the capacities of victims' organizations in order to increase their participation in the Comprehensive System's entities; fostering channels for coordination and joint work between the System's entities; the implementation of the ethnic and gender focuses in the System; the participation of vulnerable sectors of society in the Report, such as children, adolescents, displaced people, people in exile and the LGBTQI+ community; and support for the finalization, design, delivery, spreading and sustainability of the Truth Commission's Final Report and Legacy, among others.

Specifically, in terms of the setting up and launching of the Commission, a consensus was reached that its success would depend on consolidating a decentralized mandate which would facilitate the greatest participation possible of communities, identify and deal with breeches in access to the mechanism, and consolidate the entity's processes of territorial deployment. Far removed from being a traditional institutional mechanism designed and deployed from Bogotá, the entity was created as a coordinated effort with the communities in the regions in order to achieve a truly common goal. For this process, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Office

of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia (OHCHR) worked alongside the Commission to meet the objective.

Part of the strategy centered on the creation of regional spaces, such as the 28 'Truth Houses' and the mobile groups that were deployed in 11 territories across Colombia. The Houses were created as political and social meeting places where the victims and various actors from the conflict could access the Commission's institutional offering, get to know and understand its mandate, share their testimony and receive guidance on the different powers of the Comprehensive System for Peace's entities.

Through the support of the UN's agencies, funds and programmes, and with funding from the Fund, we put in place a coordinated territorial deployment strategy, which increased the understanding of the Comprehensive System for Peace's functions and created co-working mechanisms for making an efficient use of the information supplied by the different actors. In this process, communication with local and national media outlets was fundamental, as they showed commitment to the System and Commission's message, and supported the processes carried out not only by the entities, but also by civil society organizations.

1. Guinea, Central African Republic, Yemen, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Mali, Gambia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Tunisia, Côte d'Ivoire, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal and Rwanda.



## UNPRECEDENTED DIALOGUES, TRUTH(S) AND PARTICIPATION

As part of this process of getting closer to the realities of the regions, there was also the opportunity to generate responsible discussions on what had taken place during the conflict, as well as spaces to hear about the realities faced by the victims and their memories. These spaces, that brought together opposing views of the past, opened up the unprecedented opportunity for Colombian society to discuss the historic conflicts in the search for respect and collective construction. As María Emma Wills explains, “going from war to peace is not just a result of socio-political pacts and commitments made by the opposing parties, it also demands cultural transformations, within which processes of memory feature heavily”<sup>2</sup>.

We would also like to highlight that this Commission, like no other before it, shed light on some of the central elements which help provide clarity on the events that took place during the conflict, or which seek to provide explanations for what happened<sup>3</sup> and continued to happen. An example of this is the chapter on harm to and impact on victims in exile, an effort that no other commission in the world had made before, and which revealed, for the first time, an alarming reality: that of the second victimization in Colombia, following the forced displacement, which saw “more than a million Colombians abandon the country in search of international protection” between 1982 and 2020<sup>4</sup>.

Elsewhere, in the Final Report’s central chapter on its findings and recommendations, the narrative does not focus on what happened, but rather on a reading of why it happened<sup>5</sup>, a fundamental tool for

setting the bases for non-repetition and resonating the commission’s central slogan: ‘If there is truth, there is a future’. The Commission identified various persistence factors that make up conditions that perpetuated the war for decades and which need to be transformed in line with the recommendations laid out in the same chapter. Among these factors are conditions such as racism or stigmatization which, until now, had not been so closely identified as being related to an explanation of the armed conflict in Colombia.

Another element worth highlighting is the inclusion of victims by the Commission, not simply as passive actors and recipients, but as political, constructive agents of the processes of Transitional Justice carried out by the Commission. From the validation of the instruments and methodologies for the inclusion of differential focuses, to the processes of gathering testimonies and offering psycho-social support, the victims contributed to the institutional design of the Commission and, of course, to the definition of the narrative on what happened during the conflict, the resources to express that narrative, and the way they wanted to see themselves reflected in it. Just as the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, puts it: “The truth is a force for empowerment and healing”<sup>6</sup>. And, when the victims are at the center of the process, such empowerment and ownership is a restorative process itself.

## THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Currently, the greatest challenge is ensuring that efforts continue to be combined in order for the Commission’s Legacy to flourish, expand and con-

solidate. Experiences such as those of Liberia and the Central African Republic, which have seen challenges to the implementation of non-repetition actions as a result of a lack of ownership of the generated reports, prove the importance of promoting Colombian society’s understanding of the report’s findings and their ownership of the monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations for non-repetition. With that in mind, the United Nations, through the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Sustaining Peace, finances 17 civil society organizations across the country, who will contribute to this important task.

It is fundamental to create open spaces for discussion of the report, including in the school setting. We also need to keep strengthening the institutional framework created as part of Transitional Justice and ensure that there are a series of institutional reforms. Above all, it is essential to guarantee “the right to a plural memory that acknowledges the atrocities of the past, contributes to overcoming the pain and trauma, and tackles dynamics of stigmatization, dehumanization and denial which contribute to the persistence” of the conflict<sup>7</sup>.

I would like to close by quoting Soraya Bayuelo, from the Montes de María Línea 21 Communication Collective. The eloquence and power of her message needs no preface. To her,

as with all the victims who have joined us on this path, I concede this space with deep admiration, gratitude and respect.

*“Reaching out in spite of differences is an experience that we have started to weave in Montes de María, and which will no doubt take some time, however much is needed, because whatever it was that broke led us to silence, mistrust, to exile. But we will persevere. The attack took place on August 17, 2000, and the hug of reconciliation and forgiveness took place 16 years later in the public square in El Carmen de Bolívar, very close to the site of the explosion. It isn’t easy, not even sitting in front of this piece of paper, to write this all down again, but I do it in the hope that this testimony, driven by the truth, can contribute in some way to peace in Colombia”.*

**Soraya Bayuelo, victim and human rights advocate in Montes de María.**

2. (Wills, 2022, pág. 4)  
3. (Bermúdez Liévano, 2022)  
4. (Castillo, 2022)  
5. (Bermúdez Liévano, 2022)  
6. (United Nations, 2022)

7. (Truth Commission, 2022, P.795)



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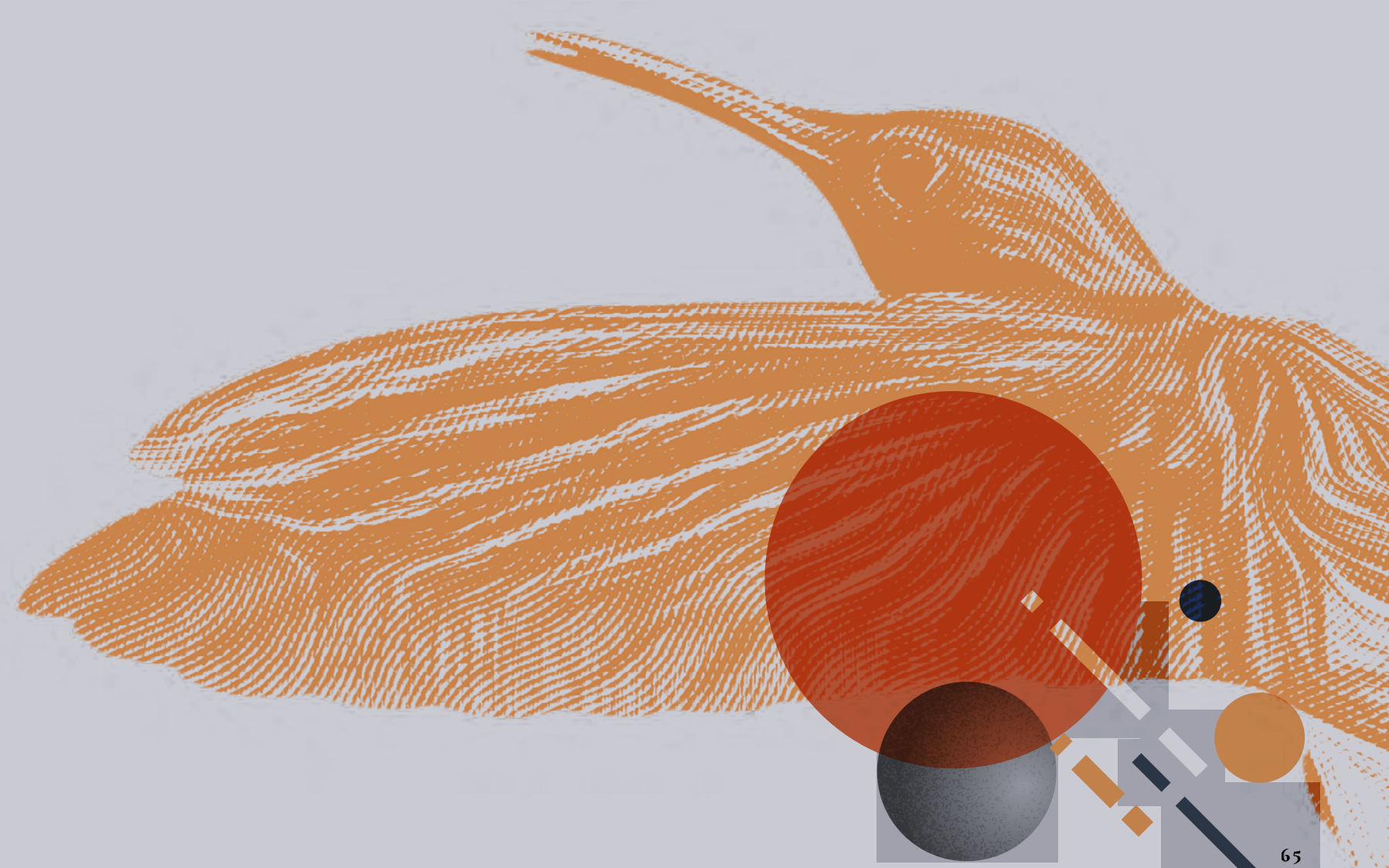
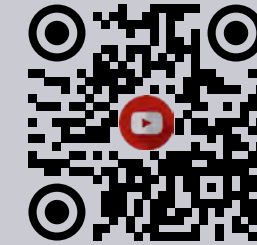
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▶ WATCH THIS SPACE HERE:  
<https://youtu.Be/q2jhejft7wy>



# COOPERATION BETWEEN A STATE ENTITY FOR PEACE AND CIVIL SOCIETY



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**LUCÍA GONZÁLEZ**  
TRUTH COMMISSIONER

TOPIC

# STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE AND WORKING IN A NETWORK WITH PARTNERS OF THE TRUTH COMMISSION



BY GWEN BURNYEAT  
MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD UNIVERSITY

Juan Manuel Santos's government invested substantial efforts and resources, both human and financial, in the negotiation with the Farc-ep, but not so much in making a state-society alliance to take peace forward. This was one of the principal conclusions of my doctoral investigation in anthropology on the peace pedagogy of Santos's government and the role of state-society relationships in the peace process, a study published as a book, titled *The Face of Peace: Government Pedagogy amid Disinformation in Colombia* (Burnyeat 2022).

For this investigation, I carried out 13 months of field work in the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (OACP, for its Spanish acronym), studying the work of the Pedagogy team and carrying out interviews with the protagonists, both within the government and in civil society. After the plebiscite, one would commonly hear the phrase "there was no pedagogy" being used. That is not true. There were considerable efforts and, in fact, it was the first time anywhere in the world that there was pedagogy of a peace agreement on a large scale.

Peace Education is a field of study within the discipline of Peace Studies, and it refers to the educational processes through which people can acquire the tools for peaceful co-existence, non-violent conflict resolution and the transformation of structural inequality (Harris 2007). On the other hand, "peace pedagogy" at the time tended to refer to the explanation, by those who were undertaking the dialogues in Havana, of the content of that negotiation: first

**AFTER THE PLEBISCITE, ONE WOULD COMMONLY HEAR THE PHRASE "THERE WAS NO PEDAGOGY" BEING USED. THAT IS NOT TRUE. THERE WERE CONSIDERABLE EFFORTS AND, IN FACT, IT WAS THE FIRST TIME ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD THAT THERE WAS PEDAGOGY OF A PEACE AGREEMENT ON A LARGE SCALE.**

its progress between 2013 and 2016, and then the Final Agreement when it was reached. It was a global innovation, demanded by many sectors of society;

perhaps this will become increasingly necessary in peace processes around the world, due to the growth of misinformation in all political processes.

Some of those who had worked on the OACP's Pedagogy Team joined the Truth Commission, and their prior experience of 'peace pedagogy' was an important influence on the Commission's work of building state-society partnerships. The

OACP at the time managed to make state-society alliances for peace, little by little, through a patient, painstaking process of trust-building. It was faced

*"The OACP at the time managed to make state-society alliances for peace, little by little, through a patient, painstaking process of trust-building. It was faced with a very difficult context, resulting from the historic lack of trust in the Colombian state".*

with a very difficult context, resulting from the historic lack of trust in the Colombian state (Burnyeat 2020); this was, in part, due to the role of the state in the conflict, and in part due to the common narrative that the state had ‘abandoned’ many regions. But above all, this was because the peace process was seen as part of a political battle between Santos and his opponent Álvaro Uribe. This mistrust of the state, and the politicisation of everything to do with the Peace Agreement, is relevant for the task that the Commission subsequently took on.

My book reveals many of the lessons learnt by the OACP, but the main lesson is that the Pedagogy team was made up of far fewer people than those responsible for negotiation. And the entire Pedagogy team was funded by international cooperation, not by the government, as opposed to the social servants working on thematic issues – this is important, because where governments place their money is an indication of their priorities. In spite of the efforts of the Pedagogy team, this lack of prioritisation by the Santos government can be seen in the result of the plebiscite, where the “No” vote won. The Peace Agreement was born within the context of this legitimacy deficit, which makes it much harder to implement.

With the Truth Commission came another opportunity to build a pro-peace state-society alian-

ce, in order to recover the legitimacy lost in the plebiscite. This led to what the Commission called “working in a network with allies”, which was, and is, an important attempt to secure the work and Legacy of the Commission within society’s appropriation. But that task had to be carried out in an adverse context, where everything related to the Peace Agreement suffered from that legitimacy deficit.

I make up part of this network of partners, as a member of Rodeemos el Diálogo (ReD), a trans-national, nonpartisan organization that seeks to support peacebuilding in Colombia. Furthermore, during a visit to Colombia between June and August 2022, in the period covering the launch of the Final Report, I had the opportunity to join one of the macro-territorial tours of the commissioners, who spent two months travelling around the country

sharing the results of their work.

In total I attended 13 meetings with different audiences, in Pereira, Armenia, Medellín, Rionegro and Apartadó, with the participation of social organizations, victims, school students, business people and some local authorities. I also make up part of the advisory committee of the project led by ReD alongside the Commission, ‘Let the truth be told’, which is constructing a community of pedagogic practitioners throughout the country to share the tools for teaching about the Legacy in formal and informal

*“When I was a child in England, I remember that we studied the World War three times at school, we saw black and white photos of the gas chambers and the corpses of those killed there. I understood that something massive, unjust and serious had happened, and that some Jewish people that I was at school with had parents and grandparents who had experienced it, and that it should never happen again”.*

education spaces; I was at this project’s meeting in Cali<sup>8</sup>. In all of these spaces I have been able to observe and document the reactions, questions and concerns of different sectors with regards to the Commission’s work. The following reflections come from that perspective, and from the comparisons that I make with the prior peace pedagogy of the Santos government.

The Commission’s analysis was that greater ownership by society during its mandate would translate into greater ownership in the post-report period. This ownership is important for at least two reasons: firstly, in order to teach the history in schools, so that children grow up with the “never again” message. When I was a child in England, I remember that we studied the World War three times at school, we saw black and white photos of the gas chambers and the corpses of those killed there. I understood that something massive, unjust and serious had happened, and that some Jewish people that I was at school with had parents and grandparents who had experienced it, and that it should never happen again. So the appropriation of the Commission’s Legacy is important for ensuring that this message reaches future generations. Secondly, of course, in order to surround the implementation of the recommendations, which will be a task that has a political impact over many years, in partnership with the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee of the Implementation of the Truth Commission’s Recommendations.

In general, the importance of what is known as ‘outreach’ is being recognized more and more in Transitional Justice. That refers to communicating to society the work of the Transitional Justice entities, be they special tribunals, reparation processes or truth commissions. This is important, because there is generally a gap between the efforts of the Transitional Justice institutions, which are often very sophisticated and use plenty of state and international resources, and what society understands about these processes. Ultimately, the purpose of the tools of Transitional Justice is to help a society understand and heal the past, turn over a new leaf and move towards a better future. But if people don’t know that there

**IN THE FEW STUDIES THAT HAVE BEEN DONE, WE HAVE OFTEN FOUND THAT EXPLAINING SOMETHING RATIONALLY DOES NOT NECESSARILY LEAD TO UNDERSTANDING AND GLOBAL SUPPORT FOR THOSE PROCESSES; WHAT MATTERS MORE IS WHO DOMINATES THE POLITICAL NARRATIVE AND WHO INFLUENCES THE POLITICAL BELIEFS OF THE MAJORITY**

8. <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/pedagogia#qlvsdicha>

**PEACE IS POLITICAL, IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD: IT IS POLITICAL BECAUSE IT IMPLIES NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN MANY PARTIES FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT AND SOCIETY; IT IS POLITICAL BECAUSE IT IMPLIES REFORMING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURES; AND, ABOVE ALL, IT IS POLITICAL IF WE UNDERSTAND POLITICAL AS THE WAY IN WHICH WE HUMAN BEINGS COEXIST AND ORGANISE OURSELVES**

has been a truth commission, or they do not understand what it did, how can its work lead to such a result? The problem is that, in Transitional Justice, outreach receives less funding, is less developed and investigated less. In the few studies that have been done, we have often found that explaining something rationally does not necessarily lead to understanding and global support for those processes; what matters more is who dominates the political narrative and who influences the political beliefs of the majority (Hellmann 2015).

One of the major problems with the Santos government's 'peace pedagogy' was that it saw peace as something technical, something that could be defined and,

therefore, legitimised with rational explanations. This is also a problem with the liberal peace paradigm that Santos adopted, and which is generally promoted by the international community. Peace is political, in every sense of the word: it is political because it implies negotiations between many parties from the establishment and society; it is political because it implies reforming the socio-economic structures; and, above all, it is political if we understand political as the way in which we human beings coexist and organise ourselves, and as a process in which confrontation between different groups and opinions is inevitable. So peace is political because it implies relationships; sometimes difficult relationships.

Working in a network alongside partners of the Commission was extremely political, because the role of a truth commission is to build relationships. It implies forming a critical mass, organising networks, building strong, if not predominant, narratives, with the potential to have an impact on transforming the reality. The future success of the Commission's original objectives will depend on what happens now with the Legacy of the network of partners.

According to the Commission's internal data, over its existence there have been more than 3,000 partners, of which: 46.9% were organizations or social platforms; 18.1% were national and territorial public institutions; 12.4% were from the international community; 10.9% were from the academic community; 8.2% were media outlets; 2.2% were from the business sector; 0.9% were from the political sphere; and 0.5% from the Advisory Council<sup>9</sup>. These partners helped to organise meeting spaces, acknowledgement of responsibility spaces, social dialogues, and to reach different audiences for the interviews. Their participation was fundamental in building trust in the Commission, especially important in a context where many pro-peace sectors, who had gradually built up some trust in the Santos government, had lost it during Iván Duque's administration. Many people hesi-

tated to give their testimony to the Commission, for fear that this would put their lives at risk again. Now that the Commission has completed its mandate, the future of its Legacy remains in the hands of this network.

The post-report objectives of the network of partners are the following:

- 1 Spreading the Final Report and the digital platform as widely as possible.
- 2 Promoting the use and ownership of the files that the Commission received, produced and consolidated for the investigation.
- 3 Making the processes of acknowledgement, coexistence and non-repetition promoted by the Commission sustainable.
- 4 Making commitments on the impact and implementation and follow-up of the recommendations for non-repetition and coordination with the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee.<sup>10</sup>

What matters now is not what the Commission did. Academics will spend the coming decades discussing whether the work was done well or poorly, if the report came out well or badly, and these debates will be relevant for the future of the Transitional Justice discipline and for Colombia. However,

**THE FUTURE SUCCESS OF THE COMMISSION'S ORIGINAL OBJECTIVES WILL DEPEND ON WHAT HAPPENS NOW WITH THE LEGACY OF THE NETWORK OF PARTNERS.**

what matters now is how this tremendous material is used. To date, there are 25 agreed agendas with various partners (eight national agendas and 17 territorial agendas), including:

- A project for counteracting misinformation on the Report.
- Youth mobilization projects, such as Generación V+<sup>11</sup>.
- Projects for incorporating the Legacy in formal and informal education, and the production of pedagogic tools.
- Processes for dialogue and acknowledgement of responsibilities.
- Appropriation of the use of archives<sup>12</sup>.

I believe that the Commission learned a lot from the Santos government's prior experience of 'peace pedagogy'. For example, the Commission carried out its work with an on-the-ground presence with local liaisons. Instead of visits by people from Bogotá, which was the main modus operandi of the OACP's 'peace pedagogy', the Commission had people from the territory,

9. Truth Commission, 2022. "El tejido de relaciones y alianzas para la sostenibilidad del Legado", internal systematisation document.

10. Ibid.

11. <https://web.comisiondelaverdad.co/participe/generacionv>

12. Truth Commission, 2022. "El tejido de relaciones y alianzas para la sostenibilidad del Legado", internal systematisation document.

with in situ offices, slowly building relationships tied to the local realities. As one of the Commission's employees said in a meeting that I attended in Urabá: "Having this auditorium full of partners is not simply a question of calling on people for a week; it is the result of years of diligent work by the liaisons". And that is how it is. I have been witness to the fact that the Commission's territorial liaisons are personally committed, and how many of them continue to be partners even after the Commission's work has concluded.

On my tour, I was also able to witness the impressive amount of initiatives that civil society is creating in order to spread and teach about the Report. The support of young people is notable; for example, in the Universidad de Antioquia, the Camilo Torres auditorium was completely full. There was no room for everyone who wanted to be present, and that is very encouraging. However, one of the great challenges is overcoming the fact that these events were generally attended by people who were already aware of the process. Throughout the tour, I asked taxi drivers and waiters if they knew anything about the event that was taking place in their city that day, or if they knew anything about the Commission. On the whole, the majority of people did not even know of the existence of the Truth Commission in Colombia, let alone of its findings. At the events, the most common questions and comments I noticed were, for example: "How do we get this message

out beyond our normal audience?" or, even, "How do we reach the deniers?"

These are difficult questions. The role of reaching a wider public and counteracting the political opposition to the Report now belongs to the network of partners. However, the big advantage that the Commission has over the previous 'peace pedagogy' is that there will be no plebiscite to approve or reject the report! So the meticulous and thorough work of the network of partners can continue in a less polarized context than that of the pedagogy of the Peace Agreement.

At the launch of the Final Report on June 28, 2022, the president-elect, Gustavo Petro, promised to ensure that its content reached the farthest corners of Colombia. We must ensure that this promise is kept. But I also think that it is important that this task does not remain solely in the hands of the government that happens to be in power. The countless initiatives for spreading the Legacy are positive because they decentralise this task of spreading information. I believe that the international community can play a fundamental role in financing the pedagogy projects put forward by various civil society organizations, each with their own style, audience and methodology. However, there is also the risk of ending up with a proliferation of small, superficial projects that have little impact. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain the coordination efforts, such as the 'Let the truth be told' project. It is also important to ensure that any pedagogy initiatives are connected

to what the government is doing, especially in terms of the promise made by the Minister for Education, Alejandro Gaviria, to get the Commission's Final Report embedded into formal education.

Other more common questions that I encountered on the tour were related to the contradictory context of doing this work while the conflict continues. One woman, in the audience at an event in Pereira, said: "When you were hearing about the horrors of the war, we were experiencing the violence on the streets". And a representative in Antioquia asked: "Who is going to tell the truth about what happened after 2018?"

The great challenge for the network of partners is to use the Report as a tool, for pedagogy as well as for surrounding the recommendations and the work of the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee, and contributing to the efforts to end the conflict and build a culture of peace. That brings me back to the idea that peace is political.

Many of those who attended mentioned that it was difficult to get the mayors to attend the Commission's events. There needs to be a concerted effort at forging relationships in order to get the regional candidates for the 2023 local elections to make a commitment, and to get the regional secretaries of education, once elected, involved. Without the commitment of Gustavo Petro, who was elected as a result of his determined mandate for peace, today we would be facing a more

difficult scenario for the survival of the Commission's Legacy. But in order for the Legacy to have the desired impact, we have to also build state-society relationships on a territorial level. That is the greatest challenge for total peace!

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# REFLECTIONS

A non-governmental organization that supported the Truth Commission's work, a foreign academic researcher who specializes in peace pedagogy processes and has plenty of experience in Colombia, a regional peace counsellor, a representative of allied youth organizations, and a peace commissioner all took part in this space to share their feelings on the Legacy left behind by the Commission as well as the management example of a state entity, using a new paradigm of service and humility, and not institutional arrogance.

From their different perspectives, these varied voices addressed the topic of how a temporary entity with an ethical and political mission, the Truth Commission, worked with the state that it represented, a diverse civil society, the victims and those responsible for the events that it was trying to shine a light on, to meet a constitutional mandate in adverse conditions that presented many contradictions. The main one being that it was delegitimized from within the very heart of the state for a large part of its period of existence, in spite of the constitutional mandate and the humanitarian impera-

tive that came with it.

Of the three entities that make up the Comprehensive System for Peace, the Commission had the shortest mandate: just three years, plus an extra nine months that were approved by the Constitutional Court as a result of the impact of the pandemic. Therefore, during its active period, the Commission not only suffered from the effects of confinement, but also of the country's ideological polarization. Thanks to technology, in the case of the former, and ethical and political determination rather than legal determination, in the case of the latter, it managed to meet its constitutional remit. It did this in a unique fashion: by bringing state institutions in contact with victims and perpetrators and adopting an attitude based around listening profoundly and respect for the dignity of the victims and the pain of all involved parties; this included those responsible for atrocious events that could not be revealed until the involved parties met in the safe space of the Truth Commission and were encouraged to recount what happened.

The following are some highlighted excerpts of the conversation, moderated by Lariza Pizano:



## LARIZA PIZANO

La Comisión de la Verdad marca una nueva manera de relacionar a la sociedad civil con el Estado. Es un ejemplo pionero de transformación. Algunos líderes de opinión parecen olvidar que la Comisión es Estado, un poco por ese antagonismo histórico que ha existido entre sociedad civil e institucionalidad estatal.



## ALBERTO HEREDIA PIESCHACÓN

The conflict derives from a problem of governance –or governability– because it highlights the incapacity of the actors in a country to come to an agreement and tackle the structural problems in a society that give rise to a conflict. But what does governance mean? It is a permanent construction of two-way trust and credibility relationships, between civil society and its institutions and leaders, in order to make them partners and equals in development and peace.

Thus we can see how the Truth Commission, as a state entity, has built its relationships with civil society. The Commission managed to carry out its work in the most uncertain setting in Colombia's recent history. Data from 2018 showed that 60% of Colombians felt that the country was not on a good path, but this perception rose to 80%

**THE COMMISSION IS AN EXAMPLE OF A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT, AND THAT IS VERY IMPORTANT IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE.**

in 2022. It was during these four years that the Commission carried out its task. And, during that period, it generated hope for a transition towards peaceful coexistence. How did it do that? I put forward these reasons:

The first is that it generated a change in the way a public institution was managed. Citizens were used to having to be the ones making contact with the institution in order to handle certain matters. There are very few examples of the institution being the one that reaches out to civil society. That paradigm shift led to a change in attitude: people now feel like the institution is theirs. It would be wonderful if this could extend to all public institutions.

The Commission is an example of a new social contract, and that is very important in Transitional Justice. And not just because it was inclusive and guaranteed the victims' right to the truth, but because it calls on the remaining public institutions to join a process of change and recovery of trust, credibility and legitimacy, which can lead to real governance.

The Commission has given an example of political, ethical and democratic leadership by the state. That is why we can talk about the existence of a network of the Commission's partners, and why that is so powerful, both in these three years that have just come to an end and looking to the future.

**THERE ARE VERY FEW EXAMPLES OF THE INSTITUTION BEING THE ONE THAT REACHES OUT TO CIVIL SOCIETY. THAT PARADIGM SHIFT LED TO A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE: PEOPLE NOW FEEL LIKE THE INSTITUTION IS THEIRS.**



**VLADIMIR RODRÍGUEZ**

We would need a post-doctoral thesis in political science to talk about the relationship of the Commission as a state entity with civil society, because the entity was faced with the paradoxical situation of being a state organism that was delegitimized by the government that should have been the constructor of the policy of peace enshrined in the Constitution. The Commission was born in an act integrated into the Constitution and should carry out a state policy.

But did the Colombian state and civil society really understand the existence of the Commission as the fruit of a constitutional mandate? I would say that they did not. Some local and departmental governments, and some civil society organizations understood that.

The Commission's dedicated workers carried out the Herculean task of building relationships with the victims in the territories. They were the safeguards and protectors of the Peace Agreement in the face of a government that never understood that this was a historic opportunity to overcome the dynamics and rationales that perpetuate violence.

The current president and vice-president claim that the roadmap for many issues related to total peace and the rule of law will come from the Truth Commission's recommendations.

Thanks to all of you at the Commission, we will live in a better country, where people hopefully understand

**THE ENTITY WAS FACED WITH THE PARADOXICAL SITUATION OF BEING A STATE ORGANISM THAT WAS DELEGITIMIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE CONSTRUCTOR.**

that the work of the Commission makes up part of the Constitution and the guaranteeing of the rights of citizens in terms of not repeating the errors and horrors of the conflict. The recommendations should become public policies as part of the Development Plan. That is where the President's manifestation of will must be seen clearly and concretely, with plans, programs and projects, as well as in the development plans of the leaders who will be elected in two years. We also need to remind members of Congress that there is a lot of regulatory work to be done with regards the Commission's recommendations.





### DANIEL BEDOYA

Since August 7, 2022, you can feel the winds of change in Colombia. These four years of work by the Commission are a gust of hope for young people in terms of the implementation of the Peace Agreement. We young people are the protagonists of this change that led to the election of our current president. Sometimes, when we try to teach, older people will tell us: “you do not know what happened, you weren’t even born”. But we are the heirs, we were born in a country fractured by conflict, in the midst of pools of blood. And that violence and that war trickled down into the very essence of our culture, customs, language and gestures.

HEMOS GASTADO MUCHA SUELA Y GRITADO MUCHAS ARENGAS, HEMOS CHUPADO MUCHO GAS LACRIMÓGENO Y HEMOS PUESTO NUESTRAS VIDAS PARA QUE LA PAZ PUEDA SER UNA REALIDAD PALPABLE.

That is why young people have always opted for peace. And that is not a recent thing. You just need to look at the “Séptima Papeleta” movement (the seventh ballot movement, with which young voters in 1990 elections demanded to form a National Constituent Assembly to modify the Constitution of Colombia), the 1991 Constitution, the peace mandate, the strikes: protests are always a call for peace. We have worn out the soles of our shoes and shouted many rallying cries, we have breathed in plenty of tear gas and we have dedicated our lives to making peace a palpable reality.

Reading the Truth Commission’s Final Report is painful, because it speaks of three or four lost generations. Young people today refuse to become another

WE HAVE LEARNT ABOUT OUR HISTORY IN TERMS OF BATTLES AND STATUES OF PEOPLE BEARING WEAPONS, AND WE CELEBRATE THE COUNTRY’S INDEPENDENCE WITH A MILITARY PARADE.

generation lost to war. We have learnt about historic battles, are surrounded by statues of people bearing weapons and we celebrate the country’s independence with a military parade. That makes no sense. That is why we backed the peace process from the outset and, when the plebiscite lost, we took to the streets to ask for peace to be renegotiated. Since the start of the Comprehensive System for Peace, and in particular the Commission, we have supported it, and now we embrace its Legacy.

When you pass through the territories, it is very encouraging to see its legitimacy, among resistance movements, victims, communities, indigenous and rural communities, Afro-Colombian communities, among young people and all those voices that had never been heard before, and who found in the Commission a safe place to express themselves.

The Commission is over, but its Legacy remains, and we have to ensure that it is felt across the whole territory. We have to include it in debate and in memory, we have to increase participation. It is very important that young people, who are those who have the most desire, continue to be supported by state and non-state entities. Do not leave us alone with the Legacy in our hands: it will be fulfilled with conversations, with songs, by looking each other in the eyes, on the ground. Just imagine, if we need four years to construct an 8,000-page report, how many we will need to digest it.

DO NOT LEAVE US ALONE WITH THE LEGACY IN OUR HANDS: IT WILL BE FULFILLED WITH CONVERSATIONS, WITH SONGS, BY LOOKING EACH OTHER IN THE EYES, ON THE GROUND. JUST IMAGINE, IF WE NEED FOUR YEARS TO CONSTRUCT AN 8,000-PAGE REPORT, HOW MANY WE WILL NEED TO DIGEST IT.



SITTING DOWN TO HUMBLY HEAR ABOUT THE OTHER'S PAIN, EVEN THAT OF THE PERPETRATORS. THE PAIN OF THE FARC, OF THE PARAMILITARIES, OF THOSE MEN FROM THE ARMED FORCES WHO ENDED UP DOING WHAT THEY DID, SOMETHING THAT THEY CANNOT EVEN EXPLAIN...

### LUCÍA GONZÁLEZ

At the Truth Commission, we made an enormous effort to leave behind much more than an important document, a collection of 10,000 pages that will be of vital historic importance for the country; the conversation that generates mass mobilization, understood as the capacity to construct shared feelings and look for solutions, is the capital that we are leaving behind.

We are proud of this enormous social capital that the Commission built around the truth. I would like to say to the seven members of the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee that we are handing over that capital, which is more important than the Report.

Many truth commissions around the world have had extremely valuable reports but, for a number of reasons, have not been able to build a social capital of this magnitude. It is that social capital that will lead to the necessary transformations. The Report will be read by very few people. People will be able to discuss and debate the Report through the summaries and the notebook, but above all as a result of the activations and mobilizations that come about as a result of its content.

This state institution set off with the deep understanding of the need to respond to the victims, to the immense pain of this country, to the profound suffering that Colombia had experienced. Faced with this mandate, which is not institutional or functional, but rather ethical, moral and political, there is no other way to respond than from

the heart and soul.

I have had a lot of jobs, almost as many as the years that I have lived, but this is the time that I have been most surprised by the profound and intimate dedication of a team. We did not think of it as carrying out a task for the state, but rather as a task for history.

We set ourselves the task of creating public communication for mass mobilization. The underlying factor that permeated through as we carried out our work was that social dialogue; deep, respectful and empathetic listening, a transaction between equals. We did not stand above anybody else, on the contrary. When you are faced with the courage and the moral high ground of the victims, that pain and their generosity, you feel small. That dialogue was what constructed the critical mass that validates this work.

Building that critical mass was a task that involved social dialogue with conversations across the entire country. And the construction of the Report was also the result of an equitable social dialogue, of sitting down to humbly hear about the other's pain, even that of the perpetrators. The pain of the Farc, of the paramilitaries, of those men from the armed forces who ended up doing what they did, something that they cannot even explain... I would say to Iguaño or Otoniel: "how did you become such a monster?" It is a human question, not a judgement. What makes a society produce those beings? Because nobody is born a paramilitary or a guerrilla or someone who kills innocent children and young people. We also had to hear those voices, all the voices!

That is why I am not concerned by the opponents. It is a very small, but powerful, sector of society and the media give them a lot of coverage. The media must take a lot of responsibility for not letting us build a spirit of peace. So-and-so says something insulting, an offensive comment that harms the country, and the media are after them to give them a platform. They are a large minority.

All of this brought us together as a team very

quickly. The presence of Pacho De Roux was very important because Pacho is a man with a moral and political compass and coherence that encouraged this humanitarian, human, ethical and political task, something that all state entities should have. We have to transform the state's ways. There were people who cried and got angry in the public meetings because the Commission was coming to an end.

People thought that this was a first report, that there was still a lot to hear and say, and that the Commission could not end. That shows that reconciliation is possible, because this is an entity that is capable of responding to something majorly damaging, like a holocaust. Because this was a holocaust.

But who in the state does not understand the imperative of an ethical task and of constructing common goods for society? That is what allowed us to forge empathetic relationships. And faced with the moral high ground of the victims, you have no choice but to be humble and to remind yourself every day that you are a public servant in the deepest sense of the word. ■

**I AM NOT CONCERNED BY THE OPPONENTS. IT IS A VERY SMALL, BUT POWERFUL, SECTOR OF SOCIETY AND THE MEDIA GIVE THEM A LOT OF COVERAGE. THE MEDIA MUST TAKE A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR NOT LETTING US BUILD A SPIRIT OF PEACE.**

*We did not stand above anybody else, on the contrary. When you are faced with the courage and the moral high ground of the victims, that pain and their generosity, you feel small.*

# YOUTH *in* TRANSITION

EXCERPTS FROM THE TEXT BY **DANIEL BEDOYA**  
A YOUTH LEADER AND MEMBER  
OF THE “V+ GENERATION” MOVEMENT

The *It is not a lesser evil* (2022) chapter of the Truth Commission’s Final Report reveals the horrors that children and teenagers have had to suffer as part of the armed conflict. The conclusion is clear: Colombia is a country that has handed over its youth to war. The Report shows us that three generations have been lost to the internal armed conflict.

It is the children who have lived through orphanhood, displacement, lack of schooling, recruitment, instrumentalization, and a lack of opportunities to build, or at least dream of, a more promising future.

Among the many methodologies for social dialogue that it implemented during its constitutional mandate, the Truth Commission incorporated an initiative aimed at exclusively meeting, listening to and building with young people, understanding the value

in their opinions and knowledge on such varied topics as community processes, peaceful resistance, giving meaning back to the territory, reconciliation and peacebuilding. This allowed for the active participation of young people in safe spaces where we were able to express our views and perspectives freely, and where these views were heard and collected as an analytical and contrast tool for the construction of the Final Report.

We young people know from experience that good intentions alone are not enough; we need to work persistently in order to reconcile with each other and join together as a country. It is with this common purpose that, in our territories and with our communities, we spearhead educational, cultural, artistic and sporting processes; spaces for civic participation where we foster respect, dialogue and coexistence, the fundamental

bases for consolidating a culture of truth and peace.

It is within this context that we see the emergence of the “V+ Generation”, a voluntary youth network where “we declare truth on war and oblivion”. We are a group of young people who firmly believe in the possibility of weaving new narratives, because we know that the language of peace is the truth. Every day we carry out actions in our territories which allow us to speak the unspeakable; in San Jacinto we compose music, in Medellín we paint graffiti, in Catatumbo we sing rap, in Cali we read testimonies out loud, in Bogota we carry out academic forums, in Leticia

we play ‘jumpers for goalposts’ football games, in Barranquilla we dance, in Bucaramanga we produce plays, in Buenos Aires, Santiago, Madrid and Paris we mount our bicycles and take to public spaces to speak about the truth. These are all forms of resistance by the communities in the midst of conflict, which will now be at the service of truth and peace.

This volunteer network has a presence in 28 territories across the national territory, as well as six hubs abroad, totaling nearly 2,600 volunteers. We structure methodologies and implement them in various pedagogic processes, with the aim of mobi-

lizing our communities and reflecting, alongside them, on the value of the truth for peacebuilding in our territories. This leap towards peace happens when we transform the value system that imposed the conflict on us, take responsibility for the decisions that are made in our country and uncover the history of pain that we have been called upon to transform.

Many of the answers can be found in the Final Report delivered by the Truth Commission. We young people welcomed this text, its findings and recommendations with a feeling of responsibility and joy, and we are committed to spreading it, so that this pain does not repeat itself. The Legacy of the Commission is an invitation to change the direction that we have been going

in for the last 60 years, to no longer walk along the sterile paths of war, and to walk together towards peace. Young people refuse to be the fourth generation lost to war, we want to contribute to reconciliation and to building a possible future, with much more hope for all of Colombia, always remembering that peace is a collective victory.

We young people see ourselves as the generation of peace and we know that our role is key in the transition this country is experiencing. As the heirs to peace, we are ready to communicate and teach about the Final Report and the Truth Commission's Legacy, giving it life and ingraining it into our initiatives, taking it to the streets, and placing it in the public debate and national agenda. ■

# THE OTHER LEGACY

## of TRUTH COMMISSION

BY ALBERTO HEREDIA PIESCHACÓN  
DIRECTOR EJECUTIVO DE LA PAZ QUERIDA

The impact and repercussions that the presentation of the Truth Commission's Final Report has had on Colombian society are testament to its accuracy, depth and significance for the transition to a democratic, peaceful coexistence. This is, perhaps, the most important investigation Colombia has seen in the last 30 years. We must ensure that the country hears about, discusses and reflects on the findings and recommendations of the Final Report. The Commission's Legacy will depend on what the country does with the Report, particularly the use and utility we imprint it with, in terms of dismantling the persistence factors of the violence and making the recommendations for non-repetition a reality.

As well as the significance of the Final Report, in this article I would like to highlight the other Legacy that the Truth Commission leaves for Colombia, which seeks to strengthen democracy and forge, by any means, relationships of trust, credibility and legitimacy between public institutions, leaders and citizens. Only through this type of social change is it possible to generate the collaborative governance required to promote sustainable and comprehensive human development and peacebuilding.

The starting point for this reflection is to ask why, in a setting of growing uncertainty about the future of the country, the Commission became perhaps the only public institution that generated hope for the future and allowed us to keep on dreaming

about the construction of the potential Colombia we could have.

In fact, while the Invamer Poll showed an increase of 20 percentage points in the number of Colombians who considered that the country was going down the wrong path (going from 59% in September 2018 to its peak of 79.2% in February 2022), the Truth Commission repeatedly showed us that Colombia was not condemned to repeat its history or be hemmed in by deep-rooted violence, illegality and the armed conflict. In other words, in the years of greatest negativity regar-

ding the future in the country's recent history, the Commission was a beacon of hope for human dignity and peacebuilding.

To explain this, we can identify at least three arguments:

Firstly, the Truth Commission as an entity that guarantees rights, made up a new paradigm, in every way, for how a public institution should be managed. In remote Colombia, and in the urban centers too, we are used to the citizen being the one responsible for reaching out to public institutions, begging for their rights to be guaranteed,

with a marked division between the citizen and the entity, which permanently separates and distances them. It is an invisible wall that, in settings where there is a limited, precarious state presence, fractures relationships, trust and credibility of the public institutions and, at the same time, distances them from people's real needs.

The Truth Commission, however, was an entity that approached citizens, in their territories and their interaction spaces, with a communication strategy that allowed it to establish a two-way relationship between its staff and all the people who participated in the promoted social dialogue, giving it legitimacy and generating trust and credibility.

The Commission interacted with citizens to understand their needs and satisfy their rights, to the point where thousands of social organizations and victims of the violence felt that this transitory institution belonged to them. Such a feeling of ownership of a public institution by civil society has rarely been seen in Colombia.

Secondly, as it is an inclusive entity, the Commission was an example of a new social contract between public institutions and citizens, based on the guarantee of rights, in this case to the historic truth of the nearly nine million officially registered victims, and of the country as a whole.

On the one hand, the entity designed an institutional setup in line with the lessons learnt from similar processes around the world, incorporating innovative procedures in accordance

with its mandate, and including the use of information and communication technology before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, it incorporated qualified public servants who were committed to the task and aware of the quality and importance of civilian peers and partners for meeting its mandate.

The Truth Commission is an invitation to all public entities to change their institutional setups and adapt them in order to, as stated by the Administrative Department of Public Service, "make available the instruments, channels and resources necessary to interact with citizens and satisfy their requests, complaints, claims, and suggestions, under principles of rationality, efficiency, efficacy, opportunity and transparency, guaranteeing the effective enjoyment of their rights".

Thirdly, the Commission is an example of political, ethical and democratic leadership, with the impeccable conduct of its staff and the worthy, honest and loyal performance of the public servants, with an interest in the individual and integrity in management of resources.

The Commission shows us that the importance of ethics can (and should) be observed in institutional decision-making processes, such that people's rights and the ecosystems upon which life depends are never put at risk.

Today, Father Francisco De Roux and the commissioners are ethical and moral examples in a country that needs its leaders to once again take on the va-

lue of human dignity and the need for constructing a new, 'other-based' view that allows us to accept each other's differences and reinforce Colombia's cultural diversity as the motor and basis for building the country. In its widest sense, this is the collaborative governance that is needed to unite efforts in favor of Colombia's progress.

More importantly, the Truth Commission's four years make clear the need to formulate a national public policy of social dialogue that is observed by national and territorial institutions, in order to interact with civil society and the private sector to deal with the structural problems that block development and peaceful coexistence in our beloved country.

▶ WATCH THIS SPACE HERE:  
<https://youtu.be/n15vzga94yc>





## THE “SEREMOS” INITIATIVE: WORKING WITH THE NETWORK OF ALLIES:

**T**his section began with the presentation of and interaction with the digital resource created by the Truth Commission:

[www.comisiondelaverdad.co](http://www.comisiondelaverdad.co)

This platform contains the country’s largest human rights archive, with sections bursting with data and audiovisual resources that can be discovered time and again on this website, which makes up the historic memory of Colombia’s armed conflict, the resistance of the victims and a whole nation, the support of the international community, the work carried out by the Truth Commission, the Final Report

and the Legacy; as well as the section “What’s next?”, within which you can find the section titled “Working with the Network of Allies”.

This section outlines the configuration of the network of partners in support of the pedagogy, spreading and implementation of the Commission’s Legacy: what year they joined, their type (civil society, institution, academia etc), their profile in terms of regions and topics (including partners in exile). It is a window that not only acknowledges the network of partners but also seeks to promote their cooperation and synergies.

This was followed by the presentation of the initiative of a group of allies (Institute of Intercultural Studies of the Javeriana University in Cali, Corporación Viva la Ciudadanía, Asociación Civil Memoria Abierta, UNDP and Avina Foundation), called “Seremos: Seguimiento a las Recomendaciones desde la Movilización Social” (“We will be: Following up on the recommendations from mass mobilization”).

“Seremos” is a virtual and social citizen mobilization and material dissemination platform focusing on the Truth Commission’s Legacy, that seeks to have an impact on the compliance with the Final Report’s recommendations through the promotion of a culture of peace and social transformation in the country. The name “Seremos” (We will be) is an acronym of the full title of the initiative; it is easier to remember and is a word that expresses hope and inclusion.

Its components are: i) Applied knowledge: observatory, bulletin, geographic information system; ii) Pedagogy: appropriation and dissemination of the tools and methodologies left behind by the Truth Commission; iii) Joint management of human, technical, technological and financial resources.

According to Malva González, from the Javeriana University in Cali, the idea came from one of the Truth Commission’s meeting spaces called ‘Fridays with Partners’, which, over several months, carried out a mass virtual summons to strengthen this network and present different elements of the Commission’s Legacy, focusing on the following questions: Once the Commission is finished,



what will the partners do with the Report, its recommendations and the rest of the Legacy? What is our joint responsibility as partners, both those on the ground and organizations, and how do we coordinate the work that has been going on since the Commission began its work?

“We analyzed the examples of other commissions around the world and their experience after the completion of their mandate, and we found that, aside from the follow-up committees that might be installed, the work of organizations is fundamental for social cohesion, especially regionally. In Colombia we thought particularly about following up on mass mobilization with regards to the Legacy and we landed on this initiative of a social platform that connects actions and generates dialogue”, explains González.

For Santiago Sánchez, from Avina Foundation, “Seremos” wants to support the road to real social change after the Commission, which has already been compared to other experiences which show that it could take two decades or more. Sánchez spoke about the initiative’s steps:

“First, we want to know who does what and where, with regards to the Commission’s recommendations, to then be able to coordinate them to ensure they do not turn into scattered, disperse actions. Secondly, we look for synergies and try to ensure that the network of partners begins to weave its web in all territories.

“The third step is ensuring that civil society and social organizations identify the critical roadmap for the implementation of the recommendations, understanding that this makes up part of a process of historic transformation. Finally, we aim to maintain the transformation actions carried out by society in the territories and make them sustainable.

“This needs the pedagogy, appropriation and spreading of all of the methodologies and tools left behind by the Commission, which we have described as something ‘immeasurable’ for one human being. It requires the participation of many people and organizations, in a network. Through the platform, we will attempt to join human, technical, technological and financial resources to

promote these synergies, with the effectiveness that comes from having lots of people joining forces. Because ‘the more people we are, the more we will be’.” ■

<https://www.seremos.co/>  
 Correo-e: [contacto@seremos.co](mailto:contacto@seremos.co)

SEE THE PRESENTATION OF WORKING WITH THE NETWORK OF ALLIES HERE: [https://youtu.be/\\_rgoUTNr4Oo](https://youtu.be/_rgoUTNr4Oo)





# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR **NON- REPETITION** AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION



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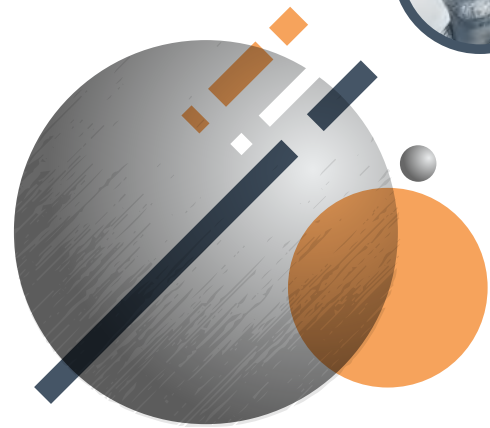
TRUTH COMMISSIONER

TOPIC

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NON-REPETITION AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION



POB MARK FREEMAN  
DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE FOR INTEGRATED TRANSITIONS (IFIT)



I had the honor of being in Havana for a year and a half as one of the Colombian government delegation's two independent advisors on the point relating to victims in the Peace Agreement with the Farc-ep. For this task, negotiating the mandate of a future truth commission was a central point. In this regard, here I will share some considerations on what international experience tells us about the implementation of the recommendations for non-repetition.

Over the last 50 years, there have been dozens of truth commissions in various regions across the world. However, given their contexts, they are all different, which is why there are some elements and conditions of the Colombian model that I would like to highlight before making reference to international experiences. These are the conditions that, together, make the Colombian commission truly unique, and which are relevant to the topic of recommendations for non-repetition.

**COLOMBIA'S TRUTH COMMISSION MAKES UP PART OF A WIDER, GLOBAL PROJECT THAT OUTLIVES THE COMMISSION, ONE THAT CONTINUES, IS FRAMED BY AND ADDS TO THE PROCESS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS.**

## EXCEPTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF COLOMBIA'S TRUTH COMMISSION

**1** Colombia's Truth Commission makes up part of a wider, global project that outlives the Commission, one that continues, is framed by and adds to the process of the implementation of the recommendations. While there are other truth commissions that have been born out of a peace agreement (for example in Guatemala, El Salvador, Sierra Leone and Aceh), the majority of commissions around the world do not make up part of a peace agreement that includes mechanisms for laying down arms or institutional reform, among other aspects that were considered during negotiations.

**2** Colombia's Truth Commission is part of a Comprehensive System of Transitional Justice, in which the various mechanisms complement each other and share a role in terms of the response to the rights of victims and society. Therefore, this is not a commission that needs to fill in gaps in justice or create from scratch the guidelines for searching for missing people or for reparations.

This fact constitutes an important asset for the Truth Commission, which, in qualitative terms, is unparalleled on a global scale (with certain exceptions, such as South Africa, Timor-Leste or Tunisia). At the same time, this fact implies some challenges in terms of reconfiguring what should happen within the Comprehensive System after the end of the Truth Commission's mandate. However, these are challenges which were foreseen from the outset of the inception and design of the System, and these challenges can also spawn new opportunities in terms of strengthening the other components.

3 As well as having carried out an impressive job in less than four years, the Truth Commission was able to take advantage of and build on the lessons learnt from prior experiences on a national level, such as the 'Justice and Peace' process and the development

**FEW TRUTH COMMISSIONS IN THE WORLD HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED IN A COUNTRY WITH SO MUCH PRIOR EXPERIENCE AND SUCH AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK IN ISSUES OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE. THIS IS WITHOUT DOUBT AN IMPORTANT STRUCTURAL SUPPORT FOR WHAT COMES NEXT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION STAGE.**

of the Victims' Law and its mechanisms. Few truth commissions in the world have been established in a country with so much prior experience and such an institutional framework in issues of Transitional Justice. This is without doubt an important structural support for what comes next in the implementation stage.

4 It is worth highlighting the strength and organizational capabilities of Colombian civil society and victims' associations. The organization and know-how that these actors have developed were key in supporting the Truth Commission and will continue to be so for the implementation of its recommendations. Again, very few commissions in the world have had local partners with these characteristics and who also, in the Colombian context, added to the active role of a dedicated international community offering financial and political support to the development of this peacebuilding ecosystem.

5 The installation of the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee also constitutes an exceptional characteristic of Colombia's Truth Commission. In spite of its relevance, this is not a systematic practice on an international level. While those who receive and implement recommendations are public entities and society as a whole, a follow-up committee has, without doubt, plenty of value in overseeing the process of implementation. This was not, nor should it be, seen as a second Commission. Its greatest asset lies in being able to have a dialogue with those who make judgement calls on implementation and with those who are responsible for communicating the development of this process to the nation.

6 Finally, as was the case in very few comparative occasions (Argentina, Morocco and Ghana), Colombia's Truth Commission delivered its Final Report in a favorable political context for its recommendations. This fact presents an unprecedented opportunity: instead of focusing its efforts on facing a government that is opposed to its Legacy, the Commission can focus on ensuring its recommendations materialize effectively. That is not ignoring the risk that they can be politicized or sectorized, and the importance of trying to ensure that the implementation is more inclusive in order to reduce, not increase, polarization.

### LESSONS LEARNT FROM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

As part of the recommendations for non-repetition and their implementation in the Colombian context, the following are three lessons learnt from international experience:

1 Anticipating the challenges of numerous recommendations. Faced with the complexity of the legacy of long periods of war or repression, most truth commissions make multiple recommendations, which usually negatively affects the perception of the effectiveness of their implementation. In order to mitigate this eventuality, the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee and civil society should concentrate on prioritizing the qualitative criteria already formulated by the Truth Commission in its Final Report.

2 Ensuring the decentralization of the implementation of recommendations. Instead of placing responsibility solely in the hands of

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the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee that follows the Truth Commission, it would be more appropriate to support an inclusive process that promotes the empowerment of civil society's role in the recommendations. The Monitoring and Follow-up Committee can formulate some suggestions on first steps and the essential actions to be carried out, while also complementing civil society's leadership.

**3** Recognizing the potential that media outlets have for promoting ownership of the recommendations on a social level and driving their implementation. The point here is to recognize the importance of the media in creating and molding narratives. The strategy for those who want to see more implementation, not less, cannot be limited to dissemination sessions, media training and infographics.

If we want to achieve implementation and non-repetition, the effort must capture the most powerful voices that model society's discourse. To do that, it is important to build a clear strategy for contacting a wide spectrum of journalists to seek relationships that contribute to a greater understanding of the wider objective that underlines the implementation of the recommendations.

**THE MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE AND CIVIL SOCIETY SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON PRIORITIZING THE QUALITATIVE CRITERIA ALREADY FORMULATED BY THE TRUTH COMMISSION IN ITS FINAL REPORT.**

**INSTEAD OF PLACING RESPONSIBILITY SOLELY IN THE HANDS OF THE MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE THAT FOLLOWS THE TRUTH COMMISSION, IT WOULD BE MORE APPROPRIATE TO SUPPORT AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS THAT PROMOTES THE EMPOWERMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE IN THE RECOMMENDATIONS.**

## CONCLUSIONS

Colombia has a whole host of exceptional comparative advantages in terms of the implementation of recommendations for non-repetition. The Truth Commission, and now the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee, make up part of the Comprehensive System and have influential, expert partners, as well as a new government that supports the recommendations.

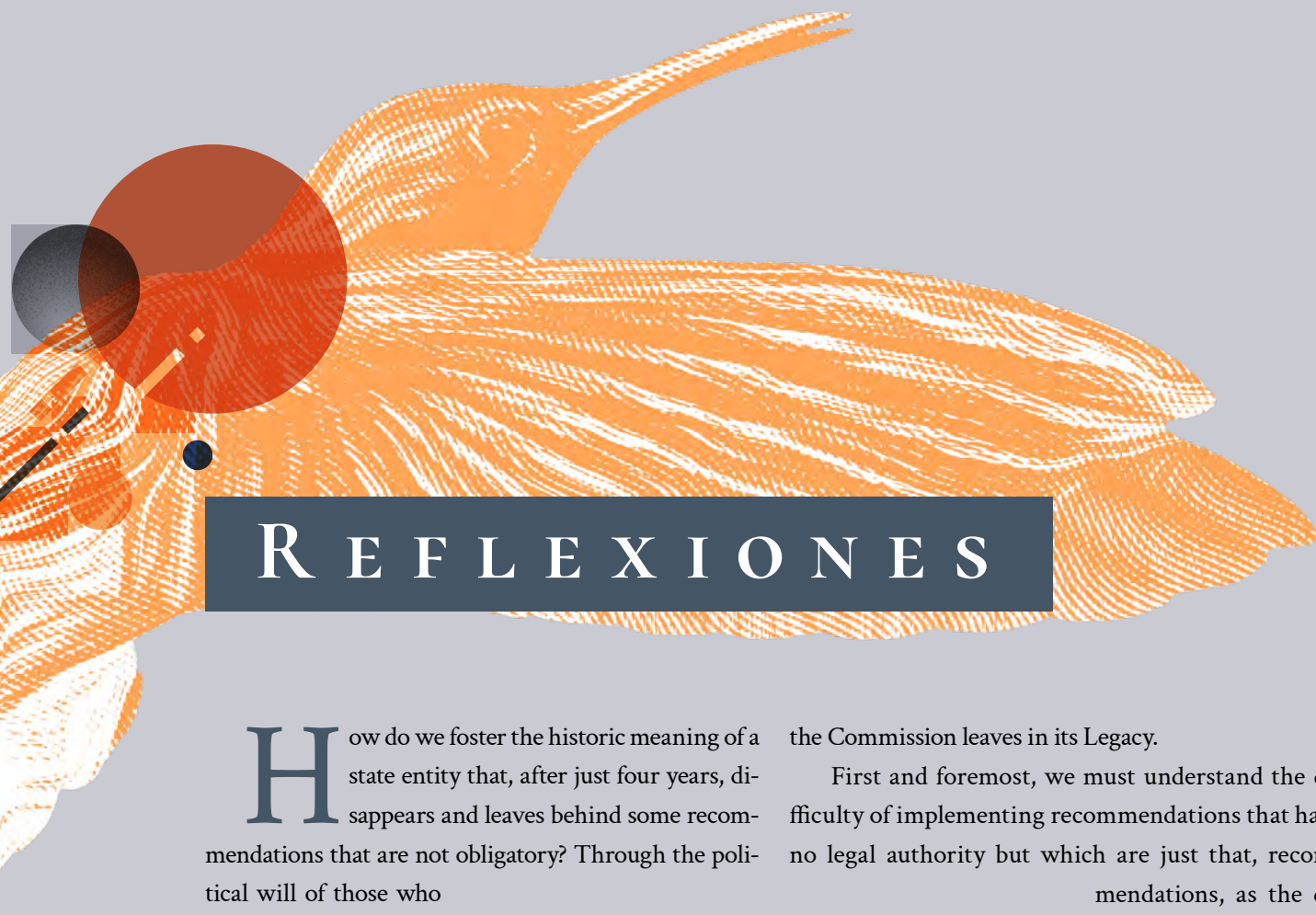
In this context, it is essential to remember the importance of thinking in the long-term, recognizing the challenges of implementing recommendations in a polarized context, in which actions that are implemented today could be cancelled tomorrow.

Today, Colombia has the opportunity to prioritize the implementation of a politically balanced mix of recommendations that contribute to the construction of the path towards a national pact on coexistence, towards a culture of peace, and towards non-repetition.

**IT IS ESSENTIAL TO REMEMBER THE IMPORTANCE OF THINKING IN THE LONG-TERM, RECOGNIZING THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS IN A POLARIZED CONTEXT, IN WHICH ACTIONS THAT ARE IMPLEMENTED TODAY COULD BE CANCELLED TOMORROW.**

**IF WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IMPLEMENTATION AND NON-REPETITION, THE EFFORT MUST CAPTURE THE MOST POWERFUL VOICES THAT MODEL SOCIETY'S DISCOURSE. TO DO THAT, IT IS IMPORTANT TO BUILD A CLEAR STRATEGY FOR CONTACTING A WIDE SPECTRUM OF JOURNALISTS TO SEEK RELATIONSHIPS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE WIDER OBJECTIVE THAT UNDERLINES THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS.**





# REFLEXIONES

How do we foster the historic meaning of a state entity that, after just four years, disappears and leaves behind some recommendations that are not obligatory? Through the political will of those who govern and a civil network of partners, both people and organizations, who promote the recommendations' inclusion in legislation and public policies. The keys are: coordination and follow-up. Those are the conclusions of the 'Recommendations for Non-repetition and their Implementation' space, in which civil society organizations that supported the Truth Commission's work, as well as commissioners and members of the Monitoring Committee, analyzed the future of the recommendations and interpretations that

the Commission leaves in its Legacy.

First and foremost, we must understand the difficulty of implementing recommendations that have no legal authority but which are just that, recommendations, as the director of CERAC, Jorge Restrepo claims. Skepticism seems harsh, but it is healthy, because it lands us on the need to develop tolerance to frustration in a political setting that today seems favorable but which is ever-changing. Neither the state or the government are united or stable establishments. In Colombia in particular, there is a lack of a feeling of belonging between citizens and the state, when in fact they are one and the same: the citizens make up part of the state and they have rights within it.

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So, the challenge of permeating the various layers of society with the essence of the recommendations can largely be taken on in the educational process, which should focus on new forms of justice that are instilled from the classroom: less punitive and more restorative. There should be a sense of reparation and not punishment in the spirit of teaching as well as in cultural practices, as suggested by Óscar Sánchez, the director of Educapaz, who was on the handover committee for the new government.

The Commission's recommendations must not be politicized or used as banners by one party or another in the hunt for votes or governability. Their implementation must not depend on the government of the moment, but rather on coordination or union between the regional governmental and legislative entities: mayor's offices, local governments, assemblies and councils. Armando Wouriyú, from the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee, widens the need for this coordination vision to nomadic groups, minorities and a cultural indigenous focus that favors the political role of women in a different way to the traditional Western concept. Such coordination must pass through national and regional laws and budget agreements, because the essence of the recommendations for non-repetition requires funding in order to hit the ground and generate real changes in the territories, and not simply remain in legal articles, which the country is saturated with.

Julia Cogollo, another member of the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee, who understands the problem of the recent Colombian violence as a result of being a displaced victim from the Montes de María region, highlights related problems. She explains that the causes of the conflict still exist. There is a social fracture that makes the governability of the territorial entities envisioned by the Constitution weak or non-existent. The conflict over land, over economic means, over social control of ethnic minorities or vulnerable sectors of the population, all continue. That is one of the reasons why assassinations

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and violent events continue, in spite of the apparent favorable political climate for the reconstruction of a peace process that was held up for so long as a result of the pandemic and the contrary political will of the previous government.

For Mark Freeman of the Institute for Integrated Transitions, part of the Commission's network of partners on an international level, it is important to review the role of the media in the construction of new narratives of recent history, in light of the amount of experience that the country is accumulating in Transitional Justice, an example for the world.

That would be the most suitable way to ensure that Colombian society takes ownership of the recommendations that aim for the so-called 'total peace', which seeks a harmonic understanding between all sectors of society. That is the conclusion of the Commissioner Saúl Franco, who believes it is necessary to integrate all political and cultural sectors, as opposing as they might be, in the greater national goal of total peace or the greater peace.

The following are highlighted excerpts of the statements of the voices gathered in this discussion space on the Commission's recommendations,

moderated by María Camila Moreno, Colombia Director of the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), which makes up part of the Truth Commission's network of partners. She began by stating that "when the Commission began its work, it was faced with the most complicated setting, but after four years the situation has turned around completely and we are in the best political moment for it to continue. We have a window of opportunity that we have not seen in 200 years of republican history. In such a context, what boosts and what hinders the implementation of these recommendations?"



### JORGE RESTREPO

We need to work out how to coordinate the recommendations with public policy programs and with the commitments of the Final Peace Agreement. We have to give this government and the next the appropriate coordination elements. Today, we have some favorable elements, such as the political will of the Colombian president and the president of Congress, as well as unfavorable one, such as the absence of serious opposition. Democratic divergence is healthy for identifying which of the recommendations have limitations with regards to their deployment. Another negative element or limitation is the budget. The economic situations are going to be extremely adverse for putting new public policy programs in place, such as reforms to the security sector, national plans for the substitution of illicit crops, and the entire Comprehensive Rural Reform; these are all costly and represent a necessary, fundamental change.

THE ECONOMIC SITUATIONS ARE GOING TO BE EXTREMELY ADVERSE FOR PUTTING NEW PUBLIC POLICY PROGRAMS IN PLACE, SUCH AS REFORMS TO THE SECURITY SECTOR, NATIONAL PLANS FOR THE SUBSTITUTION OF ILLICIT CROPS, AND THE ENTIRE COMPREHENSIVE RURAL REFORM; THESE ARE ALL COSTLY AND REPRESENT A NECESSARY, FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REVIEW THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW NARRATIVES OF RECENT HISTORY, IN LIGHT OF THE AMOUNT OF EXPERIENCE THAT THE COUNTRY IS ACCUMULATING IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE, AN EXAMPLE FOR THE WORLD.



### ÓSCAR SÁNCHEZ

If we hear the president say that he is going to follow the Commission's recommendations to the letter, we should also be optimistic to the letter. The state is complicated, and the context in which the state-citizenship relationship moves is confrontational. In Colombia, it is difficult to conceive that citizens are part of the state. As a citizen, you are part of the state, but people feel like the state is one thing and citizenship is another; that is what political thinkers from different eras defined as the difference between the political country and the national country. If we don't manage to reach a state-citizenship symbiosis, we had better start to cut down on that optimism.

One challenge is to understand, as Mark Freeman says, communication as power, and ensure that media outlets understand these new dialogues. The recommendations of the Commission wisely guide us to look towards the media, to the churches, to the narratives and sensitivity that come from artistic expressions, that touch the spirit.

Another challenge is to think of education in various dimensions. One of those is the so-called "Education in order to grow". This refers to social and emotional education, civic education and education for reconciliation. That is where reconciliation and the armed conflict reside.

IN COLOMBIA, IT IS DIFFICULT TO CONCEIVE THAT CITIZENS ARE PART OF THE STATE. AS A CITIZEN, YOU ARE PART OF THE STATE, BUT PEOPLE FEEL LIKE THE STATE IS ONE THING AND CITIZENSHIP IS ANOTHER; THAT IS WHAT POLITICAL THINKERS FROM DIFFERENT ERAS DEFINED AS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE POLITICAL COUNTRY AND THE NATIONAL COUNTRY.

*If we hear the president say that he is going to follow the Commission's recommendations to the letter, we should also be optimistic to the letter.*



## SAÚL FRANCO

We did not pull the recommendations out of thin air. They were born out of the population, from the people who we spoke to and the reports they delivered to us. We received approximately 10,000 recommendations, which we had to prioritize and flesh out in order to create an organic collection of suggestions.

Given that nobody won the war in a military sense, and usually the military winner imposes the truth, it was Colombian society that won the right to the truth. Therefore, the truth that we are offering in this ten-volume Report and the entire Legacy, is not that of a government or an armed or social actor; it is Colombian society's truth. The recommendations are by and for Colombian society. The Commission's overarching aim is to ensure that the entirety of society is committed to peace; that peace is a national aim.

The current government and those that follow must openly commit to the implementation and ensure that it is viable within their means and the historic processes that are required; because 60 years of war cannot change in just one term of government.

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## JULIA COGOLLO

The Monitoring and Follow-up Committee needs plenty of backing, and proper legitimacy, on a national level, in the territories, in the communities, in the organizations and within institutions. This initial legitimacy must come from the network of partners, which will place its trust, just as the plenary session of the Commission did, in us as the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee. They need to be sure that we are going to be working with the regions, with a two-way dialogue that permits coordination.

Implementation is less important than coordination. It is vital for the government and the network of partners to coordinate these recommendations in their agendas. The members of the network need to be our first accomplices in positioning the Committee, in order to comply with the recommendations.

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## ARMANDO WOURIYÚ

The Agreement in Havana was made in front of all the United Nations entities, which makes it a document that boasts universal guarantees for immediate compliance. Thus, the fundamental recommendation of this Monitoring and Follow-up Committee is fulfilling the Peace Agreement, with a clear objective outlined: future justice. Guaranteeing the lives of future generations. That is the first challenge, and it is a big one.

The Monitoring and Follow-up Committee's priority is working territorially. Speaking with institutions, making clear and concrete proposals to be included in the National Development Plan Law, the multi-annual investment plans and then the General National Budget.

The most hard-hit communities in Colombia are the nomadic ones, who were robbed of all their living space. We have to acknowledge that historic debt, that political debt, and be aware of the budget being developed by legislative powers for agrarian reform and the law on empty plots.

We have to acknowledge a social family structure based on women and the understanding that a nomadic family in the plains is not the same as a nomadic Yukpa family in the Caribbean. The social structure of a nomadic family on the Pacific coast is not the same as the social structure of a nomadic family in the Colombian Amazon. That is fundamental, because it will lead to the objective, real, spiritual, philosophical, ideological and

political recognition of what it is to be part of an indigenous community, an Afro-Colombian community, a Raizal (from the islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina) community; and to the rights to land of rural women. All that is differential. That is the fundamental thing that needs to be governed, and it needs to be made clear in a pedagogic fashion to the legislative, executive and judicial powers.

**THE MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE'S PRIORITY IS WORKING TERRITORIALLY. SPEAKING WITH INSTITUTIONS, MAKING CLEAR AND CONCRETE PROPOSALS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN LAW, THE MULTI-ANNUAL INVESTMENT PLANS AND THEN THE GENERAL NATIONAL BUDGET.**



## MARÍA CAMILA MORENO:

One of the most powerful recommendations of the Final Report refers to total peace, the same that the new government talks about, as one of its objectives, even in the short-term. We tend to think of total peace as a peace with all the armed actors, from the ELN to criminal organizations. It might be useful to start to talk about a comprehensive peace, a peace not only with armed actors, but the one that the Final Report proposes, born from the roots of society for this and future generations. What does that idea mean to you?

## JORGE RESTREPO:

The key question is how to follow up on these recommendations, always with an eye on non-repetition. Monitoring these recommendations should be seen as a process, not as an end itself or as a quantifiable goal. It should be a process that involves ownership and coordination with the public policies designed by this and the next government, with an understanding that these recommendations have limitations in terms of the impact they can have.

## ÓSCAR SÁNCHEZ:

The Peace Agreement has a defining nucleus: the ethical meaning of Transitional Justice, which, for the purpose of human learning, is reflected in two ideas; the idea of truth and the idea of restoration as an alternative to punishment and the simple distribution of powers.

When you ask a child or teenager what justice is in their daily life, they will say something along the lines of: “if I smoke in the bathroom, I will be suspended for two days and my mother will be called”. It would be great if we could carry out a process to explain that smoking in secret is harmful to their health and to coexistence. Then we would enter into an ethical analysis that later facilitates the question of why a society at war, like the Colombian one, decided to carry out a restorative process based on truth and the acknowledgement of victims. It is the same ethical idea.

WHEN YOU ASK A CHILD OR TEENAGER WHAT JUSTICE IS IN THEIR DAILY LIFE, THEY WILL SAY SOMETHING ALONG THE LINES OF: “IF I SMOKE IN THE BATHROOM, I WILL BE SUSPENDED FOR TWO DAYS AND MY MOTHER WILL BE CALLED”. IT WOULD BE GREAT IF WE COULD CARRY OUT A PROCESS TO EXPLAIN THAT SMOKING IN SECRET IS HARMFUL TO THEIR HEALTH AND TO COEXISTENCE.

## JULIA COGOLLO

One of the major impacts of the armed conflict in the territories was the fragmentation of the social fabric: it divided territories and communities and led to the assignation of blame. And this continues. Furthermore, rural and ethnic communities lost the power of governability, the power of authority. They lost their power of self-governance, and conflict resolution was left in the hands of armed actors.

We have to review the impacts of the conflict on public policies associated to land, the fragmentation of the territories, the impact on women and the current self-governance situation in the territories with ancestral authorities, such that we can grasp what it was and what was lost, so that we can truly rebuild it.

RURAL AND ETHNIC COMMUNITIES LOST THE POWER OF GOVERNABILITY, THE POWER OF AUTHORITY. THEY LOST THEIR POWER OF SELF-GOVERNANCE, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION WAS LEFT IN THE HANDS OF ARMED ACTORS.

## ARMANDO WOURIYÚ

The greatest challenge for peace is unlearning. Unlearning is not easy. In Western logic, the short-term vision clouds the fact that every step we take today has an impact on future life. We need to refresh the concepts and teaching methods of our 450,000 teachers in order to narrate other possible histories in the long-term, geared towards protecting life.

## SAÚL FRANCO

We have said in every way possible that, if peace is not territorial, it is not peace. And that means that the territories should be present and participate in decisive policies. The problem of drug trafficking also needs to be looked at, because it is a very important and persistent factor right now.

We also need to take nature into account; as demonstrated in the Report, it has not only been the setting for the war, but also a victim of it. We must reclaim nature’s rights and remove it from the war.

And finally, we need to foster a culture of peace that leads to a transformation in values and attitudes. To take peace to the heart of the problems created by war, so that it can try to resolve them, and penetrate all levels of daily, social and political life. Then we will be on the right path to total peace or a greater peace. ■

# ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY: THE TRUTH COMMISSION'S LEGACY FOR COLOMBIA AND THE WORLD

BY **MARÍA CAMILA MORENO M.**  
DIRECTOR OF ICTJ COLOMBIA

Since the 1980s, various countries have resorted to truth commissions in order to face the serious human rights violations committed in the context of dictatorships or armed conflicts. In order to establish a truth that recognizes phenomena such as socio-political violence, and as a legitimate exercise for the victims to seek and receive information, different contexts have seen the setting up of investigative commissions, truth trials and ethical truth commissions, among other strategies.

Yet it is the truth commissions that have been consolidating themselves as the primary mechanism for shedding light on the nonjudicial truth of the atrocities of the past, recognized as such by the United Nations System<sup>13</sup>. Jurisprudence, doctrine and the field of law coincide in considering the right to the truth part of the comprehensive reparation for victims of violations of human rights.

According to the International Center for Transitional Justice, "Truth commissions are official, nonjudicial bodies of a limited duration established

to determine the facts, causes, and consequences of past human rights violations. By giving special attention to testimonies, they provide victims with recognition, often after prolonged periods of social stigmatization and skepticism. Truth commissions can contribute to prosecutions and reparations through their findings and recommendations, assist divided societies to overcome a culture of silence and distrust, and help to identify institutional reforms needed to prevent new violations"<sup>14</sup>.

Colombia's Truth Commission was designed

looking at the international experiences of prior truth commissions and incorporating the lessons of previous national processes. The mandate of determining the facts covered the violations committed by the perpetrating armed and civilian actors, with emphasis on those violations that reflected patterns or that occurred en masse. Furthermore, the Commission had to determine collective responsibilities, allowing it to make progress in establishing truth that not only permits an exercise of understanding but also of an institutional ack-

13. United Nations (UN). Rule-of-law tools for post-conflict states. Truth commissions. New York and Geneva, 2006.

14. International Center for Transitional Justice. Truth Seeking: Elements of Creating an Effective Truth Commission. Ed. Eduardo González and Howard Varney. New York, 2013.

**SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE TRUTH DOES NOT REPLACE THE OBLIGATION TO INVESTIGATE SERIOUS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW, TRY THOSE RESPONSIBLE AND SANCTION THOSE FOUND GUILTY.**

nowledgement of the violations<sup>15</sup>.

Other tasks included in Decree Law 588 of 2017, which regulates the Commission, include the promotion of peaceful coexistence and non-repetition. According to this decree, the Commission should coordinate its work with the peacebuilding measures being carried out in the territories. The decree also stipulates that the Commission should promote coexistence, ensuring that the spaces or hearings it carries out act to strengthen respect and tolerance. Finally, the decree stipulated that the Commission should present conclusions and recommendations in its Final Report.

It is worth highlighting the creation of the Commission's Monitoring and Follow-up Committee. Some international examples show that, once the Final Report has been delivered, the truth commissions tend to dissolve, without defining a specific organism or institution responsible for following

up on the compliance with its recommendations. In the case of the Commission, the creation of the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee is very much the correct decision.

Equally, it is worth highlighting the appropriateness of the extrajudicial character that the decree gave the Commission.

Thus it positioned itself and acknowledged the value of truth in itself as a contribution to the reparations and dignity for victims and as a complement to the judicial truth. The truth obtained by the Commission, or acknowledged before it, cannot be transferred to judicial processes carried out by the Jep, or for determining responsibilities in a penal sense. However, the decree stipulated that the participation of the perpetrators of the violations in the Commission can be taken into account in order to obtain benefits in the Jep. This jurisdiction, as a judicial mechanism of the Comprehensive System for Peace, is based on proving the legal responsibilities and not on building a narrative of the victims or a context that has a more complete social or political meaning for them.

An advantage of this differentiation is that the Commission did not have to attend to legal requirements, that often end up being a distraction or even obstruction for a commission. It is equally important that the Decree established that anything revealed to the Commission could not be used to incriminate the person making the statement or confession in the Jep. This is relevant, given that it does not imply that the person giving their testimony before the Commission is exempt from any criminal responsibility or cannot be the subject of a judicial investigation coming under the state's international obligations, that state that shedding light on the truth does not replace the obligation to investigate serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, try those responsi-

ble and sanction those found guilty.

This has been noted by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, that concludes that it recognizes the importance of the work of commissions in terms of the collective construction of the truth, but that it considers it appropriate to specify that the 'historic truth' contained in the reports of said commissions cannot substitute the state's obligation to ascertain the truth through legal processes<sup>16</sup>.

After four years of grueling work, on June 28, 2022, the Commission presented the country with the long-awaited Final Report, which is made up of several volumes and almost 10,000 pages. This Report is a landmark in a long journey to shed light on the truth and construct memory in the country, because it achieves an articulated and comprehensive narrative that describes and explains the factors that caused, and have aided with the persistence of, the Colombian armed conflict. It is worth highlighting, for example, the historic narrative volume *Thou shalt not kill*, which very accurately takes politics as a common thread, to explain how political parties and elites, and their decisions for more than 50 years, shaped a 'made-to-measure' state that would meet their interests. The attempted reforms that could have avoided the deepening or lengthening of the armed conflict have been, until now, blocked, sabotaged or delayed by conservatives, who have been more interested in perpetuating the status quo than in encouraging the inclusive development of the country.

Beyond the figure on the amount of testimonies received or events carried out by the Commission, that have been widely spread across the media, it is worth highlighting the acknowledgment of responsibility as one of its main achievements, not only for Colombia's process of Transitional Justice but also for future truth commissions around the world.

**ACKNOWLEDGING RESPONSIBILITY**

The acknowledgment of responsibility is carved into the paradigm of restorative justice, understood as an approach that offers the perpetrators, victims and communities an alternative path to justice, based on a humanist perspective. Crime is seen as a conflict that causes the breakup of symbolically shared social ideals, such the need to try to build reciprocal, conscientious and responsible actions that can once again give meaning to the ties between the parties.

In terms of its objectives, restorative justice seeks to: i) support victims, give them a voice, hear their story, encourage them to express their needs and desires; ii) prevent recurrence by fostering change in the perpetrators and facilitating their reintegration into the community; iii) encourage the acknowledgment of responsibility by all parties; iv) repair damaged relationships; v) identify restorative and prospective results that reduce further harm; vi) reaffirm community values, and vii) generate new forms of coexistence under democratic principles.

Over the nearly four years of its mandate, the Commission carried out 68 acknowledgment processes that culminated in public, semi-public or private events. The acknowledgment strategy included three complementary and related prongs:

The first involved the Truth Encounters, which included the participation solely of victims and focused on giving them dignity. In these encounters, the Commission acknowledged the damages and impacts suffered by the victims, as well as their confrontations and resistance. Equally, it questioned society's normalization of violence and reminded perpetrators of the importance of recognition.

The second prong involved the processes in

15. Decree Law 588 of 2017.

16. Inter-American Court of Human Rights. *Almonacid Arellano et al v. Chile*. Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgement of September 26, 2006. Series C.No. 154. Paragraphs 149 and 150.

which both victims and perpetrators participated. In these spaces too, the victims were acknowledged and dignified, with the participation of perpetrators who acknowledged their violations and infractions of international humanitarian law.

In these processes of acknowledgement of responsibility, the former Farc-ep guerrilla had the greatest participation levels, with 62 acknowledgements by 50 signatories to the Peace Agreement. They were followed by the armed forces, with 27 acknowledgements by 20 former members of the army and two former police officers. Fifteen ex-combatants from the Auc paramilitary squad made 21 acknowledgements, while there were two from the EPL guerrilla and one from former ELN guerrilla combatants.

The acknowledgment processes did not always culminate in public events. At least 18 were private or semi-public (with no live transmission) and were shared as news items on the Commission's website, with audiovisual material and other documents<sup>17</sup>. The Commission promoted encounters between parties with differing points of view that would have been extremely unlikely a few years ago, and that put in play a variety of human dimensions: emotional, symbolic, pedagogic and political.

The acknowledgments revolved around recognizing and underlining the dignity of the victims, based on the understanding that, even though dignity is not lost, the affronts suffered affected the self-confidence of the victims, created moral wounds that are hard to endure, and had an impact on their relationships with others, society and institutions. Success depended on the process's capacity to gather and respond to the questions put forward by the victims. When that was not possible, the moderators and perpetrators had to show the victims that they understood why those

questions were so important to them.

The Commission's experience provides various lessons on how to carry out acknowledgment processes with a restorative approach. Here we highlight four:

**1** The adoption of the restorative approach in Transitional Justice mechanisms, such as the Commission's acknowledgement strategies, demonstrates that empathetic dialogue between victims and perpetrators is a realistic path towards peacebuilding. This approach can contribute to non-repetition, the construction of new citizenships based on peace and coexistence, and the prevention of new cycles of violence.

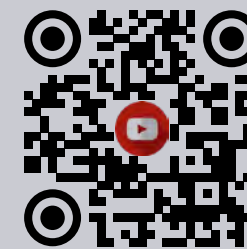
**2** Acknowledgements must be seen as processes of emotional, cognitive and ethical dialogue that require the generation of intimate spaces where the victims and perpetrators can lay out their perspectives, with the aim of finding common ground and weaving the truth. These processes do not have as their sole purpose forgiveness and reconciliation. They show that it is possible to recognize each other's dynamics, humanity and differences in order to have a more solid base on which to build a joint vision of the country.

**3** The processes must identify the narratives and messages that they want to share with the various parties and society. The Commission identified four general messages: i) acknowledgement as a form of reparation; ii) acknowledgement as a way of dig-

nifying the parties; iii) acknowledgement as a way of progressing towards non-repetition, and iv) acknowledgement as a tool for coexisting amidst differences.

**4** It is important for the processes to take into account symbolic and linguistic factors. The former help to identify who participated emotionally, promote an atmosphere of listening, coming together and healing, and permit reflections of the past, present and future. For their part, words have emotional, personal, social and political meanings; without agreeing on what to call things, it is difficult to progress to a restorative encounter. One way to witness the transformation of the parties is to observe how their forms of expressing themselves change over the course of the process. ■

▶ WATCH THIS SPACE HERE:  
<https://youtu.be/5gIrF-jxb20>



17. As an example, the Commission published the piece entitled "Why did they take away our children? The question posed by the women of Argelia to alias 'Karina'", which showed the private acknowledgement process of Elda Neyis Mosquera (known in the former Farc-ep as 'Karina') with mothers from Argelia, Antioquia, victims of recruitment and disappearance of their children; September 24, 2021.

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE TRUTH COMMISSION AND THE COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR PEACE TO THE PRACTICE OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE



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**STEFAN PETERS**  
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## MODERATOR

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**HELENA URÁN**  
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**LUZ MARINA MONZÓN**  
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PEACE SIGNATORY, FORMER MEMBER OF THE FARC-EP SECRETARIAT, FORMER MEMBER OF CONGRES



**FRANCISCO DE ROUX**  
PRESIDENT OF THE TRUTH COMMISSION

TOPIC

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE TRUTH COMMISSION AND THE COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR PEACE TO THE PRACTICE OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE



By **STEFAN PETERS**

DIRECTOR OF THE GERMAN-COLOMBIAN PEACE INSTITUTE, CAPAZ, AND PEACE STUDIES PROFESSOR AT THE JUSTUS-LIEBIG-UNIVERSITÄT IN GIESSEN, GERMANY

The president of the Truth Commission, Francisco De Roux, wondered why the international community is so fond of Colombia. No doubt it has something to do with the endless riches found in the country and its people, but I would suggest that there is a key point not mentioned by De Roux: that Colombia fills the international political sphere with hope. The hope that nourishes the country's Peace Agreement between the government and the former Farc-ep guerrilla group, the result of a peaceful negotiation. In other words, the power of politics shines through in Colombia.

No negotiation bears perfect results; this peace process has had its ups and downs. Furthermore, many of us would have hoped that the implementation would move at a quicker pace. However, taking things into perspective, what has been achieved up to now has truly been plenty. And one of the key achievements has been the Truth Commission's Final Report. It represents a watershed moment, which allows us to say that the peace process is making progress.

The following reflections deal with the achievements and challenges of the Comprehensive System for Peace. First, I would like to highlight the achievements.

6,402: all of us know what this number refers to. It is blazoned on the walls of Colombia's cities, in Bogotá and across the country. As Judge Roberto Vidal (currently president of the JEP) pointed out: "the streets are in dialogue with the peace institutions". Transitional Justice's findings are becoming part of the country's daily fabric. In that sense, it is worth highlighting the importance of the hearings being carried out by the Jep with regards to the misnamed 'false positives'.

There is still a lot of work to be done. It is essential to strengthen the communication and ownership of the findings of Colombia's Transitional Justice institutions by society as a whole, so that, for example, it is not just the families of missing persons that search

**COLOMBIA FILLS THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SPHERE WITH HOPE. THE HOPE THAT NOURISHES THE COUNTRY'S PEACE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE FORMER FARC-EP GUERRILLA GROUP, THE RESULT OF A PEACEFUL NEGOTIATION. IN OTHER WORDS, THE POWER OF POLITICS SHINES THROUGH IN COLOMBIA.**

for them, as part of the Search Unit for Missing Persons' work, but that it is in the interests of the whole nation. There are still many victims' stories who do not cause pain to the rest of the country, due to a lack of empathy.

The Truth Commission has certainly had an important impact on creating empathy and capturing the attention of society on a national and international level. The Truth Commission's Final Report is already an international model of Transitional Justice. Now comes the difficult task of spreading and discussing the findings. Ricardo Corredor, the Truth Commission's Head of Communications, told me that a printed copy of the Final Report can now be ordered online, for delivery, in a special deal that comes with a tamal and a beer. This is a reflection of the success of its appropriation. The market doesn't lie and, if this offer exists, it is because there is interest. However, there is still a lot to be done in terms of its spreading. Personally, I am convinced that the main findings and the call for a Greater Peace need

to be printed massively, so that every citizen can buy it in their local shop, at the supermarket or from informal vendors. People need to be able to flick through, touch and smell the truth, and that only works in print.

It is important to point out that interest in the Truth Commission's report crosses Colombia's borders to an international sphere, discussion spaces on Transitional Justice and in terms of peace and conflict studies. This interest is related to the report's many novelties, the central role of victims, and its differential, cross-cutting approach. The Truth Commission has also underlined in its report structural racism as a factor that has exacerbated and perpetuated the violence.

I would like to highlight the chapter on exile: Colombia's Truth Commission marked a turning point with its inclusion of the voices of victims who had to flee the country as a result of the violence caused by the armed conflict. Hereinafter, I cannot imagine a truth commission that does not take into account the phenomenon of exile. This great achievement of Colombia's Truth Commission would not have been possible without the commitment of so many people working in the hubs abroad or, of course, those of you who shared your story: you made history.

This story not only reveals the silenced truth of those who left the country because of the war; the Commission also proposes recommendations. It says: "With regards to the participation of victims in

exile and the mechanisms of the Comprehensive System for Peace, the Truth Commission recommends that, given the systematic nature, continuity and dimension of the violence, exile and refuge make up part of the JEP's cases". Given the claims of the victims abroad, virtual spaces must be set up and made official for legal hearings with victims abroad, with procedural guarantees.

It is also necessary to point out the many challenges that the Comprehensive System for Peace faces. From the outset, one challenge has been coordination between the different institutions. How do we put this principle into practice and how will the System be integrated when the Commission's mandate is over? Will the collaboration between institutions be the same? Will this turn into asymmetry between the institutions?

Another big challenge involves the expectations of the victims. It is understandable, and very positive, that victims have high expectations of the Comprehensive System for Peace's institutions. The honorable principle of giving the victims a central role is certainly a point in favor. However, taking into account the number of victims in Colombia, it is unlikely that all the expectations will be met. Although the Commission collected 30,000 testimonies, we know that that is a tiny part of the 10 million victims of the country's armed conflict. Also, in terms of the JEP, many victims are hoping for greater participation, which is almost impossible, given the limited capacity for investigation and the institution's need to make progress with legal decisions.

*“Colombia’s Truth Commission marked a turning point with its inclusion of the voices of victims who had to flee the country as a result of the violence caused by the armed conflict. Hereinafter, I cannot imagine a truth commission that does not take into account the phenomenon of exile”.*

that victims have high expectations of the Comprehensive System for Peace's institutions. The honorable principle of giving the victims a central role is certainly a point in favor. However, taking into account the number of victims in Colombia, it is unlikely that all the expectations will be met. Although the Commission collected 30,000 testimonies, we know that that is a tiny part of the 10 million victims of the country's armed conflict. Also, in terms of the JEP, many victims are hoping for greater participation, which is almost impossible, given the limited capacity for investigation and the institution's need to make progress with legal decisions.

How, then, can so many victims and their families really take ownership of the processes and ensure that they meet their expectations, not only in terms of participation, but also in terms of reparations? I would like to highlight the challenges being faced right now by the JEP, with regards to decisions on sentences and the tasks, works or activities with reparatory and restorative content (TOAR, for their Spanish acronym)

There is still a lot to be heard and understood, no longer by the Truth Commission, but now by the Comprehensive System for Peace, the country and society as a whole. John Paul Lederach spoke about the importance of taking our time to listen, without hurrying; but, at the same time, if we take our time with so many victims, we simply won't have the time. Furthermore, it takes materials, security and time to allow all the victims to participate. This applies all the more so for those victims who do not live in municipal capitals and who need resources to get around; there are even those who do not speak Spanish and who require interpreters. All of this falls within the remit of differential and cross-cutting approaches. We can also take note from academia, such as, for example, the contributions of Colombian researcher Laura Rivera Revelo, who studied differential attention to the women of the Awá indigenous community. The differential and cross-cutting approaches that are part of Colombia's experience are lessons for Transitional Justice in the world.

**WHETHER WE CAN GO FURTHER, TOWARDS A JUSTICE THAT WE MIGHT CALL 'TRANSFORMATIVE', BECAUSE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE TENDS TO TRY TO REACH THE PREVIOUS STATUS QUO; BUT WE KNOW THAT THIS IS OFTEN ONE OF THE CAUSES OF THE ARMED CONFLICT. FOR EXAMPLE, SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND LAND DISTRIBUTION**

Another challenge for Transitional Justice, not only here in Colombia but also on an international level, is something that Boaventura De Sousa Santos mentions: the decolonization of Transitional Justice. In that regard, we should consider that Transitional Justice comes from a fundamentally liberal theory, removed from a focus on decolonization. We need to make progress on achieving that focus. I would like to highlight that, in a reading of sections of the testimony section of the Commission's Final Report, "When the birds no longer sang" by Commissioner Alejandro Castillejo, we encountered the issue of nature as a victim, which is also considered by the JEP. Finding a way to treat this judicially is a challenge. These are all challenges for Transitional Justice that go far beyond Colombia.

I would also like to highlight an additional point, that corresponds to a relatively recent debate on Transitional Justice: whether we can go further, towards a justice that we might call ‘transformative’. Because Transitional Justice tends to try to reach the previous status quo; but we know that this is often one of the causes of the armed conflict. For example, social inequality and land distribution. In this respect, the Truth Commission made great strides, with an emphasis on acknowledgement and reconciliation based around sexism, homophobia, structural racism and even classism. But, how can there be Transitional Justice amidst these exclusions and inequalities? What can Transitional Justice do to transform them and create a more equal, fairer and more inclusive country?

*Here I will bring up a great Latin American philosopher and artist, whose pseudonym is “Residente”, and who would say to Colombians: “Be bold! Dare to take this message everywhere.”*

The last point I will mention is the issue of pedagogy of the Truth Commission’s findings and recommendations. We must think about a national debate on the past and its implications for the future. We have already spoken about the importance of taking these findings and recommendations to universities, schools, communities, neighborhoods, and of the Final Report being in all of the country’s libraries, as well as having accessible versions in supermarkets, petrol stations, kiosks, and informal sales stands, in order to be able to talk about a mass call for the greater peace. However, I fear that is not enough.

Here I will bring up a great Latin American philosopher and artist, whose pseudonym is “Residente”, and who would say to Colombians: “Be bold! Dare to take this message everywhere.” And

I think this includes a great joint effort by the business sector. For example, why not commemorate December 10, Human Rights Day, by asking businesses to give their staff a morning or afternoon off? Not to spend at home, but to get together and reflect on the country’s past and history, and what that means for the future?

Would Avianca, Ecopetrol, Crepes & Waffles, Siemens Energy and public institutions and ministries be willing to do that?

We cannot continue to limit ourselves to dialogues with people who already have some degree of awareness. We need controversy, we need to have debates on where peace belongs. I do not mean the kind of controversy where anything goes; there are people who relentlessly defend the belief that the world is flat, but it isn’t. Similarly, not every opinion on the

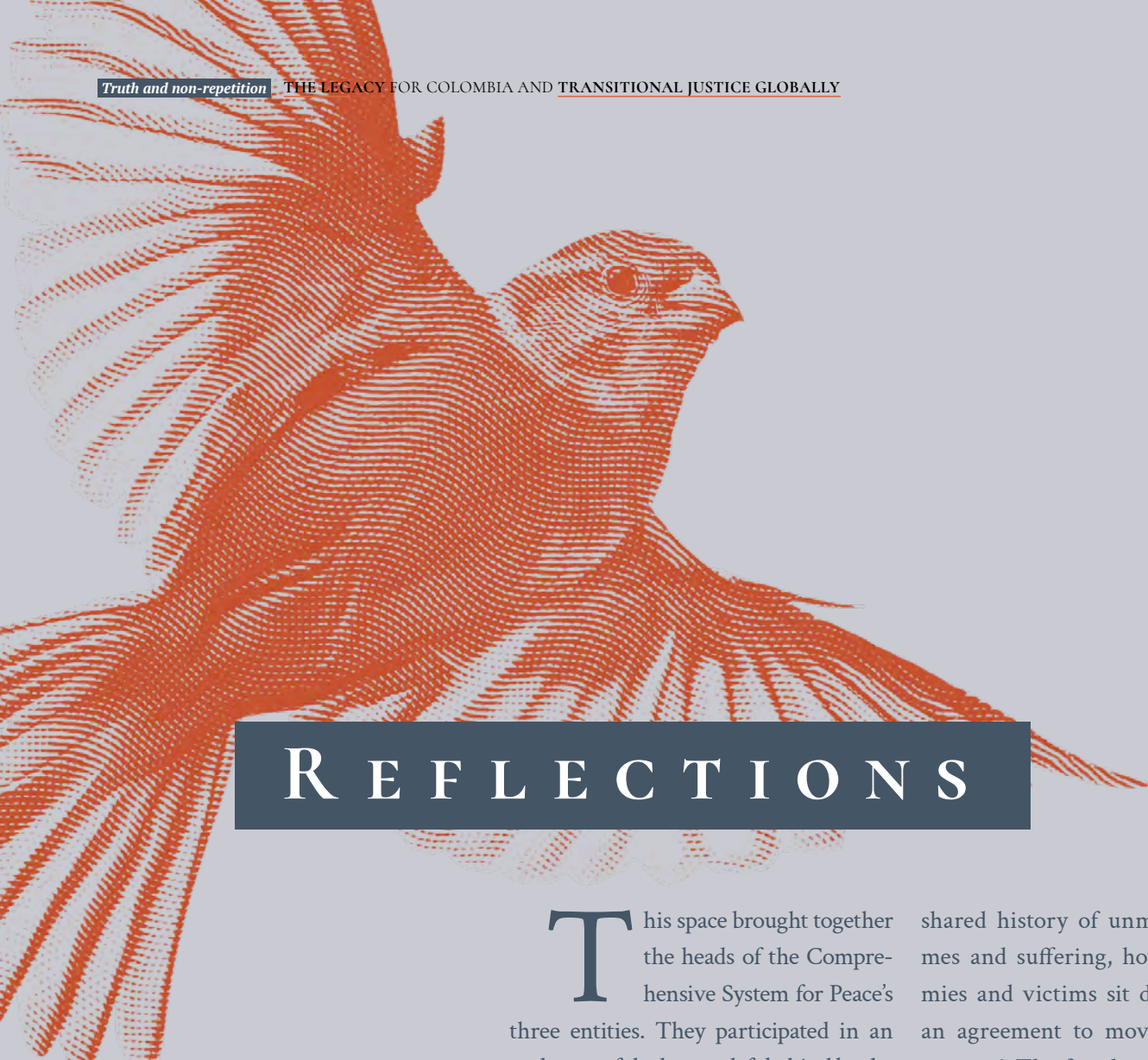
**WHY NOT COMMEMORATE DECEMBER 10, HUMAN RIGHTS DAY, BY ASKING BUSINESSES TO GIVE THEIR STAFF A MORNING OR AFTERNOON OFF? NOT TO SPEND AT HOME, BUT TO GET TOGETHER AND REFLECT ON THE COUNTRY’S PAST AND HISTORY, AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR THE FUTURE?**

past matters. We already know that the Farc-ep committed serious crimes, including sexual crimes on captives; we already know that the paramilitary groups often acted together with national and international companies to clear land; we already know that the state is responsible for serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, that go well beyond the so-called “false positives” (extrajudicial killings).

And it is the Truth Commission’s Final Report that holds the key to answering the questions that will allow us to discuss the past and obtain the necessary conclusions for ending the war and avoiding a repetition of Colombia’s violent history.







# REFLECTIONS

THE RESULT OF THIS PARTICULAR MEETING WAS A POWERFUL COMBINATION WHICH SHOWED SIMILARITIES BETWEEN LEGAL AND NON-LEGAL SPACES, AS WELL AS CONTRADICTIONS. THE RUPTURES BETWEEN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF SOCIETY CONTINUE TO BE EVIDENT, BUT SO TOO ARE THE PATHS TO REACHING AN UNDERSTANDING.

This space brought together the heads of the Comprehensive System for Peace's three entities. They participated in an exchange of the lessons left behind by the System in general, and the Commission in particular: what contributions, lessons and critiques do these entities have of themselves and their peers? Completing the spectrum of truth, searching and justice, we also heard from a victim and a peace signatory that was part of the Farc guerrilla.

The result of this particular meeting was a powerful combination which showed similarities between legal and non-legal spaces, as well as contradictions. The ruptures between different sectors of society continue to be evident, but so too are the paths to reaching an understanding. With a

shared history of unmentionable crimes and suffering, how can old enemies and victims sit down and reach an agreement to move forward as a country? The first lesson that the Colombian process leaves for the world is precisely that: that it is possible.

Roberto Menéndez, director of the Organization of American States' Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OAS), was the moderator and underlined the importance of the fact that the presence of the international community in this process went far beyond financial and logistical support, and that such political involvement opens up spaces to more diverse countries and sectors of the international community.

The following are excerpts from the conversation:



## Luz Marina Monzón

We learned that the victims do not only have information, which is what the institutions always seek them out for. They are also political beings who demand their rights. I will share some stories of when the Unit has had the honor of accompanying them and contributing to alleviating their suffering. These stories have been shared with the other Comprehensive System institutions.

One such story is that of the discovery of the body of a woman recruited in 2001 in Comuna 13, Medellín. She, along with 24 other young people, was recruited by an illegal armed group. They died in combat. Her mother looked for her for a long time, and her investigation (and this is where I am talking about the political subjectivity of the victims) led her to conclude that the body could be in one of two cemeteries. We accompanied her in her visits to these places and recovered the body. The woman saw the body being disinterred and was able to identify it. How is that possible if all that remained after so many years were bone structures? Because she recognized her scapular, and she recalled that her daughter never removed it. It took a struggle of more than twenty years to dignify the memory of her daughter and be able to give her a proper burial.

Another experience is that shared by the System's three entities, the case of the Angulo family, whose parents were kidnapped, murdered and disappeared by the Farc. The family went to the Commission and provided their

testimony, they went to the Jep and registered as part of Case 01, and they went to the Unit to ask for their loved ones to be looked for. When we were undergoing the recovery process, one of the relatives asked the anthropologist who had organized the search area if they could change the search method. He said "I want to look here and not there, because I have a hunch", and the anthropologist agreed to it. The following day, they prayed alongside the whole team and began to search the area that the relative had indicated. That is where we found Doña Carmenza. That is what we have learnt; that the victims know, and they are not just information providers. They are also political subjects who build on the enforceability of their rights.

THAT IS WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT; THAT THE VICTIMS KNOW, AND THEY ARE NOT JUST INFORMATION PROVIDERS. THEY ARE ALSO POLITICAL SUBJECTS WHO BUILD ON THE ENFORCEABILITY OF THEIR RIGHTS.



### EDUARDO CIFUENTES

Experience has shown us that there is an enormous reserve of dignity in this country, and the custodians of that dignity are the victims. It is a dignity that wants to occupy the space of the truth. These people knew the truth, they slept with it, it weighed down on their lives and penetrated their existence. When the Peace Agreement and its regulations arrived, appropriate channels were created in these three entities, which were superbly utilized by the victims.

We have seen the victims take up a strong and robust position. And that is dignity. Thanks to that dignity and, I would say, thanks in general to the victims, the Commission was able to present an unprecedented report in Colombia's history, with a significant truth value.

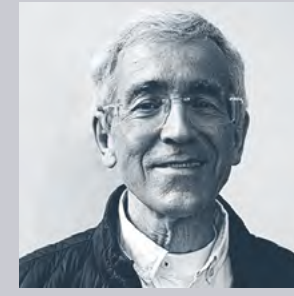
Thanks to the victims, the Search Unit has regional plans that it did not have in the past. And, in the case of the Jep, in 95% of cases the perpetrators have had no choice but to bow to the accusations made against them, thanks to the completeness of the victims' reports and their representation through human rights organizations.

We have also seen that the space for dignity is not restricted solely to the victims: the perpetrators, upon recounting face to face to the victims what they did, can also move towards a new perception of themselves. On the other hand, the victims, who are faced with the truth, recognize the need to continue with their life plan and mitigate the past pain they carry with

them. That represents an enormous reserve of dignity for the country, that can give birth to many transformations.

I think that total peace is necessary. I think that, in the case of the Jep, that means not only granting benefits from the outset, even temporary or provisional ones, but also that the appearing parties proceed to carry out reparative actions that form part of larger state projects, where they can be real, sustainable and viable.

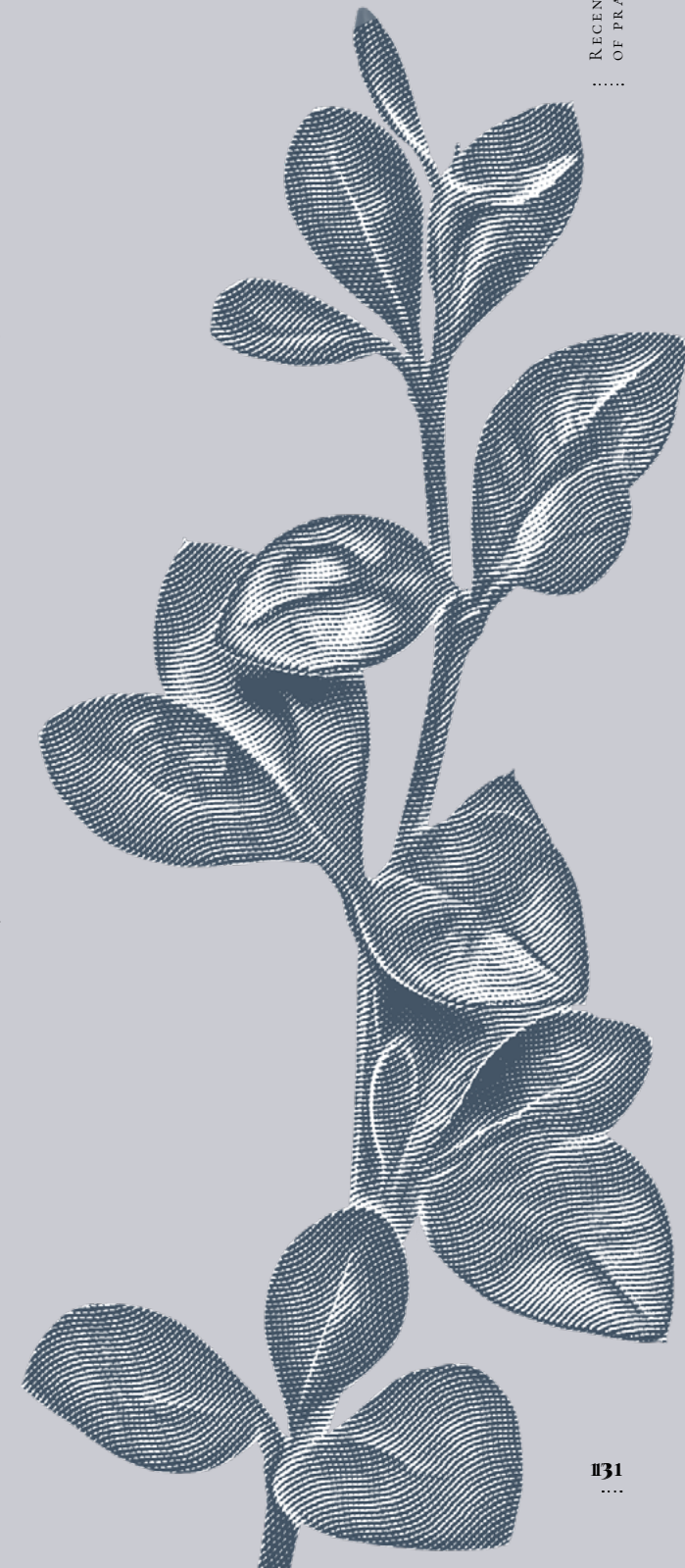
**THE SPACE FOR DIGNITY IS NOT RESTRICTED SOLELY TO THE VICTIMS: THE PERPETRATORS, UPON RECOUNTING FACE TO FACE TO THE VICTIMS WHAT THEY DID, CAN ALSO MOVE TOWARDS A NEW PERCEPTION OF THEMSELVES.**



### FRANCISCO DE ROUX

We have seen a transformation in the world of victims as a result of feeling recognized and heard. Initially, there is the searing pain and the rejection of the state, then the condemnation of all forms of justice that exist in the country, as well as a rejection of the perpetrators and a desire to have nothing to do with them. And then, through conversation, little by little the acceptance of the need to open up to dialogue appears. These first dialogues involve direct confrontation, the brutal clamor for the truth about what had happened, as well as the request for the men and women involved in each case to tell the truth.

Faced with a perpetrator who takes full responsibility, the victims begin to understand that nobody has more moral authority than they do to say "this happened to us, we have suffered brutalities, we want Transitional Justice; we were hoping for the truth but, above all, we want to tell the country that we do not want others to suffer what we have suffered. We do not want this to happen to anyone in Colombia". And they can say it with a moral authority that only they, the victims, can have.





### HELENA URÁN

There are a lot of victims that I have been working with for years on the search for justice. Those of us who suffered the events of the Palace of Justice had to wait 22 years for the District Attorney's Office to even open the case. That in itself was victimizing. Then, the district attorney who opened the case and who opened investigations on three generals was taken off my father's case. We had to go to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The I/A Court H.R. condemned Colombia for that.

I use that case, my case, as an example, because I feel that it is a little contradictory and painful to have to wait for an institution to acknowledge what it did to you, when you know exactly what you experienced and have a hold on the truth. But, at the same time, that foreign or local institution gratifies you because it confirms that truth. For me, it was a great endorsement to feel that others finally believed us, that we were not crazy, that what we had been saying all along was acknowledged.

With regards to the Comprehensive System for Peace, I believe that it is a timesaver. Now, other people do not have to go through what we went through. We are all equals in pain, regardless of who the perpetrator is. Of course, there are different levels of legal responsibility, but pain makes us all equals.

*it is a little contradictory and painful to have to wait for an institution to acknowledge what it did to you, when you know exactly what you experienced and have a hold on the truth.*

WITH REGARDS TO THE COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR PEACE, I BELIEVE THAT IT IS A TIMESAVER. NOW, OTHER PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE TO GO THROUGH WHAT WE WENT THROUGH. WE ARE ALL EQUALS IN PAIN, REGARDLESS OF WHO THE PERPETRATOR IS.



### VICTORIA SANDINO

Giving victims dignity is a process that began in Havana when they began to be heard, but which remains in its early stages. It began with the acknowledgement that there was a whole world of victims created and affected by the conflict. And it's not a 20 or 30-year conflict: we're talking about more than six decades!

Why do I claim that the process is in its early stages? Of course, we salute all the progress we have seen up until now, but this is just the beginning because the issue of the victims and giving them their dignity goes well beyond what has been achieved so far. We need to understand the truth, the whole truth, everybody's truth, not just those of the two demons that have been created. It is not a case of two devils, some bad guys and other less bad guys, but about a society that used all forms of violence to maintain power, on the one hand, and to transform the reality on the other. That is part of the recognition that we are making today and that generated, among other things, a lot of victimization. ■

IT IS NOT A CASE OF TWO DEVILS, SOME BAD GUYS AND OTHER LESS BAD GUYS, BUT ABOUT A SOCIETY THAT USED ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE TO MAINTAIN POWER, ON THE ONE HAND, AND TO TRANSFORM THE REALITY ON THE OTHER. THAT IS PART OF THE RECOGNITION THAT WE ARE MAKING TODAY AND THAT GENERATED, AMONG OTHER THINGS, A LOT OF VICTIMIZATION.

## FINAL MESSAGE:

# A CONCRETE CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD IN TERMS OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

### FRANCISCO DE ROUX

I recommend that you take the Commission's recommendations very seriously. Firstly, in terms of seeking a definitive peace agreement for the country, with the ELN, dissident groups and groups that need to be brought to justice. Secondly, in terms of transforming the security system. Instead of securing property, let there be security for people, and equally. Let a child in Chocó be cared for just as much as a member of Congress. And thirdly, in terms of carrying out an in-depth pedagogy of peace in this country. We must fight decisively against impunity by strengthening the Transitional Justice system.

### LUZ MARINA MONZÓN

A fundamental contribution of this Comprehensive System is the inclusion of a mechanism for searching for missing persons, and which gives recognition to the suffering, loneliness and indifference of thousands of victims; that is its most important contribution to peacebuilding. It made a difference with other mechanisms of Transitional Justice. The challenge is laid out in the conclusions of the Commission's Final Report: it is necessary for there to be coordination with the state in order to make rapid progress in finding the missing persons; more than 25,000 bodies need to be identified; the identification of the people whose bodies are found needs to be sped up, the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences needs to be strengthened; and regional search plans must be able to enter into dialogue with the JEP's macro-cases. Relieving suffering is the foundation of coexistence and peace in this country.

## EDUARDO CIFUENTES

The first, and extremely important, contribution to the world is being able to prove that you cannot give up on the legal truth, or the extralegal truth, nor on the search for missing persons. The second is allowing things to be resolved through dialogue. It is exceptional what is being carried out in that sense with the Jep and UBPD as the system's surviving entities. The felonies, war crimes and crimes against humanity are penalized through very strict legal procedures with prison sentences in the international and national legal system. The basis of dialogue between victims and perpetrators with the intervention of judges is also something unprecedented from the point of view of comparative law.

THE BASIS OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS WITH THE INTERVENTION OF JUDGES IS ALSO SOMETHING UNPRECEDENTED FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF COMPARATIVE LAW.

## VICTORIA SANDINO

The main contribution to the world is the System in itself. With all of the elements that you have laid out, I believe that it is unprecedented. In the case of the Jep, it is not a court of winners over the defeated; it is a court of dialogue. The Truth Commission did not limit itself to the task of discovering the truth as such, it delved into the issue of non-stigmatization; it continues to be something that needs to be worked on, as well as progressing towards that stable and lasting peace with social justice; the total peace that we want in other settings.

IN THE CASE OF THE JEP, IT IS NOT A COURT OF WINNERS OVER THE DEFEATED; IT IS A COURT OF DIALOGUE.

## HELENA URÁN

What I admire about this System is how it managed to synchronize the respect for the regulations of international justice with our right to truth, justice and peace.

I would like children to be given more opportunities to tell their story and participate. I was 10 when my father's torture, execution and disappearance took place. Then they forcibly kicked us out of Colombia, and nobody asked us anything. It is always the parents who speak for their children, but the children are immersed in this violence and this war. I know that this brings with it certain difficulties, and the children need to receive support and advice; but make that possible, make it possible for children to also have the floor, because that helps them to negotiate the pain and gives meaning to what they went through.

I WOULD LIKE CHILDREN TO BE GIVEN MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO TELL THEIR STORY AND PARTICIPATE. I WAS 10 WHEN MY FATHER'S TORTURE, EXECUTION AND DISAPPEARANCE TOOK PLACE. THEN THEY FORCIBLY KICKED US OUT OF COLOMBIA, AND NOBODY ASKED US ANYTHING. IT IS ALWAYS THE PARENTS WHO SPEAK FOR THEIR CHILDREN, BUT THE CHILDREN ARE IMMERSSED IN THIS VIOLENCE AND THIS WAR.

## ROBERTO MENÉNDEZ

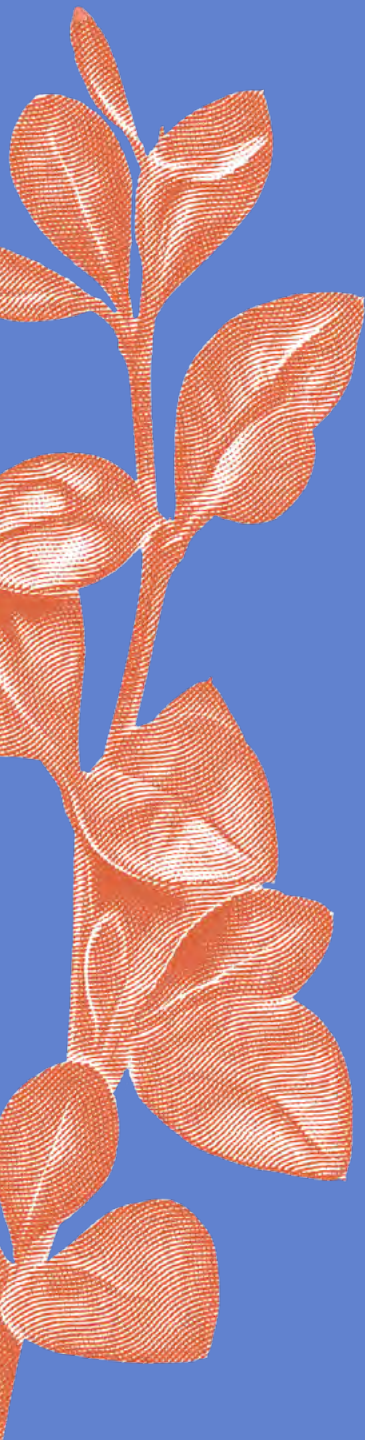
Hopefully, when other actors are designing a system like this, they also invite the international community to get involved and support them, and to understand their support in a much wider sense. Not all states and societies are able to cooperate financially, but they can do so in other technical and human ways. In future Transitional Justice designs, the wider, more horizontal participation of the entire international community should be considered, as it was in Colombia. ■

IN FUTURE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE DESIGNS, THE WIDER, MORE HORIZONTAL PARTICIPATION OF THE ENTIRE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD BE CONSIDERED, AS IT WAS IN COLOMBIA.

▶ WATCH THIS SPACE HERE: [https://youtu.be/CJFdsav4V\\_Q](https://youtu.be/CJFdsav4V_Q)



# OFFICIAL PRESENTATION OF THE MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE (CSM, FOR ITS INITIALS IN SPANISH)



**F**or the seven years following the publication of the Truth Commission's Final Report, that is to say until 2029, the entity has put in place the Monitoring and Follow-up Committee (CSM, for its initials in Spanish) of the recommendations, made up of seven people representing various sectors of society, including victims' and human rights organizations.

The full name of this entity, as defined by the decree that gave life to the Truth Commission (Decree 588 of 2017) is the 'Monitoring and Follow-up Committee of the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Commis-

sion for the Clarification of the Truth, Coexistence and Non-repetition'. It will be responsible for monitoring and following up on the implementation of the recommendations, communicating with various entities and victims' and human rights organizations, creating periodic follow-up reports on the recommendations (which should have a territorial, differential and gender focus), and spreading its reports across the media.

The plenary session of commissioners, based on this decree and other regulations, designated the following as members of the Committee:



## JULIA EVA COGOLLO

Afro-Colombian leader from the Ruta Cimarrona del Caribe (maroon communities). Social psychologist and specialist in comprehensive protection of human rights advocates. Investigator of cases of sexual and socio-political violence.



## MARINA GALLEGO

Lawyer with a master's in Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law and International Courts. Founder and national coordinator of the feminist organization "Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres" (Women's Peaceful Route).



## ANGELIKA RETTBERG

Professor and researcher from the Political Sciences Department of the Universidad de los Andes, advisory expert in conflict transformation.



## DORYS ARDILA

Lawyer with a master's in International Public Law. She is a member of the Mesa Catalana por la Paz y los Derechos Humanos en Colombia (Catalan Board for Peace and Human Rights in Colombia), the Mesa Catalana de Codesarrollo (Catalan Board for Development), and the Mesa por la Verdad de Colombia (Board for Truth of Colombia).



## WILSON CASTAÑEDA

Political scientist and doctor of Philosophy. He is the director of the "Caribe Afirmativo" Corporation, which works for the respect and recognition of the human rights of the LGBTQI+ population.



## MARCO ALBERTO ROMERO

Public administrator, specialist on legal-political institutions and public law, with a master's in Political Ideas and Understanding the Contemporary World. He is the director of the Organization for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES, for its Spanish acronym).



## ARMANDO WOURIYÚ

Indigenous Wayú leader. Previously leader of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC). Secretary of the Special High-Level Instance with Ethnic Peoples, the Ethnic Chapter of the Final Peace Agreement.

The official presentation of the CSM and its members took place on August 9, 2022, carried out by the president of the Commission, Francisco De Roux, who thanked them for having accepted this responsibility, on behalf of the country, the victims and peace in Colombia, stating: “I know that you will put your heart and soul into this. We have complete faith in the fact that you will do this with the determination and valour that you have always shown in your different paths, for the good of all Colombians”. He then asked each member to say a few words. The following are snippets of their contributions:

**“I KNOW THAT YOU WILL PUT YOUR HEART AND SOUL INTO THIS. WE HAVE COMPLETE FAITH IN THE FACT THAT YOU WILL DO THIS WITH THE DETERMINATION AND VALOUR THAT YOU HAVE ALWAYS SHOWN IN YOUR DIFFERENT PATHS, FOR THE GOOD OF ALL COLOMBIANS”.**

### JULIA EVA COGOLLO

I would especially like to thank the victims, for whom we have been working for many years, as well as the perpetrators, who we have accompanied in some form in order to insist that they do not return to war. I think it is also important to be here for them: in order to guarantee that they can continue with their processes of acknowledging responsibility, and continue dignifying the lives of the victims and all the actors involved in the war... Most of my time will be spent in the territories, building from the ground up, alongside the communities, with those who will give us the strength to demand the compliance with these recommendations.

### ANGELIKA RETTBERG

Those who know me and my academic history, know that I tend to see the glass as half full. This is certainly a step in the direction of filling the glass of peace in Colombia. I will put my heart and soul into my commitment with the accumulated knowledge of the horrors that have taken place in this country. I will also put my academic self into the work for the empirical evidence that supports many of the events that have been shared and collected by this Commission.

### MARINA GALLEGO

I represent the feminist movement. We previously wrote a report on the impact that the armed conflict has had on women, and we can see these perspectives, and more, in the recommendations. The feminist and women's movement has an important commitment to the recommendations. We find ourselves in a favorable context that we have to take advantage of so that, when this government's term ends in four years, at least 60% of these recommendations have been met.

## DORYS ARDILA

I represent the voices of those of us that are not in Colombia. We have built hubs in various countries across the world. We built a bridge, but that bridge is made of eggshells. The challenge is to integrate those voices from outside Colombia, their knowledge and stories, so that Colombian society acknowledges them. We hope to build a dialogue with our partners, but above all with that other part of Colombia that is not convinced by this process, that denies it, that does not acknowledge the existence of the conflict, that is not present, that is skeptical, that continues to believe that the mechanisms of violence are those that can take us forward.

WE HOPE TO BUILD A DIALOGUE WITH OUR PARTNERS, BUT ABOVE ALL WITH THAT OTHER PART OF COLOMBIA THAT IS NOT CONVINCED BY THIS PROCESS, THAT DENIES IT, THAT DOES NOT ACKNOWLEDGE THE EXISTENCE OF THE CONFLICT, THAT IS NOT PRESENT, THAT IS SKEPTICAL, THAT CONTINUES TO BELIEVE THAT THE MECHANISMS OF VIOLENCE ARE THOSE THAT CAN TAKE US FORWARD.

## WILSON CASTAÑEDA

I am an activist from the LGBT-QI+ movement, that has grown around the world and particularly in Colombia, as part of the peacebuilding framework. When we were in Havana, we spoke about the armed conflict's disproportionate damage to members of the LGBTQI+ community, with conclusions that ended up being included in the Peace Agreement's gender focus, making it a globally unique agreement. The speaks very well of the Transitional Justice system, and can be read about in the gender volume of the Commission's Report. Making up part of this Committee is to continue walking in the right direction.

## ARMANDO WOURIYÚ

History is always written by the victor, but here and now we have the conditions to change that. The Republic is yet to recognize 67% of indigenous land and there are 9 million rural citizens that are disregarded by the national institutions, who have only recognized 433,000 hectares of their land, less than 0.1% of the potential, which today provide us with 70% of our food.

The responsibility that lies in the hands of the two governments that are to come is the task of population, spatial and territorial follow-up and monitoring. We must understand the results that show us we need to follow women's intellect instead of men's, such that the resistances are different in these four years. I welcome everyone to this space of harmony and balance, to this aesthetic task for life, with different ethics and morals. ■

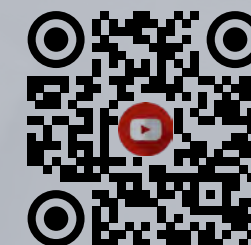
## MARCO ROMERO

The recommendations set out transformative criteria. That is their fundamental aspect. In Colombia, there is an enormous victimization rate and a huge world of victims. We got to this disproportionate position of harm largely because those sectors in society suffer from a situation of structural vulnerability, systematic discrimination, segregation and inequality.

The Commission has successfully tied together the two dimensions to show that the problem is not just an issue of justice, truth and reparation with regards to the damage caused by the conflict, but also of those persistence factors that Colombian society has to resolve so as not to continue living in waves of violence; just as we have seen in conflicts in Central America, where the peace negotiations are followed by more murders and systematic violence than even during the wars. That is why this transformative approach is so important.

▶ WATCH THE PRESENTATION OF THE MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE HERE:

<https://youtu.be/iQrinuahM9U>







# GRATITUDE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY



**PRESENTER: MARÍA PRADA**  
COORDINATOR OF THE OFFICE OF COOPERATION  
AND ALLIANCES, TRUTH COMMISSION

## PARTICIPANTS



**LUCÍA GONZÁLEZ**  
TRUTH COMMISSIONER



**CARLOS RUIZ MASSIEU**  
HEAD OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
VERIFICATION MISSION IN COLOMBIA



**MAURICIO KATZ**  
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE  
TRUTH COMMISSION



**FRANCISCO  
DE ROUX,**  
PRESIDENT OF THE TRUTH  
COMMISSION



**DÉBORA BARROS**  
WAYUÚ LEADER FROM BAHÍA  
PORTETE AND VICTIM OF THE  
INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT

**M**aría Prada introduced the voices gathered in this space for thanks and recognition for the international community: their diplomatic corps, multi-lateral and bi-lateral cooperation agencies, the United Nations System, private institutions, academia, and international NGOs, for their decisive support on this shared path towards peace in Colombia, and in particular for their contributions to helping the Truth Commission reach this point in history.

The following are excerpts of the thanks:

### LUCÍA GONZÁLEZ:

We have witnessed an example of alliances between countries for the highest purpose, peace. We were always conscious of wanting the Legacy of this Truth Commission to also reach the rest of the world, as a form of retribution. The Legacy wants to become a form of wisdom that remains in the heart of society, with the lessons gathered from the pain of the victims in the territories and in exile, and from the moral conscience of the perpetrators. It is not the product of an institution, but of the national community for the world; this would not have been possible without the help of the international community; its political support in the widest sense of the word.

From you, we gathered the opportunity to progress as a state institution, nationally and internationally-recognized, and to increase our legitimacy in a political moment that was not favorable. Without you we would not have been able to continue with the same enthusiasm and with our heads held high, and with the respect of the sectors of the state that understood what they needed to do. We are grateful for your affection, because yours was not a bureaucratic task, but a task of love. That is what it feels like in our hearts and we are here to say: thanks a million!

### MAURICIO KATZ:

The support of the international community helped us politically with the consolidation of the Comprehensive System for Peace; especially the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, which helped with the territorial deployment and provided enormous logistical support to the Commission's teams on the ground, thanks to its knowledge and availability.

Similarly, thanks to the international community we were able to set up multi-lateral support mechanisms, in particular with the Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the European Union and the United Nations System; as well as bi-lateral mechanisms with the USAID tender, the European Union member states, and joint projects.

We also had the support of international institutions who joined the network of partners and supported the Commission's work, as well as the support of a huge academic network. All of them made up an important solidary support network, with an economic contribution close to 35 million dollars, 45% of what the Colombian state contributed, in a great show of complementarity. We hope to count on your continued company as we seek a total peace that will disarm all conflicts and integrate the entirety of Colombian society.

### DÉBORA BARROS:

For a long time, the victims have been fighting for a better life, for opportunities from within the territories; that struggle was already underway when the Commission arrived, and it was the moment for many of those who had not spoken out before out of fear to do so. The international community helped to give us that confidence to reveal everything that marked the history of the women, children and ethnic communities, of a battered nation. We were able to ensure that nothing could stop us in the territories, largely thanks to the support of the international community.

In the name of all the victims, and as an indigenous Wayuú victim, I would like to thank the international community and the alliances of countries; of course, the Commission too, but we know that its efforts alone would not have achieved the same results. The trust that the international community helped to build has meant that today we have a Legacy; now we want to take that to schools and universities, in all languages, transmit it through art, so that it reaches everyone. Now that we are beginning the new process of spreading the Legacy, it is key that your support continues.



OPCIÓN  
LEGAL

### CARLOS RUIZ MASSIEU:

The Verification Mission is the result of the will of all the actors and volunteers present today; it exists thanks to the commitment of the members of the UN Security Council, but also of the 193 countries funding us to support them on this path, through agencies, programs and funds, all working together. We are here to reiterate our support in this new beginning.

It has been an honor to support the Commission in the territories and reconciliation and acknowledgement spaces, and in the dissemination of the Final Report and Legacy. To the United Nations System, the Verification Mission, the Secretary General and the Security Council itself, it is very clear that the Comprehensive System for Peace is the backbone of the Peace Agreement; because of the central role of the victims and because the Commission's Legacy is aimed at the whole of Colombian society.

The country will have to continue advancing alongside the System towards that reconciliation, that healing. The truths, as harsh as they may be, are the beginning of that process of closure and finally healing and making peace as a society.

### FRANCISCO DE ROUX:

I wonder why the international community loves Colombia so much and why it puts so much into its peace. Maybe it is because our story has been a deeply tragic human tale in the midst of a beautiful country, with its people and ecological world bursting with potential. Here, the international community gave its all for peace from the dialogues on the Agreement, even before, and it continues to do so.

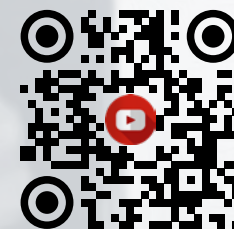
The international community has seen that there are very important issues at play in the country regarding the meaning of people as humans of the world, and the meaning of nature. Thank you for understanding that.

I reiterate the thanks of the Commission and the victims, who have expressed it very clearly; not as suffering voices, but as people with an enormous moral authority saying to the country: "we do not want this to happen again". Thanks to the victims for their determination. The delivery of the Final Report and the Legacy is a crop of seeds that need to be planted again in order to give much larger fruits than those we have seen until now. But we know that they are already strong fruits that are going to contribute to the peace process in Colombia.

I apologise in advance for not naming everyone, but we are grateful for the support of each of you as nations, United Nations institutions, and especially the Latin American community, the MAPP/OAS, even in the most difficult places. We also thank the countries that received the exiled Colombians in every continent. You have been partners on our path, with immense determination to achieve reconciliation.

Finally, we learned from the international community how listening carefully to the voices of people is received, which was one of the Truth Commission's major worries. Thanks for that and for the respect and support you have given us; it is truly admirable. In the midst of our delicacy, you honored our work. ■

▶ WATCH THIS MOMENT OF THANKS HERE:  
<https://youtu.be/5fuiMkq1qSU>



▶ VIDEO CLIP WITH THE THANKS FROM THE TRUTH COMMISSIONERS TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:  
<https://youtu.be/YZAnbmKCAeE>



UN DOCUMENTAL DE NEGRITA FILMS PARA  
**COMISIÓN DE LA VERDAD**  
CON EL APOYO DE  
**UNIÓN EUROPEA**



## AUDIOVISUAL MATERIAL

**H**ere we include summaries and links for two of the artistic and documentary pieces produced by the Truth Commission, which made up part of the agenda for 'Truth and Non-repetition: the Legacy for Colombia and Transitional Justice in the World'



## DESPUÉS DEL FUEGO: FRAGMENTOS DE UNA TRANSICIÓN (AFTER THE FIRE: FRAGMENTS OF A TRANSITION)

A full-length film that uses cinematographic language to explain the Truth Commission's Final Report, which premiered for the international community on August 8, 2022, introduced by the European Union Ambassador Gilles Bertrand, whose entity supported its production, and Ricardo Corredor, the Truth Commission's Communication Director.

Después del fuego is a political thriller lasting one hour and 28 minutes, in which each scene, each character, each phrase is designed to elicit a strong reaction from the audience; it involves five true stories that show what happened to Colombia during the armed conflict and while the Commission was in existence. ■



RICARDO CORREDOR,  
Truth Commission Communication Director



GILLES BERTRAND,  
European Union Ambassador to Colombia

▶ LINK TO THE TRAILER FOR 'DESPUÉS DEL FUEGO':  
<https://youtu.be/hZVCnL-MNJA>





RECENT REFLECTIONS FROM THE VOICES  
OF PRACTICAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERTS

## DEVELACIONES: UN CANTO A LOS CUATRO VIENTOS (APPARITIONS: A SONG FROM THE ROOFTOPS)

*Develaciones: un canto a los cuatro vientos* is a stage show with more than 100 actors, in which the Truth Commission reveals episodes of the tragedy experienced by millions of Colombians during the internal armed conflict in different territories, recreating the environment, songs, dances, and clothing of each region, with the common denominator of the pain caused by the human rights violations as well as the social resistance; all of this is expressed with the finesse and power of the dramatic arts. ■

▶ LINK TO THE COMPLETE PLAY:  
<https://www.youtube.com/live/BHZC9I-ZxfRU?feature=share>





# CLOSING STATEMENT

By  
**DANILO RUEDA**  
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE

The Truth Commission has spoken of the ‘Great Peace’. The ‘Great Peace’ is the great impact of the transition. That this transition today coincides with a government program is another matter, but the country had already been talking about a transition. Just as we talk about a transition to peace, to the truth, we also talk about an energetic transition.

Today in Colombia there is a feeling that we need to try to go from the “sad emotions” that the writer and researcher Mauricio García Villegas speaks of to a country where we live the good life. It is hard, complex, but we are ready for change.

First, there was the demobilization of the Auc, with all the criticisms we made at the time from within the organizations, but which started to show us how it was possible to generate a setting for truth and total peace.

We encountered, for example, with regards the missing persons, some women in Antioquia who, shattering the paradigm of

the great social movement of the victims, decided to go and talk to the perpetrators who were detained in Itagüí’s prisons. They approached them with dignity, staring directly into their eyes, to break down their pride. That pride that one sometimes has in daily life when you have made a mistake; starting with stubbornness and denial, and then feeling shame, breaking down inside and then beginning to acknowledge.

The ‘Great Peace’ must necessarily pass through the internal search for the acknowledgement of our own shadows as human beings. We are not saints; we

are not perfect. We are what we are, and recognizing that is important for allowing us to approach others, with respect and dignity. The Peace Agreement with the Farc picks up on these discussions in some way. We know what happened in the assessment made in Law 975, when restorative law began to gain momentum.

Initially it was thought of as an exercise in impunity. Getting out of prison seemed like ‘freedom’; but there is a bigger problem taking place inside ourselves: the freedom of our conscience. Something that moves inside us and eats away at us, that is expressed

physically and in our day-to-day relationships. It is expressed in our inheritance: in our children, in the future generations.

Nothing comes for free, and Helena Urán already mentioned it when talking about the children: they seem child-like, but it turns out that their knowledge is much more profound. So talking about restorative justice involves, as well as the legal setting, that

which lives inside the individual, taking it to an extralegal setting, like the Truth Commission.

Beyond the institutions, the truth began to come out very clearly, from the mouths of thousands of victims and perpetrators in various territories in Colombia.

The idea, beyond the idea, and the culture, beyond the culture, the spirit of Transitional Justice is here to become part of a global effort to demonstrate other forms of justice, beyond punitive justice. To show that it is possible for the perpetrator of crimes

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against a person, against a group of humans, to restore the damage caused through the generation of dialogue settings; by outlining the contexts in which the events occurred.

Today, that which has its critics, that needs improvement, is making headway. In Colombia, there are people deprived of freedom, condemned to 60 years, against the Constitutional Court’s decisions, who have spoken to us about the need to evaluate what 60-year sentences signify; and there are people in that situation who see what it would mean to get out or have fewer years deprived of freedom.

We have also seen in prisons, in those human beings who have committed or participated in crimes against humanity or war crimes, conscientious decisions to contribute to the truth in order to ensure the violence does not keep repeating itself.

In the midst of the pandemic, we saw the appearance of mechanisms that allowed the victims to communicate with the perpetrators, through letters and WhatsApp messages, in order to generate transformative processes, starting with those who were affected and those who were responsible.

Today, a world of opportunities has opened up for the country, through this new government, that has publicly taken on the commitment to follow all of the Truth Commission’s recommendations. How it will do that, I do not know, but there is a confirmed commitment.

And that commitment has very concrete elements. The first is open-

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ness to dialogue with all armed groups, without exception, respecting their nature and how they define themselves; that is to say, their identity. “To each their own”, respecting how everyone defines themselves, with the public demonstration of the willingness to make peace part of its movement, to approach people and to find a way out.

And recognizing that there are structural matters of a historic debt, and the aim is to be in the territories. Being in the territories means that, with unilateral ceasefires or not, the government has taken on the commitment to be in those places to listen, create a dialogue and take on concrete commitments for initial changes with regards the profound inequality and marginalization of many human groups in this country.

The search for ‘Total Peace’ necessarily implies the acknowledgement of rural and urban violent events. And the urban violence sometimes has an



invisible thread that unites it to the rural violence. If we comprehensively and systematically resolve these types of violence that sometimes interact invisibly, and which also disappear, which do not apparently have a political connotation, we can cement the possibility that the majority of armed violence ceases.

I repeat: this is achieved by understanding all the motivations, but simultaneously by the government responding to the rights of citizens, in particular those belonging to the most excluded and impoverished sectors of this country.

The government must coordinate and offer effective responses, with a presence in remote areas. All the ministries, each and every one of them.

We must try to ensure that civil society strengthens meeting spaces, with different voices, in order to promote effective dialogue. We have a large map of civil society creativity, but it is rather ineffective to hear the same complaints in different civil society entities, when they could come to an agreement and help the government's results take on more effectiveness.

Economic resources are scarce, but it cannot be right that there has to be a collective territorial characterization carried out by the Restitution Unit, another one by the Jep, and yet another one by the Victims' Unit. What a waste of time and resources, and nothing is resolved!

That very characterization is useful for agents of the state and executive powers. If we have to make adjust-

ments, let's do that! But let's save time and money. That way the communities will not get tired out and we can have a greater impact.

That is the respectful request that I make; to be able to rely on each and every one of you for the construction of the 'Great Peace', which must begin from deep inside of you and be a deeply democratic thing. Let us recall Gandhi and many others who have spoken of how changes start from within. That way we can all enjoy the good life.

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▶ WATCH THIS SPEECH HERE:  
[https://youtu.be/e3SqSP\\_BUik](https://youtu.be/e3SqSP_BUik)





El Instituto Colombo-Alemán para la Paz-CAPAZ es financiado por el Servicio Alemán de Intercambio Académico (DAAD) con recursos del Ministerio Federal de Relaciones Exteriores

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