

## Colombia's Truth Commission

### *The Comprehensive System for Peace*

The Comprehensive System for Peace is a transitional justice mechanism created to determine what happened in the Colombian armed conflict by implementing measures for justice, truth and the search for persons reported missing, with the aim of satisfying the rights of victims, ensuring accountability for what happened, guaranteeing the legal security of those who participate in the System and contributing to coexistence, reconciliation and the non-repetition of the conflict. The System is composed of the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition; the Unit for the Search for Persons Reported Missing (UBPD) and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP).

### *The Truth Commission*



The Truth Commission is a constitutionally mandated State institution, autonomous, independent and of a temporary and extrajudicial nature. The Commission was established in the Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace, signed between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) in 2016. It was created by Legislative Act 01 of 2017 and officially constituted and regulated by Decree 588 of 2017.

The Commission has devoted itself to understanding what happened in Colombia's Internal Armed Conflict and to proposing recommendations so that progress can be made towards peace, accompanied by an ethical and political truth. During its mandate, the Commission has carried out a

series of private and public processes for the recognition of the victims' pain and their dignity, and the effects of the perpetrators' actions. It has also promoted dialogue and actions aimed at comprehensive coexistence and non-repetition, in which multiple voices from different regions of the country have been heard. The tireless work included:

- Gathering nearly 15,000 collective and individual interviews covering the national territory and including Colombians in the diaspora in 23 countries, which allowed more than 28,000 people to be directly heard.



- In depth research on 730 cases and 1195 reports of civilian incidents of violence during the armed conflict.



- Establishing 28 Truth Houses in major cities and territories hardest hit by the conflict.
- Conducting 14 dialogues on non-continuity and non-repetition of armed violence; 10 events of public acknowledgement and responsibility for large scale acts of violence to dignify and respond to victim requests; 17 contributions to Truth by public figures including five former Presidents; dozens of open listening and Truth and co-existence encounters, including security forces, and the hosting of regional dialogues.



- Hundreds of volunteers and 800 international organizations supported the listening process in 24 countries.
- Thousands of investigative hours and deliberations with historic documents, multi-disciplinary experts, and national archives by the Commissioner-led teams, including in-depth exploration of the Indigenous and Afro-Colombian plight during the war.

### ***The Commission's goals***

1. **Clarification:** to contribute to clarifying what happened during the Colombian armed conflict and to provide a broad explanation of the complexity of that conflict, to promote a shared understanding in society, especially of the lesser-known aspects of the conflict, such as, for example, the impact of the conflict on children, girls and adolescents, and gender-based violence.

**Recognition:** to promote and contribute to recognition. This means recognition of the victims as citizens who had their rights violated and as political subjects who are key players in the transformation of the country; the voluntary recognition of individual and collective responsibilities by all those who directly or indirectly participated in the conflict as a contribution to Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition; and in general, recognition by the whole of society of the violations that occurred as something that must be rejected by everyone and should not and cannot be repeated.

Recognition was understood by the Commission in four ways:

- a. Recognition of the victims, as a way of restoring their human dignity.
  - b. The voluntary recognition of responsibilities by those who participated directly or indirectly in the conflict. The perpetrators listening to what happened to the victims in the conflict was part of the process of Truth building and restoring dignity to the victims.
  - c. Recognition of the existence of the Internal Armed Conflict by civil society and the reasons why it persisted.
  - d. The recognition of community resistance and resilience in the midst of conflict.
2. **Coexistence:** to promote coexistence in Colombian regions, with the understanding that coexistence does not consist of simply sharing the same social and political space, but of creating a transformative environment to enable the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the construction of a broad and democratic culture of respect and tolerance. To this end, the Commission promoted an environment of dialogue and created spaces in which victims had their dignity restored, and where individual and collective responsibilities were recognized. This environment also enabled the consolidation of respect and trust between citizens, cooperation and solidarity, social justice, equal opportunities between men and women, and a democratic culture that cultivates tolerance and promotes “buen vivir” (living well).

The Commission worked with communities and regions especially affected by armed violence and promoted processes that led to transformational agreements for coexistence, with the purpose of contributing to the elimination of factors that could lead to the persistence of conflict over time.

3. **Non-repetition:** The Commission understood this as individual and collective reflections, recommendations and commitments, contributing to the non-continuation or repetition of the Internal Armed Conflict. The aim was to create conditions for coexistence with justice and equality between Colombians and to lay the foundations for reconciliation. To achieve this, the Commission insisted on dialogue and public, open and participatory discussion; promoted the formulation of recommendations for institutional reforms on economic, political, social and cultural issues; and encouraged the participants to commit to implementing agreements reached.

### ***The Commissioners***

The Truth Commission’s direction and mission was delegated to the Plenary of Commissioners, constituted by eleven members and chaired by Francisco de Roux. The Commissioners who took part

are outstanding professionals and citizens committed to peace, with longstanding experience in human rights and work with victims, selected by an autonomous committee and representative of various sectors. They are:



**Francisco de Roux Rengifo:** Jesuit priest and former provincial, philosopher and economist.

**Alejandra Miller Restrepo:** leader from the feminist movement in Colombia. Economist and Master of Political Studies; researcher and university professor.



**Alejandro Valencia Villa:** lawyer with thirty years' experience in the promotion and defense of human rights, with vast experience on issues of historical truth. He has been an advisor to multiple truth commissions around the world.

**Alejandro Castillejo Cuéllar:** PhD in anthropology and a post doctorate in Legal Studies.





**Saúl Franco Agudelo:** medic with a doctorate in public health, with forty years of experience as a university professor and researcher into violence and armed conflict and its impact on the lives and health of people and communities.

**Lucía González Duque:** architect, former director of the *Casa de la Memoria* Museum in Medellín. She has extensive experience in the formulation of projects related to culture and social transformation.



**Marta Ruiz Naranjo:** journalist with more than fifteen years' experience covering the internal armed conflict, both in the press and on television. Her work has analyzed rural development issues, the dynamics of war, the defense of freedom of expression and the right to information.

**Carlos Ospina Galvis:** retired Army major, lawyer and professional in military sciences (resigned in May 2022.)



**Leyner Palacios Asprilla:** social leader and victim of the Bojayá tragedy, which occurred on 2 May 2002.

**Patricia Tobón Yagarí:** Indigenous Emberá, lawyer, specialist in constitutional law. She has documented the violation of human rights in the country's Indigenous territories.



**Carlos Martín Beristain:** Spanish doctor and psychologist with vast experience in the psychosocial care of victims throughout the world and an advisor to truth commissions in several countries. He coordinated the Guatemalan report Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI).

### ***The Commission's Legacy***

The Commission's legacy are the actions, products and processes, both tangible and intangible, that the Truth Commission will make available to society in general, as well as to the State, the Comprehensive System for Peace, the international community and allies. The aim is for society to appropriate these resources and, especially, for strategic social actors to commit to implementing the Commission's recommendations.

The Legacy is the work carried out and the learning accumulated during the Commission's mandate, from the processes of collective listening, dialogue and reflection. This comprehensive process will be given back to society through academic dialogue, cultural and artistic activities, educational tools and archive materials. The information is being systematized, organized and will be made publicly available as widely as possible, across multiple formats, media and languages.



### ***Final Report and Digital Platform***

The Final Report is the most important result of the process of listening, clarification and analysis carried out by the Truth Commission and is part of the legacy that the institution is handing over to Colombia. The Report is a starting point for a wide-ranging and sustained country-wide dialogue on the causes and persistence of the conflict and the need for it not to be repeated. The period analyzed in the Report ranges from 1958 to 2016, without neglecting ongoing conflict factors which persist to date.

Some features of the Report:

- It was drafted taking into account ethnic diversity, gender and regional differences.
- It contains the findings, analyses, conclusions, recommendations and proposals arising from the process of clarification and listening.
- All the information contained in the document was subjected to a checking and revision process.
- Responsibility for its structure and content lies exclusively with the Commissioners.
- The Report is not a legal document clarifying the truth about what happened in the country in the context of the Colombian armed conflict.
- It has no legal character. That is to say, it will not lead to legal consequences for any responsible party who has not been previously judged by the ordinary justice system.

### ***Chapters in the Final Report***

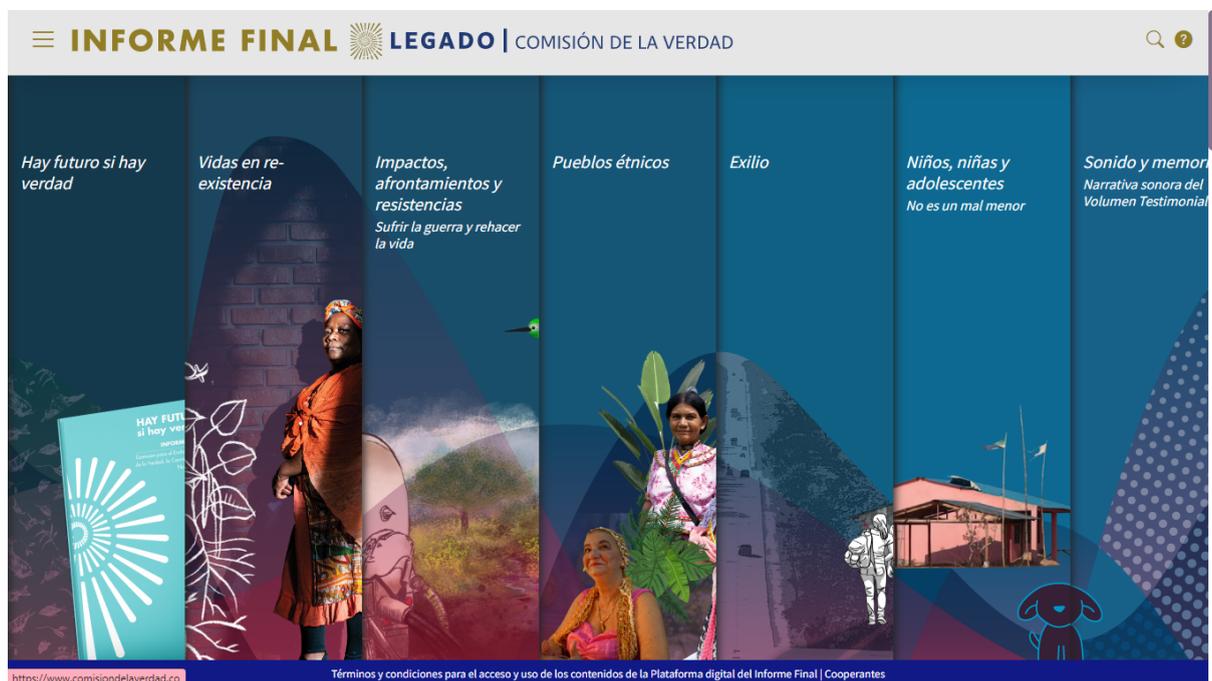
There are ten thematic chapters in the Report plus a statement by Francisco de Roux, President of the Commission. The structure is as follows:

- › **Declaration:** this is a short document that captures the Commission's message for the country, with a transformative perspective.
- › **Historical Narrative:** addresses the different periods of the Colombian conflict, historic milestones and the key explanations of conflict evolution, as well as elements of present-day persisting conflict.
- › **Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law:** explains the violations during the different periods, the collective responsibilities and the contexts that help to understand their intentions, modus operandi and impacts. This chapter seeks to answer the questions: what happened? how did it happen? why did it happen? and to whom did it happen?
- › **Women and THE LGBTQ+ population:** this chapter is approached from two perspectives: the first is violence against women and their role in peacebuilding; the second is violence against the LGBTQ+ population. This chapter also describes the ways that these two sectors of society resisted.
- › **Ethnicity:** analyzes the causes, dynamics and impacts of armed conflict on ethnic peoples, who have been disproportionately affected by the conflict. It also delves into how the territories of these communities have become areas of dispute due to their strategic locations and natural wealth.
- › **Children, adolescents:** this chapter is based on the life stories of those who lived through the conflict as minors and who have given their testimony to the Commission. The key focus of this analysis is the lack of protection for children in Colombia and the impact of orphanhood and recruitment.
- › **Impacts, coping and resistance:** focuses on the experience of millions of victims and the individual and collective consequences that the war has left. This chapter also talks about social fractures and the ways in which communities have overcome the acts of violence they suffered in the context of the armed conflict.
- › **Exile:** addresses the invisible experience of the Colombian population that has had to leave the country to defend their lives due to the armed conflict. There are many truths from Colombia outside of Colombia and it is the first time that a Commission has taken on such a challenge.
- › **Testimonial:** collects the stories of victims and perpetrators who talk about the ways that violence affected their daily lives in the midst of the armed conflict. These stories are divided into three main parts: before the violence, in the middle of the war and the prospects for the future, from a selection of testimonies.
- › **Territorial:** explains the local dynamics of the armed conflict in different regions of Colombia. The narrative describes the evolution of the war, the experience of the victims and social movements. This

chapter also addresses ways of understanding differences and similarities in regional dynamics and the impacts of the armed conflict.

› **Synthesis, findings, conclusions and recommendations for non-repetition:** this chapter offers an analysis of the impact of the war, its evolution over time and the Commission's fundamental findings to help understand the keys to the conflict in greater depth.

### **The Digital Platform**



The Truth Commission's Digital Platform is an innovative, intuitive, easily accessible and navigable tool for all audiences, which includes audio, video, text and other multimedia tools offering a comprehensive and critical narrative of what happened during the armed conflict in Colombia.

The Commission's Final Report is included on this platform as a downloadable e-book. In addition, the platform includes various expanded narratives that address in an intuitive and illustrated way the contents of the chapters that will be uploaded progressively, as well as the publications, records of lived experiences, educational tools and art works that demonstrate the Commission's learning, so that these can become a working tool and a reference point in the ongoing search for peace and reconciliation.

The platform gathers the Commission's experience of fulfilling its mission objectives: namely clarification, recognition, coexistence and non-repetition. It also gives an account of the meetings, recognitions, contributions to the truth, and other processes and spaces that were organized during the listening exercise with almost 30 thousand people, including: small-scale farmers, ethnic communities,



women, older adults, children, adolescents, the LGBTIQ + community, former presidents, businesspeople, and members of the state security forces.