



**THERE IS FUTURE
if there is truth**

FINAL REPORT

call
for a **GREAT
PEACE**

Declaration of the Commission for the Clarification
of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition

COMISIÓN DE LA
VERDAD



Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad,
la Convivencia y la No Repetición.

Colombia. Comisión de la Verdad, autor
Hay futuro si hay verdad : Informe Final de la Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición. -- Primera edición. -- Bogotá : Comisión de la Verdad, 2022.

11 tomos en 24 volúmenes : ilustraciones, diagramas, fotografías y mapas a color.

Incluye referencias bibliográficas

ISBN 78-958-53874-3-0 (Obra completa impreso en español)

ISBN 978-958-53874-4-7 (Tomo 1 impreso en español)

ISBN 978-628-7590-18-2 (Obra completa digital en español)

ISBN 978-628-7590-19-9 (Tomo 1 digital en español)

Tomo 1. Convocatoria a la paz grande: declaración de la Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición -- **Tomo 2.** Hallazgos y recomendaciones de la Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia -- **Tomo 3.** No matarás: relato histórico del conflicto armado interno en Colombia -- **Tomo 4.** Hasta la guerra tiene límites: violaciones de los derechos humanos, infracciones al derecho internacional humanitario y responsabilidades colectivas -- **Tomo 5.** Sufrir la guerra y rehacer la vida: impactos, afrontamientos y resistencias -- **Tomo 6.** Cuando los pájaros no cantaban: historias del conflicto armado en Colombia, tomo testimonial -- **Tomo 7.** Mi cuerpo es la verdad: experiencias de mujeres y personas LGBTQ+ en el conflicto armado -- **Tomo 8.** No es un mal menor: niñas, niños y adolescentes en el conflicto armado -- **Tomo 9.** Resistir no es aguantar: violencias y daños contra los pueblos étnicos de Colombia -- **Tomo 10.** La Colombia fuera de Colombia: las verdades del exilio -- **Tomo 11.** Colombia adentro: relatos territoriales sobre el conflicto armado -- **Tomo 11. vol. 1.** Ensayo introductorio -- **Tomo 11. vol. 2.** Amazonía -- **Tomo 11. vol. 3.** Antioquia, sur de Córdoba y Bajo Atrato chochoano -- **Tomo 11. vol. 4.** Caribe -- **Tomo 11. vol. 5.** Eje Cafetero -- **Tomo 11. vol. 6.** Frontera nororiental -- **Tomo 11 vol. 7.** Magdalena Medio -- **Tomo 11. vol. 8.** Nariño y sur de Cauca -- **Tomo 11. vol. 9.** Orinoquía -- **Tomo 11. vol. 10.** Pacífico -- **Tomo 11. vol. 11.** Región Centro -- **Tomo 11. vol. 12.** Valle y norte del Cauca -- **Tomo 11. vol. 13.** Dinámicas urbanas de la guerra -- **Tomo. 11. vol. 14.** El campesinado y la guerra.

1. Colombia. - Comisión de la Verdad - Informes 2. Conflicto armado -Colombia - Siglos XX-XXI - Informes 3. Víctimas de la violencia - Colombia - Siglos XX-XXI - Informes 4. Justicia y reparación - Colombia - Siglo XXI - Informes 5. Búsqueda de la verdad - Colombia - Siglo XXI - Informes 6. Testimonio de víctimas - Colombia - Siglo XXI - Informes 7. Reparación de víctimas según grupo poblacional - Colombia - Siglo XXI - Informes

CDD: 303.609861 ed. 23

CO-BoBN- a1096847



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ISBN Obra completa en español

978-958-53874-3-0 (impreso) - 978-628-7590-18-2 (digital)

ISBN Tomo 1 en español

978-958-53874-4-7 (impreso) - 978-628-7590-19-9 (digital)

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Introduction

The claim

We bring a message of hope and future for our broken and shattered nation. Awkward truths that challenge our dignity, a message for all of us as human beings, beyond political or ideological options, beyond cultures and religious beliefs, beyond ethnicities and gender.

We convey a message that comes from listening and feeling for the victims in most of the Colombian territory and in exile; from listening to those who fight to keep the memory and resist denialism, and to those who have accepted ethical, political, and criminal accountability.

A message of truth to stop the outrageous tragedy of a conflict in which eighty percent of the victims have been civilian non-combatants. An invitation to overcome the oblivion, fear, and hatred to death that hover over Colombia because of the internal armed conflict.

We do so from the question that has challenged humanity from the earliest times: Where is your brother?

And from the perennial claim of the mystery of justice in history: The blood of your brother cries out endlessly from the earth.

We call for the healing of the physical and symbolic, pluricultural and pluriethnic body that we form as citizens of this nation. A body that cannot survive with an infarcted heart in Chocó, gangrenous arms in Arauca, destroyed legs in Mapiripán, the severed head in El Salado, the violated vagina in Tierralta, empty eye sockets in Cauca, the ruptured stomach in Tumaco, the vertebrae crushed in Guaviare, the shoulders shattered in Urabá, the neck slit in Catatumbo, the face burned in Machuca, the lungs pierced in the mountains of Antioquia, and the indigenous soul ravaged in Vaupés.

We call for the freedom of our symbolic and cultural world from the traps of fear, anger, stigmatization, and mistrust. To remove weapons from the venerable space of the public. To alienate ourselves from those who bring guns into politics. Not to cooperate with the messiahs who pretend to support the legitimate social struggle with machine guns. We call to protect human rights and to place institutions at the service of the dignity of each person, of communities and ethnic peoples. To take on together, through democratic means, the responsibility for the social and institutional changes that coexistence demands, as set forth in the Peace Agreement between the State and the FARC-EP, and to extend this agreement to the ELN and other armed groups, with the understanding of the current circumstances.

We do not intend to end the legitimate debate between those who maintain the status quo and those who wish to change it. We call on society to become aware that our way of seeing the world and relating to others is trapped in a “war mode” in which we cannot envisage that

others think differently. Opponents are seen as schemers, their arguments are no longer interesting or debatable but dangerous and frightening, and taking them into account when debating is a supposed betrayal of own arguments. Thus, opposition becomes deadly because people become mere obstacles. This way of thinking is what made it possible for aberrations such as human beings being turned into smoke and ashes in the chimneys of the crematory oven of Juan Frío, or for lists of “deaths in combat” of the “false positives” to become mere figures; that way of thinking also made it possible for soldiers to become hunting trophies for the guerrilla, or to find the remains of shot politicians in garbage bags, for us to become used to the suspended deaths of kidnappings and to have pick up daily the corpses of troublesome leaders.

We call for moral and political responsibilities to be accepted before the truth of the brutal damage caused and to do so with sincerity of heart. We have found that those who acknowledge responsibility, far from destroying their reputation, enhance it, and go from being part of the problem to being part of the solution that victims yearn for and that the perpetrators themselves require.

This nation has the stirring wealth of its people, the multiplicity of its cultural expressions, the depth of its spiritual traditions and the labor and entrepreneurial stamina to produce the conditions that satisfy the longed for life; it has the wild ferocity of its ecology, the natural power of two oceans and thousands of rivers, mountains and valleys; the audacity of its youth, the courage of its women and the secular strength of its indigenous, peasant, black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, Palenquero and Roma peoples.

At the same time, paradoxically, it is an exclusionary society, with structural problems never confronted with

the political will and ethical greatness that was essential: inequality, racism, colonial treatment, patriarchy, corruption, drug trafficking, impunity, negationism, security that does not provide security. Thus, cultural, natural, and economic wealth has gone hand in hand with the absence of recognition of the other man, the other woman, and has led to the violation of rights and contempt for the rights of citizens. This is precisely what must be changed through peaceful and democratic ways; otherwise, the wonders of Colombia will continue to float above one of the most brutal and longest humanitarian crises on the planet.

We strongly believe that there is a future to build together amidst our legitimate differences. We cannot accept the alternative of continuing to accumulate shattered, disappeared, ostracized, and exiled lives. We cannot remain in the armed conflict that transforms itself every day and devours us. We cannot postpone, as we have already done after millions of victims, the day when “peace becomes a duty and a right of mandatory compliance”, as set forth in our Constitution.

Where do we speak from?

We were eleven commissioners appointed by the Selection Committee established by the Peace Agreement. We come from the accompaniment of communities, ethnic causes and work promoting women’s rights; from regional development, science, culture, arts and memory, human rights, analytical journalism, and work with all victims; from the university and social research centers; from public administration; from other truth commissions, and from the Church and other spiritual traditions. Also, from welcoming organizations of soldiers and police and ex-combatants of

guerrilla groups wounded in combat. And we owe our origin to the courage of these groups that form the movement for a negotiated solution to the conflict, peace, and reconciliation.

We are one of the three agencies created by the Peace Agreement between the Colombian State and the FARC EP. We make up the Comprehensive System for Peace, together with the *Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas Dadas por Desaparecidas* (UBPD, from its name in Spanish, Unit for the Search for Missing Persons) and the *Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* (JEP, from its name in Spanish, Special Jurisdiction for Peace).

The Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, - or simply the Commission, as we will name it here, - is a State Agency, autonomous, of a constitutional nature, which does not depend on the Presidency, the Congress nor the judiciary, with the duty to clarify the truth about the conflict.

Devoted to this cause died our fellow commissioners Alfredo Molano and Ángela Salazar. Alfredo, until his last day, traveled along rivers, roads, and moorlands in his passion for peasant farmers, and Ángela spent her strength and joy on behalf of so many communities until one night in Urabá Covid snatched her away from her people. Following the rules, we chose those who took over the place of our friends. Two months before the conclusion of the Final Report, one of the commissioners, chosen when the Commission started its work, made the decision to withdraw.

What we did

For more than three years we listened to more than 30,000 victims in individual testimonies and collective meetings in 28 places where we established Houses of Truth, in

Indigenous reservations and Afro-Colombian communities, in gypsy kumpaños and among the Raizales, as well as in exile in 24 countries. We received more than a thousand reports from civil society organizations, corporations, organizations for the defense of human rights and nature, women seekers of the disappeared, women and LGBTIQ+ population; from hundreds of children and thousands of young people, as well as those who were taken to war at those ages. We listened closely to living former presidents, intellectuals, journalists, artists, politicians, bishops, priests, and ministers, and we met many times with law enforcement officials and received through President Iván Duque the Contribution to the truth of the Armed Forces. We listened to those appearing before the JEP and held meetings and acts of recognition with FARC-EP ex-combatants, members of the Comunes Political Party, former members of the other guerrilla forces, former paramilitaries of the Ralito Pact and other perpetrators who are in prison.

We carried out our mission based on two interconnected processes: listening in open social dialogue and research. The Constitutional Court extended our initial three-year term for seven more months, in response to the request of victims and human rights organizations, to compensate for the time lost as a result of the pandemic, extend our listening exercise and complete the preparation of the Final Report and the legacy we are delivering.

International solidarity

We had the support of the United Nations System and all its agencies, the Secretary General, the Security Council, the Verification Mission, and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office; and we received the clear and

discreet backing of Pope Francis, the effective support of the European Union and its member countries, as well as Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom; the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); all the countries of the Americas and Japan. We have more than 200 international partners including bilateral agencies, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) and private foundations such as Porticus, Ford, Open Society and Rockefeller. In our meeting with the international community, which knows about wars, we have been impressed by their appreciation of the Colombian peace process as one of the positive news reports in a world in conflict and one of the most serious negotiations which has taken place between a state and a powerful insurgency.

As part of the truth that we are as a nation, we witnessed the solidarity with the victims and the support for the peace process from the international community compared to the indifference of large sectors of Colombian society, who seem to be unaware of the suffering of millions of their fellow citizens as a result of the internal armed conflict.

We believe it is possible

Although new forms have taken shape in the armed conflict and despite the fact that there are areas of the country where communities consider that insecurity is now worse than before, we are aware that we are not in the times of the war when the FARC-EP came to control the initiative of the violent confrontation and when paramilitarism, in the highest degree of terror, came to constitute a political alternative on the doorstep of power. Times when massacres were of 50 or 100 people, disappearances and kidnappings were

counted by the hundreds; displacements, by the hundreds of thousands, and all the beds in the Military Hospital were full of war-wounded.

The achievements of the November 2016 Peace Agreement are a reality. Although the expected regional participatory transformation did not occur and the development plans focused on a territory (PDET) were limited to demonstrative projects validated by the UN Verification Mission, these, and the election to Congress of the victims in the special peace constituencies show that we can and must go further, “until we love life”, as we have sung in the territories. The people knew in 2017, the most peaceful year lived in half a century, what peace means, and they are not going to give up on it.

The legacy

We received the mission to clarify, in three and a half years, the truth of this armed conflict of more than six decades, to dignify the victims, to achieve voluntary recognition by those responsible, to promote coexistence in the territories and to formulate feasible proposals for non-repetition. With determination and amidst pressures, opposition, and risks, as well as the Covid pandemic, we did what we could. We delivered the Final Report, made up of a set of volumes that address the different dimensions of the conflict, in an ongoing dialogue with society, to set in motion a process that we hope will be irreversible and incremental. We want the report to produce the effect of a stone falling into a body of water and its ripples to erode Colombia’s numb surface.

Together with the delivery of the Final Report, we also pass on a Human Rights Archive and our Mission Information System -which contains the compilation of

all our research with the technological tools to continue producing knowledge towards peace-, as well as the Digital Transmedia, accessible on computers and cell phones from anywhere. In it can be found the Final Report, the Commission's recommendations, audiovisual narratives, and pedagogical products put together in fulfillment of our mission.

We deliver this legacy of truth to Colombian society, to the JEP, to the UBPD and to the *Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas* (Uariv, from its name in Spanish, or Unit for the Assistance and Comprehensive Reparation of Victims), and we entrust it to more than 3,000 allied organizations and institutions. We are confident that the president-elect, Gustavo Petro, in the context of his call for social and political unity, as well as the high courts, will take the Final Report and its recommendations and promote democratic and institutional dialogue to develop the necessary changes. There remains in place the Follow-up and Monitoring Committee on the recommendations, made up of seven people, mostly women, elected by us in compliance with Decree 588/2017 and the Commission's rules.

The truth event

Together with the JEP, the UBPD and the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (CNMH, from its name in Spanish, National Historical Memory Center, or NHMC), the Commission has contributed to turning the truth into a public right and an event both inside and outside the country.

This can be seen in the willingness of the victims who came to the Commission in their thousands, overcoming the fear that still exists in some territories; in the words

used by perpetrators in accepting their responsibility in acts of recognition; in the generosity of the people who, after listening to them, welcomed the perpetrators; in the documents submitted by hundreds of groups; in the institutions and companies that contributed their vision of the conflict. The event has also been marked by questioning, distortions, and fake news, as well as denialism, lies, attacks and stigmatization against members of the Commission.

Shedding light on the truth

We received the mission to clarify the truth about the conflict and we have done so in two moments. First, by listening to embrace the reality of the physical and emotional impact of violence on people and communities, those unquestionable harms and pain that need no interpretation. Second, by seeking the truth that explains: why did it happen? Who did it, what is their responsibility and how to prevent it from continuing? What happened to society and the State while it was happening?

First step in the clarification process:
accepting the reality of the victims

“Before any speech or sermon, lay your hands on the bloodstained body of your people”, Pope Francis asked the bishops gathered in Medellín. We, the commissioners, welcome this claim by laying our hands on the wounded Colombia.

The more than 500 social dialogue meetings to hear the truth, meetings to acknowledge responsibility, women’s meetings, presence in mingas (indigenous

peoples' gatherings) and riverside or mountain communities, which were reached through long journeys on foot, hours on mule back, on truck and airplane rides, acts of coexistence, the welcoming of groups that bear their tragedy and thousands of hours of individual and collective testimonies, placed before us the reality of victims and perpetrators.

The testimonies, with their eloquent words and stirring silences, are collected in the volumes of the Final Report and especially in the book devoted to the oral account of life: *When the birds wouldn't sing*.

We are faced with the kilometer-long queues of children taken to war; the endless procession of women searching for disappeared partners and children; the multitude of young men and women murdered in extrajudicial executions; the mass graves and corpses of rural boys and girls scattered in the mountains, many of them indigenous and Afro-Colombians who were taken as guerrillas, paramilitaries or soldiers and who died not knowing who they were fighting for; the thousands of abused and humiliated women; the massacred and abandoned villages; indigenous reservations and black communities devastated and confined to stay within their territories; millions of displaced families who abandoned plots of land and ranches; thousands of soldiers, police officers, ex-guerrillas and ex-paramilitaries who wander around lame, maimed and blinded by explosives; members of communities that had to suffer the same fate because of improvised explosive devices; hundreds of thousands of exiles who escaped to survive; multitudes of families who carry the blow of kidnapping and mourn for those held captive who did not return; nature victimized in the rivers and the Dike Canal (Canal del Dique), turned into graveyards and streams of oil sewage because of the blowing up of oil pipelines; the

burned jungles and hundreds of native species disappeared, hundreds of thousands of hectares poisoned with the chemicals used in the production of cocaine base paste and ruined with glyphosate sprayed left and right to wither their cultivation. And the traditions, laughter and affection of the people's festivities invaded by symbols of sadness, terror, darkness, and mistrust.

The claim of outrage

We had no reason to have accepted barbarism as natural and inevitable, nor to have continued with business, academic activity, religious worship, fairs, and soccer as if nothing was happening. We did not have to get used to the disgrace of so much violence as if it did not concern us when our own dignity was being shredded in our hands. There was no reason for presidents and congressmen to govern and legislate calmly over the flood of blood that drowned the country in the hardest decades of the conflict.

Why did the country not stop to demand the guerrillas and the State to stop the political war early on and negotiate a comprehensive peace? Which were the State and the institutions that did not prevent and rather promoted the armed conflict? Where was the Congress, where were the political parties? To what extent did those who took up arms against the State calculate the brutal and gruesome consequences of their decision? Did they never understand that the armed order they imposed on the peoples and communities they claimed to protect destroyed them, and then abandoned them in the hands of paramilitary executioners? What did religious leaders do in the face of this crisis of the spirit? And, apart from those who even laid down their lives to accompany and expose, what did the majority of bishops, priests and religious communities do? What did the teachers do? What do the judges

and prosecutors who let impunity accumulate say? What role did the opinion leaders and the media play? How did we dare to let it happen and let it continue?

Let's take a look at some of the most painful facts:

The disappeared

One day, women searching for their missing relatives arrived in Pasto invited by the Commission and filled the central park with photographs of the daughters and sons who were taken from them and never returned. They came from all regions and gave testimonies of years of struggle interwoven with the claim that they shout in the streets: "Alive they were taken away, alive we want them back!". On a different day, other women from all over the country staged a sit-in in front of the Commission's headquarters and demanded that the State hand over their loved ones taken by paramilitaries, guerrillas, and members of the security forces. They returned on other occasions. Always from different places, from different organizations. Always searching. The last group came from Guaviare and the Pacific, from La Guajira and Soacha, from indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombian communities of Cauca and from all the borders; and that afternoon they asked the Commission to request the Constitutional Court to declare a "state of unconstitutional things" because, at least since 1982, the search continues relentlessly, and the number already exceeds 110,000. This is the immense challenge of the UBPD that goes with the families through cemeteries, hillsides, and mass graves together with those who have turned the pain of the lost family member into a collective struggle for human rights.

The kidnappings

If only Colombia would one day listen to the thousands of victims who were kidnapped by the FARC, ELN, other guerrillas and paramilitaries. If only it would pay attention to the stories of the human degradation of the women whose kidnappers stripped them of all rights, denied them communication with their young sons and daughters, deprived them of the slightest privacy, kept them between the uncertainty of being killed in a rescue operation and the panic at the news of the shooting of those who tried to flee. Let the whole country hear the story of the deputies of the Valle del Cauca Department shot dead in what was supposed to be the last week of kidnapping, after five years of suffering. Also, the story of the families held captive in the church of La Maria and the three hostages who died in the cliffs of Cali after the “kidnapping of Kilometer 18”; the story of the dean of medicine of the University of Rosario whose ransom was paid after being murdered in his prison. Or the stories of soldiers and police officers victims who for more than a decade were kept isolated and often chained, and those of farmers and small and medium-sized businessmen deprived of their freedom against any standard of International Humanitarian Law.

During the war, the FARC-EP pretended that kidnapping was a normal, justifiable practice, along with the humiliations and crimes against humanity that go along with it, and that is why the former guerrillas pay the price of collective indignation, although the men and women who signed the Peace Accord recognized in a public letter that they had destroyed the dignity of the kidnapped and, incidentally, their own dignity and legitimacy, and asked for forgiveness as an organization. Today, those most responsible are answering to the JEP in Case 01, called «Retención ilegal de personas por parte de las FARC-EP» («Illegal

detention of persons by the FARC-EP»).

The Commission has accompanied former guerrillas in several emblematic cases of truth and recognition of responsibilities - such as the kidnapping and murder of Guillermo Gaviria and Gilberto Echeverri - before the families and the people of Caicedo, or the ceremony in the church of San Francisco, in Cali, when the former commander of the FARC-EP said verbatim in front of the relatives of the deputies: «We had them in our hands, we killed them, we are responsible».

The massacres

You must have been in Barrancabermeja the night of May 16th, 1998, when the paramilitaries of alias Camilo Morantes assassinated 7 young men and disappeared 25 others as they were celebrating on the eve of the Mother's Day fiesta (and later to have buried day after day the dead of the long massacre that lasted for more than half a year in that oil port). Or , the following year, to have lived through the massacre of San Pablo, on the banks of the Magdalena River, perpetrated by the Central Bolívar Block; or to have followed in Bojayá the procession of the remains of the children who were killed in the town's church by the explosion of a gas cylinder launched by the FARC-EP in the middle of a combat against paramilitaries; or to have listened to the burned survivors of the ELN crime in Machuca; or to have participated in the memorial of the horror left by the paramilitaries in El Salado, in the Montes de María; or to have gone with the community of Toribío to bury the corpses of Nasa Indigenous People massacred by the invaders of their village; or to have lived a funeral of black laments in the marshes of Buenaventura after the massacre of the young people of Punta del Este; or to have listened to the testimonies of the massacre in the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó

by men of the Army; or to have been a neighbor, for a long time, of the neighborhoods of Commune 13 of Medellín that suffered the Orión Operation; or to have accompanied the Afro-descendants displaced from Cacarica by the Genesis Operation in their return to their lands. Then one would fully understand the tragedy of the conflict in its desperate mourning and in the anxiety and terror of the survivors in the territories where the great massacres of defenceless members of the civilian population took place.

These blows of political violence against peasant farmers, ethnic communities and inhabitants of rural towns and the outskirts of cities occurred more than 2,000 times. Massacres were perpetrated by all groups; the analysis of the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (National Center of Historical Memory) shows that most of the massacres were carried out by the paramilitaries with the support of members of the security forces. There were towns that faced massacres committed by the same group dozens of times, such was the case of the FARC-EP that repeatedly attacked Caldonio; other places were destroyed by one group and destroyed again by another. Towns that, like Vallecito in the south of Bolívar, were burned on several occasions, and towns that were emptied, like El Aro or San Carlos, in Antioquia. Massacres that transformed the joy of the Colombian countryside into mountains and valleys of terror from where millions of people fled displaced.

At the beginning of 2002, a university professor, assistant to paramilitary chief Salvatore Mancuso, explained that for them massacres were ethical options in the context of war: to guarantee that when attacking a town at least one subversive would die, 20 inhabitants had to be killed; and since the FARC-EP had 20,000 members, to finish them off, 400,000 people had to be eliminated. For him, this lurid mathematics prevented a greater evil, since

not doing so would lead to a supposed civil war wherein millions would die. Thus, they created an abhorrent arithmetic and a morality of barbarism.

From the pain of the displaced victims, who mourn the murdered dead, the burned houses and lost plots of land, the Commission asks: why did we Colombians see the massacres on television day after day and as a society let them continue for decades as if they were nothing to do with us? And why was the security that surrounded the politicians and big property not security provided for the villages, the Indigenous Reservations or for the popular sectors that faced the avalanche of massacres? And why did the guerrillas, who presented themselves as the savior of the people, commit hundreds of massacres in the struggle for the territories?

False positives

This was the name given by the mothers to the young men killed by members of the Army, where everything was fake: the job offers to recruit them, the feigned combat, the guerrilla uniforms and boots, the weapons placed on their corpses, the Prosecutor's report as "killed in armed action" and the action of the Military Criminal Justice System.

If there had been ten killings, it would be very serious. If there had been a hundred, it would be enough to demand the change of an army. There were thousands and it is a monstrosity. The JEP made public the number 6,402, which became a slogan on street murals, and the Commission considers that there could be many more. The crime took place in almost all the brigades, and soldiers and even several generals are directly involved. There was no law or written order that mandated it, but the feeling of the soldiers who fired was that they were doing what the institution wanted, due to the incentives and pressures that demanded immediate results of corpses, the publicity

given to “those who were killed in action” and the protection of the perpetrators.

Since these extrajudicial executions began to increase in 2001, there have been complaints from victims and from national and international organizations. The monstrosity could be stopped, as did the subordinates who refused to shoot out of respect for their conscience and paid the cost of being singled out and threatened. It could be exposed, as did the two military judges who had to go into exile to protect themselves. But it was a persistent corporate behavior, as evidenced when the “false positives” subsided immediately, in all the brigades, the day the president and the minister removed 26 military officers, 3 of them generals, from the institution, and 10 other officers months later.

Paradoxically, many of these crimes occurred when civilian and military personnel took human rights training to the highest echelons of the security institutions. The Commission is witness to this struggle to change the behavior of high-level commanders that could lead to events that were actually happening. These efforts led to the investigation undertaken in the second half of 2008, which resulted in the dismissal of implicated military personnel. Why didn't they do it earlier when there were so many complaints? If they had done so, many murders would have been avoided.

More than a thousand families of those killed throughout the country have placed at the heart of the Commission their own pain and indignation. Soldiers and commanders, in private and in public events, have acknowledged the crime perpetrated and the magnitude of the damage caused. They have asked the families and the whole nation for forgiveness, and the Commission asks the State for protection for these people who have accepted their crime and the institutional reality in which

they acted and are today before the JEP.

The damage caused by this State crime to the public moral fibre of the nation is unfathomable and has a devastating effect on the children and youth of Colombia: high-ranking members of the Army and mid-level military and State officials, violating the law, over several years publicly presented as positive something that was despicable. They did it thousands of times, presented their crimes as a matter of honor when these crimes were intrinsically perverse and out of their lies they sought to bring glory to themselves. And this moral damage to the nation violates the social legitimacy of the entire public force; to the pain, at the same time, of many men and women of moral integrity who base their honor on being members of the Colombian Army.

The basic question is posed by the mothers in the streets shouting: «Who gave the order? ». The questions are unavoidable: why didn't those primarily responsible within the Army act in time? Why haven't they spoken before the victims or the nation to acknowledge their crimes? Why did it come to such barbarism? Why didn't the other State bodies, the Congress, the high courts, intervene?

The Commission wonders about the military chaplains and the Military Diocese. In all the brigades where false positives occurred, there were priests in charge of guiding the consciences of the soldiers, the vast majority of whom were Catholic. How can it be justified that they were unaware of this and, if they knew about it, why did they not act? It was a crime of such brutality that it demanded acting with the greatest ethical and evangelical energy, at the highest institutional and public level, no matter what.

Former President Santos - who was Minister of Defense from late 2006 to late 2008 - came to the Commission to contribute to the truth with his testimony,

as a former president and public servant, and focused his speech on a rigorous analysis of the false positives, concluding by asking forgiveness from all the families and Colombia, and invited the Military Forces to apologize to the national and international community.

The pain of girls and boys

More than 30,000 children were involved in the armed struggle when they were fifteen years old or younger. The Commission has listened to the testimony of these victims who are now young people or adults. It has accompanied the mothers of Argelia, in Antioquia, who condemn the way the FARC-EP came to their homes to take their children away. The Commission was present in a public act where Misak and Nasa families in Caldono, Cauca, asked the guerrillas to return the children alive or tell them where they are buried. A group of young survivors of the Berlin Operation told how the FARC-EP recruited them, the sufferings of the journey they undertook and how their peers were killed by members of the Army who were not unaware that they were killing children. And this has been confirmed by testimonies of retired soldiers who admit to having shot unarmed children. Ex-combatants of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia have told the Commission in public that they enrolled many children with money. The FARC-EP and former paramilitary chiefs have accepted this in acts of recognition. In one of those gruesome accounts, a former paramilitary combatant told how, when he was recruited as a child, he lived through the moment when a comrade who tried to escape had his throat slit in front of the rest of the children. Then they were forced to pass from hand to hand the head of their friend. And, among all these victims, there are more than a thousand who have had the courage, in events of truth,

to recount the subjugation, indoctrination, emotional and sexual abuse, repeated abortions, sadness and silence in which their childhood was imprisoned.

But the reality of the conflict is complex. Women and men who joined the guerrillas as children also came to the Commission, and even after laying down their arms defend their life story as one in which there was respect and personal growth. Many of them came to the war fleeing from destroyed homes or poverty, filled with rage at the murder of their parents or siblings to cover up the mourning for the family that was taken away from them.

Bodies broken by contempt and prejudice

The first act of acknowledgement by the Commission was in Cartagena. Women from all over the country and LGBTIQ+ people arrived there. It was a milestone act: from that moment on, the decision of the victims to publicly present the violence of the armed actors against them became an unstoppable and irreversible determination. Women and LGBTIQ+ people recounted how their bodies were used as a battlefield and a symbolic ground of dispute by one or the other to consolidate patriarchal domination. Others had the courage to tell the story of rape by several men, in front of their husbands and children, under the threat of killing their families and with the demand for absolute silence, often with the aim of displacing the families and dispossessing them of their land. Some had the courage to share how they were forced to have abortions within the ranks. All of them, in different ways, showed the emotional fractures they carry in their bodies and souls. There were those who opened up to tell of the cruelty of sexual torture when they were impaled through the vagina or had their breasts cut off, or others who shared the accounts of shocking electric currents or castration to which they were subjected

as political detainees. Adult women and perpetrators recounted how, as schoolchildren, paramilitaries turned them into sex slaves with the consent of school administrators. Many told how in different towns it became normal to satisfy the sexual appetites of the armed leaders whenever they felt like it. We were able to demonstrate how violence against women became normalized and how cultural prejudices against LGBTIQ+ people allowed a social complicity that facilitated violence against them. In all these cases we felt the cry of indignation and rage. We have witnessed how pain and rage have been transformed into energy to fight for dignity. Not only have many decided to leave shame aside and speak out, but have also become leaders for a different future, wherein there will give themselves the recognition, celebration, and respect for the greatness of every human being in their gender identity and sexual orientation.

The wandering crowd

Eight million Colombians fled. There was no place for them in this false «everyone's house» protected by the security agencies. They abandoned plots of land, animals, friendships. They fled to any hiding place because they were going to be killed. Others, a million more, ended up in exile in the rest of the world. More than four million were under eighteen years of age, and more than five million were women.

Those who did not leave resisted the terror and sieges. In the fields and mountains. In the indigenous Reservations, some decimated to the point of extermination. In the Afro communities, confined within their territories by the armed groups. Others created «peace communities» or began processes of collective resistance that gave rise to the peasant farmer reserve areas. Many of them persevered by themselves, even when the neighboring farms were left alone: «We are not going to leave because the only thing we

have is a piece of land and we can't take it on our shoulders».

The outburst of the young people of Cali and other cities in the national strike of 2021 also carried the energy and indignation of those who have been forced to move to the big cities where they are not considered people, after being forced to leave their roots and their dreams: alienated from their own culture, without jobs, without education, without contacts; considered a danger in this country that sees internal threats everywhere. And invited, as usual, to join the micro-trafficking, the paramilitaries, or the guerrillas, to be someone in «everyone's house».

The Peasant Farmers, fields of war

In December 2019, after twelve preparatory meetings held in seven regions (Caribbean, Central Andean, Orinoco-Amazon, South Andean, Northeast-Arauca, Antioquia-Coffee-Growing Axis and Sumapaz), more than 200 peasant farmer men and women gathered in the municipality of Cabrera, Cundinamarca, to analyze the impacts of the armed conflict on farmer populations. There, delegations of peasant farmer women participated together with territorial delegations in intergenerational and inter-territorial dialogue sessions in an effort to exchange knowledge, stories, and experiences. Commissioner Alfredo Molano considered Sumapaz to be the setting in which the peasant farmer struggles for land were born in the mid-twentieth century. For this reason, Cabrera, in the heart of the Sumapaz Peasant Farmers Reserve Area, was the municipality chosen to take forward the recognition of the impacts of the war on a particular cultural and political subject of rights such as the peasantry.

In that space, the peasant farmers of Colombia were able to express an irrefutable truth: the Colombian peasantry was the main victim of the internal armed conflict. During

the war, peasant farmers were forced off their land, tortured, murdered, kidnapped, extorted, forcibly recruited, made invisible, sexually abused, marginalized, and criminalized. All armed actors contributed to this tragedy, and some of the wounds generated by this war are still open. The dispossession and violence especially affected peasant farmer families: from the 393,000 plots of land dispossessed during the period of violence to the more than 2 million hectares claimed in the current land restitution process, peasant farmers were the most severely affected. The progress of the peasant farmer struggle for agrarian reform in the 20th century was reversed in a violent agrarian counter-reform at the beginning of the 21st century. The peasantry was persecuted, marginalized, and stigmatized.

During the armed conflict, peasants have fallen victim to the bullets and bombs thrown by the public forces in military operations against drug-trafficking and insurgent groups, and they have also fallen victim to the cylinder bombs and taticos (explosives in containers) of the guerrillas in their processes of expansion and territorial control. They were also victims of ruthless massacres by paramilitaries. When referring to the conflict in Colombia, the writer Tomás Eloy Martínez put it accurately: «Adversaries seldom fight each other. Their battlefield is the body of the peasants».

The indigenous, black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, Palenquero and Roma peoples

The suffering and uncertainty caused by the internal armed conflict were experienced in all parts of Colombia but were and continue to be more destructive and lingering in ethnic communities for many reasons. They are culturally rich populations that forge an identity with the mountains, jungles, and beaches, where they are not reached by a State in

the process of national integration. A State that is still unable to fully understand the ethnic groups and the immense historical debts owed to these communities as a result of exclusion and prevailing racism, despite constitutional efforts to recognize a pluricultural and pluri-ethnic nation. There, national oblivion, and exclusion created conditions conducive to dispossession of territories and for traditional coca for medicinal use to become a turbulent commodity. The territories served as corridors for drug trafficking and the development of illegal economic activities that generate income for the armed groups, while the guerrillas and paramilitaries, both wildly racist, found young people and children for recruitment, took their rage out against the ethnic authorities, and carried out sexual violence against women.

More than a hundred different indigenous peoples lived and expressed their identity and sovereignty, until the Conquest arrived. Then, in the name of the king and the god of the Christians, the Spaniards imposed armed and institutional domination. This physical, spiritual, symbolic, and cultural subjugation of the inhabitants, and the limitless disrespect for human beings, was deepened by bringing and selling hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans on the market to use and exploit them on farms, mines and on plantations.

The daily normalization of subjugation did not allow the Creoles and Spaniards to understand that a cry for dignity was growing in the hearts of the indigenous and Blacks peoples that would break the injustice of that racist and slave-owning world, in a struggle that would take centuries and that was already heralded in the local indigenous rebellions, in the resistance of the Palenque people and in prophets against racism in Nueva Granada, such as the Jesuits Antonio de Sandoval and Pedro Claver. In these

cries in favor of human greatness, the ethnic groups fought for their dignity and their territories and were attacked, expelled and, in several cases, annihilated.

Amid this institutional and cultural reality, the political War of Independence took place; and the same racist and exclusionary reality prevailed in the establishment of the Republic, in the civil wars and in the confrontation between liberals and conservatives and has been felt in the disproportionate violence faced by indigenous and black people during the decades of the internal armed conflict.

Therefore, upon request of the ethnic peoples and out of respect for human dignity, the Commission carried out a prior consultation with the JEP and the UBPD. Through this mechanism the decision to create an Ethnic Peoples' Directorate in the Commission was approved, which has kept alive in our search the clamor for justice and in the echo of centuries of memory, the experience of the suffering of the peoples and the appreciation for their struggles for autonomy, land, freedom, and dignity, recorded in their organizations and defended by the calm and strong security of the Indigenous Guard and the Cimarrona Guard.

The protagonists who full exposed themselves to risk

It is the duty of the Commission to honor those who fought without arms for human dignity and peace and were murdered. Also, to recognize their partners who carry the pain of their lost friends and continue to take risks in the same task.

They are first and foremost human rights defenders who stood up to the military and civilian courts and stood by the victims until the day the trials ended. They are judges and prosecutors of integrity, murdered because they did not yield to threats or pressure, and against whom some members of the security forces, businessmen, politicians, and paramilitaries allied themselves in different places to

persecute them. Many were murdered and others are in exile. Trade unionists from public and private institutions who fought for better working conditions for all workers in Colombia, who exercised their right to strike and to collective bargaining and confronted company managers and security forces, did not give in to blackmail and often ended up exposing their lives. Young university students full of enthusiasm for the cause of building a society without exclusion or inequality and who were killed as they expressed courage, civil resistance and including through graffiti, music, and dance. Spiritual leaders, indigenous and Afro-Colombian sages, nuns and priests, bishops, ministers, young people inspired by faith were killed in the countryside and cities, and their memories are honored as an inspirational presence.

The countryside of hell

Members of the Commission who traveled throughout the country at the end of the last century remember the signs left by the guerrillas around the villages: «Minefield, do not stray from the road». And we have the memory of the blind boy and the girl with no feet who strayed from the path on their way to school. And we know today of the Pacific beaches strewn with improvised explosive devices. We remember the arrival of the victims to the dialogue in Havana, before this Commission began, when a farmer put on the table the plastic prosthesis that served him as a leg to complain to the guerrilla: «You put the explosive device in the place where we milked the two cows we had in the little farm».

Thus, guerrillas and paramilitaries filled peasant trails, riverbanks, fields, and forests with bombs. It was calculated that after Afghanistan this country was the most “mined” country in the world. And in the countryside, we

saw capybaras and deer, cattle and dogs falling into those traps for humans. The peasant farmer soil and ethnic territories, beyond the large farms and agro-industrial crops, became hell. We also saw the maimed and blind soldiers, victims of mines hidden in the bushes, at face height, and the young ex-combatants, prostrated forever in wheelchairs, and we have met the families of some of them who saw their illusions shattered. We have felt the cost in the shattered bodies of the young police officers who followed orders to pull up coca in fields loaded with gunpowder and shrapnel, and we have seen the families of those who saw their illusions shattered.

Following the Peace Agreement, a demining process was initiated and is progressing. But the territories that remain to be cleared are massive. Especially in the indigenous and Afro-descendant regions, where today drug-traffickers and war-waging groups are once again planting mines to stop the manual eradication of crop substitution programs. Meanwhile the communities continue to wait for the day when the comprehensive rural reform agreed upon in the peace agreement will begin.

The economic model

In the task of understanding the armed conflict and in the search for paths to non-repetition, the Commission repeatedly confirmed, in testimonies and documents, the situation of poverty in the countryside and in the poor neighborhoods of the large cities. The inequality that places Colombia among the ten most unequal countries in the world, added to an overwhelming concentration of land that increased during the internal war and took away 8 million hectares from farmers, forcing them to flee to urban communes, to cut down forest areas and expand agricultural borders. We also verified the exclusion of Indigenous

and Afro territories and populations, and the imposition on them of mining and agro-industrial projects that destroyed their cultural and ecological environments, and attacked forests, mountains, and rivers.

Social injustice and the abandonment of a people with a vibrant and creative culture of the loss of human lives, infrastructure, villages, and plots of land: billions of dollars burned in a useless armed conflict, are paradoxical. There is a country that does not count and at the same time we have one of the most stable macroeconomic and financial management systems of the continent.

Although we did not carry out specific studies on the armed conflict and the economy, after four years of listening to the drama of the war, the Commission assumes that, if profound changes are not made to the country's economic development model, it will be impossible to achieve the non-repetition of the armed conflict, which will be repeated and will evolve in unpredictable ways.

Four aspects call for special consideration: first, the management of public resources by the State, which does not tax the wealthy classes as it should, loses a high percentage of resources to corruption and does not redistribute the taxes it does collect in order to reduce inequality. At the same time, when allocating public resources, it leaves huge regional inequalities and abandons the countryside and fails to implement the comprehensive agrarian reform that is essential for peace.

Second, the implementation of large successful private investment projects in industry, agro-industry and finance, which in Colombia is carried out with administrative stringency, but which, contrary to what sustainability demands, has resisted the inclusion in the markets of the popular population of the cities and of the peasant farmers, Indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and the Roma

peoples, and has left millions of Colombians not being able to participate in a process of production of life with dignity to the detriment of the tranquility of all, because such exclusion requires immense expenses in aggressive security.

Third, drug-trafficking, which makes Colombia the world monopoly of cocaine and that has ended up being a perverse solution that the «Colombian-style» model has found for exclusion and inequality, tacitly accepted by those who in the State and in big formal businesses, lead the economy. A fateful solution that keeps the armed conflict active in the countryside and popular communes, buys electoral campaigns and ties up the public administration, disseminates corruption and makes smuggling and criminal mining proliferate, and provides resources to more than half of Colombians who demand goods and services in the so-called informal sector, which surely explains why a Colombia at war has more economic growth than its neighbors.

Finally, what has been serious because of the pain and injustice to the victims is the finding of business initiatives playing a leading role in the conflict who paid paramilitary groups in order to displace and dispossess communities of their lands and territories, and establish agro-industry or mining businesses, or that within the enterprises stigmatized workers and are accomplices in the assassination of hundreds of trade unionists. The same is true of companies that paid large amounts of money to the armed groups as transaction costs essential to keep the projects active. And the reality of economic actors who, exasperated by the guerrilla and in the face of insecurity, contributed to the creation of the Convivir (Private security cooperatives) and at other times sought out the paramilitaries to bring the security they provided through terror. Then there were those who took advantage of the abandoned lands amid terror to buy with front men and establish projects. And

others who with money put members of the Armed Forces at their private service.

The Commission has also heard from hundreds of Colombian business victims, from small producers to huge corporations. Individuals and businesses were targeted for «vacunas» (Extorsions), a significant group of which suffered the kidnapping of managers and family members, including young sons and daughters, and had to make high extortion payments or were blackmailed by paramilitaries and guerrillas, as well as having to pay the FARC-EP's wealth tax and the State's war tax, and suffer the death sentence when they did not comply with the demands for money. Cargo and passenger transport companies were attacked on the highways with human losses of drivers and capital in the form of buses and trucks; and cattle-ranching of all sizes endured cattle theft, extortion, kidnapping and murder of workers and farmers.

The Commission has paid special attention to the testimonies of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs who suffered total bankruptcy in the villages destroyed by paramilitary and guerrilla massacres, and who, when displaced, abandoned connections, markets, businesses, belongings, and farms to escape death and try to start from scratch in other cities or in exile.

Amid all this, there is this reality of entrepreneurs of all strata who, despite the human and monetary costs paid, and the uncertainties, remained in the country and continue to risk investments, believing that their best contribution to peace is to persevere in the daily task of contributing to the production of goods and services for the life with dignity of Colombians.

We now move on to the next moment of clarification, when the Commission seeks to answer the questions: why, by whom, with what interests and under what alliances?

Second step of clarification:
the explanation in order to be able to
assert

The discussion on the explanation

We have continually been asked these questions: how do you reach the explanation of the truth? How can you choose among so many possible ones? Are you not biased?

The Commission does not own the truth. On the contrary, it knows that it belongs to the truth and that it must clarify it. We constructed a method that we approved after submitting it to public opinion, which began by asking ourselves about the origin and persistence of the armed political conflict. There was a first moment in which we listened and received the deep and indisputable suffering of the victims through their testimonies and memories. Then we moved on to a second moment of investigating the contexts that explained the violent events and that allowed us to give answers to why and how they occurred, to draw up hypotheses and contrast complementary or opposing points of view. And so, once the best explanation has been reached, there is a third moment when the Commission asks itself: is this what really happened? Are we sure that this is the case and not otherwise? The answer to these last questions is yes or no and compromises the honesty of the commissioners with the victims, the coherence and thoroughness to be able to affirm or deny that a certain event is so and not otherwise; further entails the moral obligation not to remain silent in the face of the truth found or to recognize that it cannot yet be affirmed and that the search must be continued.

We do not accept the argument of authority according to which something is true because an important

person said it. This does not contradict collaboration in knowledge with what others have found; on the contrary, it allows us to maintain a critical vision. For example, we incorporate indigenous and afro-descendant ways of thinking as well as the dimensions of gender and different age groups.

In any case, we do not share the position according to which there are many truths that are equally valid on the same subject. Through the aforementioned method, we listened and incorporated, to the extent possible, these differences as elements for clarification. However, the different opinions and hypotheses are for the Commission part of the search process, but not truths in themselves, but important contributions to answer the pertinent questions and for the contrast that allows us to make a statement with certainty.

We are aware of the complexity of the historical truth that is delivered from the meaning that contemporary people gave to the facts and the transformations of culture, institutions, and laws over time. We know that many times we can only reach conditioned affirmations, wherein it is asserted that the hypothesis that best explains is one particular one, but that there are others that must be considered. The Commission is aware that it achieves important truths within the information and contexts it knows today, like someone who deciphers significant parts of a larger picture. Always open to a more complete explanation.

But this truth about the intolerable, in fact, fragmentary as it is, remains true and demands ethical and political decisions that are set out in recommendations of non-repetition.

Once these points on the method have been shared, we present elements of explanatory context about which the Commission has discussed during the task.

Some elements of the explanatory context

The complex framework

There were millions of victims, but not because one day someone suddenly had the idea of going out to kill or blow-up villages. Everything happened in a complex system of political, institutional, economic, cultural, military and drug trafficking interests; of groups that, faced with structural injustice, chose armed struggle, and of the State - and the elites that govern it - that delegated to the Military Forces the obligation to defend the laws, the power, and the status quo. A permanent confrontation between those who were protected and abandoned, between those who invented forms of private defense because there was no public force to defend them and those who, supported by the State, set up and financed the Convivir, with the support of the military on the ground, which evolved into violent apparatuses carrying out massacre and displacing peasant farmers who were struggling for land in a context of uncertain ownership deeds; between drug traffickers

turned into paramilitaries or parapoliticians and guerrillas who determined who governed the territories and conditioned the operation of the local State. Between corrupt administrators of justice and upright and courageous judges. Between economic projects that respect human beings and others that devastate nature and people. Isolated causes cannot be established. Everything happens in a swarm of state and private institutions, of political and insurgent groups, of decisions and, finally, of millions of victims.

Responsibilities

The Commission takes into account that complex and changing framework that conditions the decisions made by individuals and groups of those who were in conflict. The responsibilities are different for those who exercised the power of the State and those who defended it, since they had to respect its laws at all costs, without the conflict exonerating them from this obligation. And they are different for those who took up arms and denied the legitimacy of the State. And they are different according to each person's place in society.

In the Comprehensive System for Peace, the JEP determines who were the most responsible perpetrators of the greatest war crimes and crimes against humanity and sentences them to restorative justice sentences in the framework of a due transitional process. The Commission, for its part, establishes historical, moral, and political responsibilities of a collective nature, and refers to individual responsibilities only when it is indispensable for the understanding of the conflict. We are not a judicial body, so our truth is not forensic. Even so, this urgency to establish and accept responsibilities is

essential for peace, because without it, the construction of the future is halted.

The German friends accompanying us in the Commission's process have taught us that their people regained dignity and pride when, even decades after the Jewish genocide and the war crimes committed, they took on the suffering of the victims as their own, made the wound that of the body of the nation as a whole and acknowledged collective responsibility. We have before us the possibility of making our own, as a responsible body of nation, the wound of our 10 million victims and redeem ourselves through the creation of an inclusive, just and reconciled nation.

The history

The *Final Report* delivered by the Commission includes a volume dedicated to the historical narrative that shows a democracy under construction amid the conflict for state power. We do not intend to establish this narrative as the official history of Colombia, but rather to open paths for a fearless conversation about the nation we are and the State we have built. Within this narrative, it is worth highlighting two aspects that never cease: weapons in politics and the idea of the internal enemy.

Weapons in politics

In history compared to the rest of the countries of the continent, Colombia stands out for the high level and persistence of weapons in politics. What became normal among us is not normal for the rest. In the political violence normalized during six decades, in which drug

trafficking is mixed in, candidates to the Presidency and to the different legislative bodies were murdered, as well as congressmen, deputies, councilors and mayors of different parties, and the adversary was stigmatized to such an extreme that the Patriotic Union Party (Unión Patriótica) faced political genocide.

In this context, the State began to persecute communism, while revolutionary groups took up arms in the struggle for power when they interpreted that there were objective reasons that legitimized the insurrection. On the other hand, groups in society that demanded structural changes by democratic means were often militarily repressed by the State. The legitimate political dispute between citizens who hold power and protect the status quo and those who seek power to establish structural changes, instead of taking place within democratic debate and concluding in a negotiation of reasonable interests, began with weapons and has been protracted in a war for more than half a century that has not ended.

The internal enemy

The belief of many that there is an «internal enemy» in political life has gone hand in hand with the presence of arms in the public dispute. For the extreme right, inside and outside the State, this internal enemy is made up of the Communist Party, its allies, its disciples, and its simulations; the internal enemy is the class enemy for the revolutionary extreme left, opposed to the bourgeoisie and the capitalist elites of the establishment. The great asymmetry in this confrontation is obvious, which has benefited the power in the hands of the State and the ruling sectors, but what is serious and difficult

to reconcile is the mutual position of absolute rejection of each other.

With the enemy you do not negotiate, you never tell him the truth. With him it is not possible to build the “we and us” of a nation. In connection with this, on both sides appear the combination of all forms of struggle and the linking, whether they want it or not, of the citizens to the conflict appears. Stigmatization and finger-pointing proliferate. The internal enemy extends to those who think differently, it is rooted in the culture, it is at the base of the generalized distrust. In this context, an armed security system that does not achieve its goal is consolidated. In addition to the Army and the Police, there are millions of whistle-blowers and 500,000 private guards to protect us Colombians from other Colombians.

Dying for the country or for the people

What we have had in Colombia is a war in which most of the dead were civilian non-combatants, killed mostly by paramilitaries, then by the guerrillas and, finally, by State forces. Both the military and the insurgents committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, and both perpetrated them against the civilian population, and the State forces committed them in alliance with the paramilitaries. However, the Army and the Police are not battalions conceived to violate human rights and the FARC-EP and other guerrillas were not organizations initially set up to commit crimes. The confrontation between the security forces and the insurgency was to the death and ruthless. From both sides, for reasons of conscience, the honor of dying for the country or dying for the people was experienced. Amidst

the ambiguities, uproars, hatreds and dark alliances of the conflict, soldiers, police officers, guerrillas and paramilitaries buried their own fighters killed in action in the battlefield as heroes.

The Commission has met with ex-combatants who survived physically and emotionally wounded, as did their families. Young people - today adults - who belonged to guerrilla squads, military battalions, or paramilitary units, who were maimed in battlefields, attacks, «pistola» («gun») operations (operations to kill any law enforcement officer), bombings and ambushes, or those injured in minefields.

We have been with the mothers of soldiers and police officers who buried their children or mourn them because they were disappeared in the forest. We have attended different spaces with members of the police who were destroyed by improvised explosive devices, with their families and the organizations in which they are grouped. We have shared moments with the mothers of the boys and girls enrolled by the guerrillas who never returned home. We have also learned about the emptiness left among their siblings and parents by those who died as paramilitaries and those who are at home, now without arms or legs. We have received publications from the Military Forces about their victims in the conflict, and to a lesser extent from the FARC-EP.

This conflict was not originally a war over the drug trade. Drug traffickers bribe and kill to protect or expand the business, but they do not give their lives for what they consider the common good or the revolutionary principle. Another thing is that the drug traffickers entered the war to legitimize the business and the guerrillas entered the drug trade in search of financing.

There was an internal armed conflict and, therefore, a right of war, *ius in bello*. For this reason, the military rejects that their constitutional obligation to defend the institutions, within the law, should be pointed out as a violation of human rights. And the former guerrillas reject that their political war has been categorized as «terrorism», although this does not discard the fact that both perpetrated acts of terror contrary to *ius in bello* and serious violations of human rights. The JEP exists precisely because there was a war and IHL should be applied. Therefore, equal justice must operate for the parties based on the truth about war crimes and crimes against humanity in the political armed conflict.

For the FARC-EP, making peace and giving rise to the Comunes Political Party meant ceasing to see the State, politicians, and businessmen as enemies of war and entering into the civil contest of democracy based on the Constitution of 1991.

The hard time of the war and of great victimization

The most intense period of the war was from 1996 to 2010, when 75% of the registered victims of half a century of internal armed conflict occurred. From this period, looking back, it can be better understood where the process that, with preceding violence, began as an armed conflict around 1960, was heading. It is also possible to understand what remained latent within the hope brought by the Constituent Assembly of 1991; why the peace between the State and the FARC-EP happened as it did; why the “no” vote won in the referendum of 2016, and how to explain what happened afterwards with the murder of leaders and ex-combatants, the confinement

of and attacks against communities, and why there is still a conflict involving several armed actors that may intensify into another period of total confrontation if serious steps are not taken towards the construction of a great peace.

In these twenty years, the two parties - at different times, first the FARC-EP and then the Military Forces - came close to winning the war: both reached the maximum in the war effort and gave rise to the highest peak of infractions of international humanitarian law through the perpetration of war crimes and crimes against humanity. In this period, the FARC-EP invested billions of dollars from illegal sources in recruitment, weapons, and territorial expansion for the definitive seizure of power. The State then made the greatest effort to defend the institutions with the war tax, the increase of the military budget and the billions of dollars from Plan Colombia donated by the United States. Troops grew rapidly in number. The Soldados Campesinos (Farmer Soldiers) and Soldados de mi Pueblo (Soldiers of my People) programs were implemented, the number of professional soldiers tripled, and the goal of four million informants at the service of the security apparatus was set.

Having reached the maximum of confrontation and victimization in these years calls for an analysis of the policies and decisions that never resolved in depth the serious problems of land, impunity, exclusion, structural racism, abandonment of territories, drug trafficking, inequality -and in many cases made them worse-, while social, political, and insurgent pressure accumulated. In contrast, there was at the same time, during the maximum confrontation and amid risks, a civil society active in the defense of human rights, movements for peace and reconciliation and thousands of forms of resistance against the war.

The risk of imperfect peace

Finally, in building the framework of explanatory contexts that allow us to approach the truth, the political and ethical-political value of the peace process carried out in Havana, which resulted in the agreement signed between the Colombian State, represented by President Juan Manuel Santos, and the FARC-EP, represented by Rodrigo Londoño, stands out.

The negotiation process, which was extremely demanding for the participants, had the discipline and thoroughness never before seen in a similar effort in Colombia and is considered a benchmark by the international community. The agreed results include the essential and necessary changes to achieve coexistence.

The operators of the process on the ground and the president were careful to involve the international community, which was deeply involved: the United Nations and its Security Council, Cuba, Norway, Sweden, and the United States. Equally definitive was the participation of high-ranking Colombian military officers, as well as receiving social and academic organizations and political parties, and promoting assemblies to address the issues of the countryside and the victims in the territories. The process was strengthened with three special participations: victims affected by all actors, ethnic groups, and the gender dimension guaranteed by women's and LGBTIQ+ groups.

Unfortunately, former presidents Andrés Pastrana and Álvaro Uribe, who contributed with the results of their governments to prepare the ground to make the Havana Agreement possible, did not have the grandeur to see and accompany what others concluded. Former presidents César Gaviria and Ernesto Samper were on the side of Havana and the process. This division at the highest level

that was mobilized to achieve the victory of the “no” vote in the referendum to ratify the Agreement was a very hard blow to peace. However, peace has prevailed, the Agreement is alive and so are the institutions of the Comprehensive Peace System. Gustavo Petro becomes President with the purpose of strengthening the peace process and convening a dialogue with the ELN and the groups that remain in the conflict.

Findings and messages

As a result of the social dialogue and research, the Commission submits in a volume of findings the central points that explain the internal armed conflict. The rationale for the findings can be found in the other books of the Final Report.

The central findings are on these issues: wounded Colombia, culture and conflict, the narrative of building a democracy in peace, the reconfiguration of territories, guerrillas, paramilitarism, drug trafficking, impunity, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, international interference, and the transformation of the security system.

Based on the findings and the social process of the Commission, recommendations were made, which are included in this volume and in a specific publication. In this volume we present the claim we wish to make to society, the State, and the international community. Since the recognition of the truth helps to heal the wounds of the victims, transform those responsible and open the way to build the future together, the Commission request:

- To the Colombian men and women, without distinction, **to accept the truths of the tragedy** of the destruction of human life among us and to take the determination not to kill for any reason whatsoever. That every violent death be rejected collectively and emphatically and that we succeed in putting the life of humans and nature at the center and ahead of all particular interests. That no Colombian may have to flee into exile to protect his or her life.
- To all the Colombian people, **to recognize** the pain, dignity, and resistance of the victims of the armed conflict; to recognize the injustice of what we have experienced and the collective trauma that we share as a society, and to commit ourselves to the comprehensive and transformative reparation of the more than 9 million victims of the internal armed conflict.
- **To look critically at history** from a perspective that gives a place to the constant presence of memory for the construction of peace and non-repetition, in a way that commits the State and society as a whole and contributes to the strengthening of democratic values.
- **To the youth, face the truth** of the causes and horrors of the armed conflict and build the new nation that is in your hands, because you are the future. We ask you **not to collaborate in anything that deepens death, hatred, and despair** and to be the leaders in the implementation of the recommendations made by the Commission.

- To society and the State, **to implement the Final Peace Agreement** in a comprehensive manner and to advance towards consensus on the transformations necessary to overcome the factors that have facilitated the reproduction of the cycles of violence. And to do so starting from coexistence in the territories through the reconstruction of citizens' trust among themselves and with the institutions, and always from the national perspective of a great peace.
- To the State, starting from the truth that every day of war distances the possibility of coexistence and government: **to take the initiative for peace** with the ELN and other armed groups, and to seek dialogue with the other illegal groups for negotiation or submission to justice.
- To the organizations that do not accept the legitimacy of the State, as well as to the ELN, the dissidents and the other insurgent groups that continue to wage war, **to listen to the outcry** of the people who are asking to «stop the war now from all sides» and to align on the road to dialogue until peace is achieved, taking into account the diversity of methodologies and regional situations.
- To all social and political strata, **to deepen democracy** through the definitive exclusion of weapons from the venerable scenario of public affairs and to implement a reform that opens spaces for excluded sectors and groups, in a representative democracy that reflects the territorial and ethnic plurality of the country and that has at its center participatory dialogue, with direct citizen participation

and mobilization as fundamental tools to guarantee rights, the restoration of the social fabric, the construction of institutional trust and the definitive rejection of violence against those who think differently.

- To the justice system, **to stop impunity**, rebuild trust in the State and guarantee the impartiality and independence of the investigative and judicial bodies; to protect judicial officials, victims and those who participate in the legal proceedings, and to clarify organized crime and punish those responsible.
- To the Government, the security forces, political parties, businessmen, churches, academia, and other decision makers in Colombia, **recognize the penetration of drug trafficking** in the culture, the State, politics and the economy, and the way in which the war on drugs is one of the main factors in the persistence of the conflict. We ask them to develop investigation mechanisms that allow us to confront with real effectiveness both the system of alliances and interests involved in drug trafficking and the prosecution of the political, financial, and armed machinery that make it possible, as well as to change the policy towards the peasantry and the weakest links in the drug supply chain in order to overcome structural problems of poverty, ostracization and stigmatization. All of the above, from a human rights and public health perspective, in order to undertake an in-depth dialogue towards ethical, educational, legal, political, and economic solutions, both nationally and internationally, that will allow progress in the regulation of the drug market and overcome prohibitionism.

- To the State and society, **to establish a new vision of security for peacebuilding** as a public good centered on people, in which the protection of all human beings and nature comes first; a vision in which security ceases to be restricted to the military and is built on collective trust, with the support of all State agencies and adapted to the ways in which communities, ethnic groups and territories build coexistence, based on dialogues between citizens and institutions, in order to make the necessary transformations in the State, the military forces, the police and civil society organizations, as a fundamental element for peace.
- To the state bureaucracy and public and private administrators, **to reject and terminate corruption** at different levels, to break habits and complicities and to act with determination in citizen control and the effective enforcement of laws to stop it.
- To the State, society and, particularly, to the entrepreneurship of the great industrial and financial projects, **to give priority to guaranteeing the conditions of well-being and dignified life of people and communities, without exclusions**, from a shared vision of the future to overcome the structural inequalities that make this country one of the most inequitable in the world in the concentration of income, wealth, and land. And for state, business, and financial investment to be incorporated into the creativity and passion of popular and rural youth, who demand to be part of the production of the life that is cherished by all Colombians.

- To all Colombians, **to give peasants farmers the undivided recognition they have for the life of Colombia**, to assure them the equal redistribution of land, the prevention and reversal of dispossession, the multimodal cadastral system, the conditions for sustainable production, access to public goods and services - including high quality education relevant to rural areas, security, and justice - and the conditions they need for the care of ecosystems, water, land, and native species.
- To the whole nation **to overcome structural racism, colonialism and the unjust and immensely clumsy exclusion** inflicted on indigenous, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Romani peoples, disproportionately hit by the war, and to make their cultures and traditions an essential and substantive part of the identity of all of us as Colombians. A sine qua non condition for living in tranquility, justice, and peace.
- To all, to respect the differences in equal dignity of women, LGBTIQ+ people, girls, boys, adolescents and young people, people with disabilities or functional diversity and the elderly, who have been particularly severely impacted by the armed conflict.
- To Colombia's friendly nations -whom we recognize and thank for their accompaniment of victims in the territories, their humanitarian and human rights aid, and their contribution to peace- we ask to take this step: to help Colombia become an example of reconciliation in the world and to stop seeing us as a country that survives in «war mode» and needs military support that perpetuates the conflict. We

have suffered 60 years of violent victimization and we ask not to be given anything for war. We do not want it. We do not want war anywhere in the world. Support us in all that makes life and nature, civic trust, and the economy, to thrive in harmony with the natural wealth of this earth; support us in the friendship of nations that respects differences in an international community that shares the common home of the planet.

- To society as a whole, **to undertake the commitment of a far-reaching change in the cultural elements that led us to the inability to recognize the Other** as human beings of equal dignity; to build in dialogue, from the differences and spiritual traditions and conceptions of life, a public ethic wherein we recognize ourselves simply as people, citizens, in us a collective as a nation, and undertake the transformations in the institutional, the regulatory and, particularly, the personal and daily life; and dismantle the narratives of hate, discrimination and stigmatization, in order to establish in exchange the confidence and passion for a future of shared hopes and full life that we owe to the future generations of Colombia.
- To religious leaders, **to reflect on the spiritual emptiness** and perplexity of a people of faith-based traditions, immersed in a humanitarian crisis of hatred, mistrust and death and trapped in the behaviors of war, and to take courageously the mission of reconciliation of the Catholic Church with the other churches and with the wise men and elders-men and women- of the indigenous and Afro-Colombian traditions.

The challenge of reconciliation

Most truth commissions in the world have been structured at the end of a violent dictatorship or when a conflict has ended altogether. In those cases, the truth gives rise to building the rule of law that was absent. The case of Colombia is special because there was no such dictatorship; on the contrary, there is a Constitution that guarantees and broadens the rights it enshrines and a continuous democracy, and although the confrontation between the State and the FARC-EP ended, the violence connected with politics and money continues in different forms, because the problems described in the findings have not been solved. To solve them we need to be a society that makes the pain of the victims its own, that says «no more», that takes on the justice of the transition. A society that, without turning the page of oblivion, has the courage to build on the differences, incorporating those who have hated each other, to enable a dialogue within the respect enabled by true democracy.

The peace made by the armies in Havana left, however, the fracture that continues in society. The normal political controversy remained in Colombia soaked in pain, hatred, and distrust. We got used to live in «war mode» even though the vast majority of us do not have rifles. That is why we have received a message that the other commissions of the world did not have. A message requested by the signatories of the *Teatro Colón* agreement, the guarantors of the Agreement, the United Nations, the international community, the Constitutional Court, the Catholic Church, and the other Christian churches, the indigenous mamos (spiritual leaders) and Afro-descendant wise men and women and, above all, the victims overwhelmed by despair: “May the blatant truth that you deliver lead us

to reconciliation". This is the request, formulated in many different ways, but always the same one.

Reconciliation means accepting the truth as a condition for collective construction and overcoming denialism and impunity. It means making the determination to never again kill each other and to take the weapons out of politics. It means accepting that many of us - to different degrees, by action or omission - are responsible for the tragedy. It means respecting the other, the fellowmen, over and above cultural heritages and accumulated rage. It means considering the woundedness of the other and his or her concerns and interests. It means building in such a way that the State, justice, politics, economy, and security are at the service of the equal and sacred human dignity of Colombians. It means that we are going to build this together or there will be no future for anyone, and to walk together we have to change: that the current State be transformed into a State for the people, that politicians stop corruption, that businessmen do not exclude from participation in production a multitude that claims the right to be part of it, that those who monopolize the land hand it over; that all those who cooperate with drug trafficking, with war, with exclusion, with the destruction of nature, change. Let there be no more impunity. That those who continue waging war understand that there is no right to continue doing it because it does not allow democracy or justice and only brings suffering. That we must build from our differences with hope and collective trust so that we can remain today and in the generations of tomorrow.

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Non-Repetition.

July 2022

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Annexes



Annex 1. General Annexes for the Final Report



Annex 2. Digital platform



Annex 3. Clarifications of the commissioners

