

## Introduction

Welcome to the first of a series of monthly updates about Colombia's Truth Commission.

These are intended to provide snapshots of ongoing innovations as the Truth Commission works to lay the foundations for a transformative and long-lasting peace.

## What is the Truth Commission and what are its objectives?

In September 2016, the Colombian government and FARC-EP representatives signed the final peace agreement which was designed to put an end to Colombia's prolonged conflict. This agreement established the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition (SIVJGNR), which created mechanisms to uncover truth and to secure victims' rights.

These mechanisms include the Truth Commission (The Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition), the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Special Search Unit to locate disappeared victims, comprehensive reparation measures, and guarantees of non-repetition of rights violations.

The Truth Commission was officially launched on 28 November 2018. It now has just three years to produce a final report that offers a comprehensive and inclusive explanation of the complexity of the conflict.



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## It has four fundamental objectives:

- To shed light on the conflict and offer a wide-ranging explanation of its complexity
- To promote recognition of victims of conflict; for individuals involved in the conflict to assume responsibility; and recognition by society that past abuse should be rejected and never repeated
- To promote coexistence in areas affected by conflict
- To lay the groundwork for non-repetition

This Truth Commission has a number of special characteristics that can help communities to understand the causes of past violence and end it. For instance, it is mandated to uncover how different groups, (including women and LGBTI people, ethnic communities, children and disabled people, among others) experienced the armed conflict, which offers a significant opportunity for an intersectional understanding of the numerous complexities of the conflict.

## How will it achieve this?

The Truth Commission has four principle interconnected strategies:

**Participation.** The work of the Truth Commission requires the joint, active, organised and constant participation of society as a whole. It has a commitment to be flexible to the needs and realities of local communities and will therefore use different methodologies for receiving testimonies and working with victims in each region.

**Pedagogy.** The Truth Commission needs to advance knowledge and understanding about its mandate, mission and methodologies among wider society. This includes teaching-learning mechanisms and tools that are intended to encourage Colombians to embrace the notion of truth as a public good.

**Production, dissemination and appropriation of knowledge.** The Truth Commission must work to investigate what happened in the conflict, and to provide an explanation of its causes and impacts. It is important to note that the final report cannot explain every single crime to have occurred during the conflict but seeks to uncover patterns of violence.

**Communication.** The Truth Commission must deliver its findings and proposals to all sectors of Colombian society by means of artistic interventions, technological resources including social media and public events. An ambitious number of regional and national meetings are being prepared to encourage dialogue about the conflict and to promote recognition and coexistence.



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## Challenges and opportunities

The ongoing security situation and political context in Colombia threatens the Truth Commission from achieving its objectives and facilitating peacebuilding. In areas where violence continues, the Truth Commission must work carefully with local partners to ensure the safety of those wishing to speak out.

With less than a year to receive testimonies and just three years to fulfil its mandate, practical restrictions coupled with a need to overcome the enduring internal ruptures and divisions produced in the conflict, are further challenges the Truth Commission faces. It therefore needs to gain legitimacy and confidence in all sectors and must awaken society to the importance of truth and its ability to help wounds heal.

However, despite these challenges, the Truth Commission has the potential to offer a truly rigorous and innovative approach to understanding the events of the conflict, which can, in turn, contribute to a 'National Dialogue for Truth'. It could also set in motion a process of national healing which recognises the pain caused throughout the country during 50 years of conflict.

While its task of reconstructing a historical truth from the stories of millions of Colombians will be monumental, the Truth Commission has reinvigorated hope among victims for healing their long-held traumas.



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