

## Progress in 2019 and challenges for 2020

Previous Embrace Dialogue Truth Commission Snapshots have discussed some of the innovations of the Colombian Truth Commission (TC), which, according to international experience, has the most sophisticated mandate ever of a TC, with real potential to lay the groundwork for a stable and long-lasting peace. With a third of its three year mandate now gone, we offer some timely reflections about the TC's progress in 2019 and we highlight some of the key challenges that lie ahead in 2020.

## Key achievements in 2019

### 1. Listening

7000 testimonies were collected in the TC's first year of operation. This is a significant progress which suggests that there is a strong desire for peace among victims, who are willing to share their truth.

28 Truth Houses (*casas de la verdad*) were opened throughout the country. This is a meaningful effort to include people living in the most marginalised and hard-to-reach corners of Colombia.

Approximately 200 interviews have been taken with Colombians in exile. The TC is now charting new territory in its inclusion of the Colombian diaspora.

The participation of former leaders. In October 2019, the TC conducted a public interview with ex-president, Ernesto Samper Pizano. It is hoped that more former presidents and authority figures will step forward to support truth-seeking in Colombia in the coming months.

### 2. Recognition

Four Truth Encounters (*Encuentros por la Verdad*) were held in 2019, to officially recognise the wrongdoings suffered by victims. The first, in Cartagena, recognised the impact of sexual violence against women and LGBTI people; in Pasto, the resilience of women and the relatives of missing people was recognised; in Medellín, the focus was on people who experienced the conflict as children; and finally, in Cundinamarca, recognition focused on the impacts of armed conflict on rural farmers.

One of the most important achievements of the Colombian TC to date is the participation of perpetrators from all sides of the armed conflict, and their acknowledgement of responsibility.

### 3. Dialogue

Colombia's TC has set in motion a national dialogue about what happened in the armed conflict. There have been seven Dialogues for Non-Repetition (Diálogos por la No-repetición), with participation from state institutions, victims, social leaders, the international community, media, civil society organizations and business, among others. These dialogues are also a valuable instance of marginalised and persecuted groups being listened to and taken seriously by both the TC and the State.



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## 4. Reconciliation

The TC has a fundamental goal of promoting reconciliation in Colombia. In partnership with ABC Paz, the TC facilitated a Working Table: "Narratives of Ex-combatants", in which former members of the National Liberation Army (ELN); April 19 Movement (M19); Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), among others, met several times and signed a statement with various commitments to peace, including a complete rejection of violence and the possibility of returning to war. This is a remarkable achievement demonstrating that through dialogue, even enemies are able to overcome differences.

## Key challenges for 2020

Despite this progress, the TC must finish collecting testimonies before the end of the year so that they can be integrated into the final report, while also developing an impactful media strategy to share some of the findings and encourage wider society to acknowledge the truth. Here are three challenges that lie ahead in 2020:

### 1. Polarised context

A polarised and divisive political context threatens to suffocate an already fragile peace process in Colombia. Polarising narratives are reinforced by social networks, the media and individuals in everyday conversations. The TC must endeavour to challenge these narratives.

### 2. Ongoing violence

Hundreds of social leaders, former combatants and human rights defenders have been murdered since the signing of the peace agreement in November 2016. Ongoing violence in Colombia has serious implications for truth-telling. The TC must confront the sensitive problem of encouraging and protecting terrified victims and witnesses to speak out, who fear putting their lives in danger by doing so.

### 3. Uncovering narratives which are still silenced/marginalised

This year, the TC must prioritise uncovering narratives which continue to be silenced and marginalised in Colombia's historical memory. In an interview, President of the TC Francisco de Roux explained that these include, but are not limited to, clarifying the links between illegal economies and armed actors, the involvement of the business sector in the armed conflict, and the problem of ethnic exclusion and racism. Embrace Dialogue acknowledges the important achievements of the TC in 2019 and will continue to support its work both in Colombia and abroad in 2020. Keep an eye for our future snapshots, we will continue informing about key developments and challenges.



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