

The Fourth Encuentro por la Verdad

A fundamental goal of Colombia's Truth Commission is to lay the groundwork for reconciliation in the country, which is a challenging, complex and emotive process. Achieving reconciliation on a personal level, between individuals and within communities, is one thing, another is to reconcile a whole society, composed of people from all different walks of life. In this snapshot, we discuss the fourth Encuentro por la Verdad which focussed on the experiences of rural farmers, in an effort to build bridges between rural and urban Colombia

The event, held on 12-13 December 2019 in Cabrera, in the heart of the Sumapaz region, was also to honour the work of the Commissioner Alfredo Molano, who passed away in October 2019. Writer, sociologist and Truth Commissioner, Molano dedicated his life to travelling the rural Colombian countryside and amplifying the voices of marginalised groups who were living the reality of the armed conflict first hand.

Many emblematic events and characteristics of the Colombian armed conflict have taken place in the countryside. According to the National Victims' Registry, approximately 6 million victims of forced displacement in Colombia are of rural origins. For example, the poignant location of Sumapaz bore witness to ongoing conflict between different armed groups in Colombia, even before the birth of the FARC guerrillas, and was home to the first ever peasant reserve zone (ZRC).

The Truth Commission had three principle aims for this event: firstly, to recognise the impact of land dispossession and displacement on rural communities, their livelihoods, cultures and traditions; secondly, to recognise the stigmatisation suffered by rural populations, whom are frequently stereotyped as criminals, guerrilla supporters and drugs-traffickers; and thirdly, to acknowledge their resistance over the years, including efforts to rebuild community ties and mobilisations to demand that their rights are upheld.

In an effort to create bridges between the rural and urban populations, the Truth Commission sought to highlight the critical and strategic roles that campesinos play in terms of managing Colombia's natural resources, water sources, maintaining biodiversity, as well as promoting food sovereignty and sustainable energy sources. In doing so, this meeting sought to recognise rural farmers as legitimate political subjects and not only victims of armed conflict, thus dignifying their valuable place in society.



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In the lead up to the Encuentro, the Truth Commission's Gender Working Group organised a preparatory meeting with female rural farmers to identify how the armed conflict had impacted them, in particular. This meeting identified the role women often hold when providing for their families, the impact of land dispossession that has led to losing family members, their community, territory, ways of life and food sovereignty; the sexual violence to which many have been subjected; the effects of displacement, including their reception as poor and often illiterate women, and with this the loss of identity; as well as the need to recognize the historical struggle of women for land restitution, reparation processes and compensation.

Although there remains a long way to go, in a predominantly rural country, this Encuentro por la Verdad represents a significant effort to begin repairing the ruptured social fabric in Colombia, following decades of violent confrontation and deep distrust of the 'other'.

This theme will be developed further in upcoming snapshots, when we focus on the work the Truth Commission is doing with regard to drug economies and the armed conflict, a key goal for 2020.



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