

The consolidation of the Truth Commission in the United Kingdom

Between 5 and 11 March, a delegation from the Colombian Truth Commission organised a crucial series of events with the Colombian community in the UK, including victims of the state living in exile, students and migrants, along with leaders from different NGOs, unions, academics and UK political representatives. The delegation included Commissioner Carlos Beristain, public officials Tatiana Pedraza and Alejandra Coll, and Peter Drury, representative of the Truth Commission in the UK. The visit achieved three objectives. First, to take the Truth Commission beyond London where it has focused the majority of its work over the past year. The delegation was able to get to know the Colombian diaspora living in other parts of England and Scotland and to invite the community to present their testimonies. Second, to build confidence in the Commission and its work. And third, to build political support from the UK government which will help continue to reaffirm and legitimise the work of the Commission within the international community.

Building a dialogue with the Colombian community in exile

The Truth Commission met and listened to the Colombian community in exile at events in Oxford, Newcastle, York, Nottingham, Edinburgh and London. This particular community is made up of victims of the state and those who were politically persecuted in the armed conflict. The personal stories of members continue to be filled with unanswered pain, reaffirming the necessity to continue the search for clarification of what occurred during the armed conflict. What was also clear throughout the event organised by Congreso de los Pueblos, the Grupo Europa de Familiares de Personas Desaparecidas en Colombia, Colombia Humana Londres, Colectivo Aji, and United Migrant Workers Education Programme, is that there are many who are prepared to give their testimonies.

However, one of the main challenges that the Commission faces is to overcome the mistrust that many people, understandably, hold for the Colombian state. The Commission insisted on getting to know this community in order to create a dialogue on the importance of formally listening to their testimonies in order to understand the dynamics of the conflict and the impacts of exile that otherwise remain hidden and forgotten.



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A dialogue with UK academics and politicians

Another objective of the tour was to bring the experience of the Commission into academic debate. Academia is fundamental in generating knowledge about the ambitious transitional justice process, peacebuilding and the reasons for and dynamics of the armed conflict. The critical reflection between academics, victims and representatives of the Commission provided a comparative perspective, putting on the table lessons learned and challenges of other truth commissions.

The academic debates took place at the Universities of Oxford, Nottingham, Newcastle and York. The historian Malcolm Deas acknowledged the essential role that the Commission plays, as well as urging it to maintain a clear focus. The professor and sociologist Leigh Payne at the University of Oxford emphasised the great achievement that was the inclusion of transitional justice in the Peace Agreement, and highlighted the importance of the Commission, recognising that coexistence is the pathway to breaking the vicious circle of violence.

The Commission also approached the UK government, looking to obtain the support and legitimacy of the international community and to open new doors to include other political sectors in support of the work of the Commission. This led to meetings with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the UK Parliament, and the [presentation of the work of the Commission before members of the Scottish Parliament](#). The Commission also participated in a [round table organised by the Legatum Institute and Embrace Dialogue](#), with the participation of institutions that focus on peacebuilding such as the UK Stabilisation Unit.

The gender perspective and the media

Tatiana Pedraza and Alejandra Coll, both members of the Commission's gender group, presented the developments of the gender perspective in events with the community in exile, as well those events that included academics and politicians. They also held a meeting with the NGO Diaspora Woman and participated in the [International Women's Day](#) marches organised in London.

The delegation also participated in various interviews and meetings with the media to share the progress and challenges of the Commission's work and build awareness of the unprecedented commitment of the Colombian Truth Commission to uphold victims' right to truth on an international scale.

Embrace Dialogue celebrates the work that the Truth Commission is doing with the Colombian diaspora and the institutional support gained in the UK. We invite the Colombian community in the UK to actively participate in the social dialogue led by the Commission, and the international community to continue supporting its work.



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