

## The Impact of Coronavirus on the Work of the Truth Commission

The coronavirus pandemic poses a significant challenge to the implementation of the Peace Agreement. On 17 March 2020, the Truth Commission announced measures to protect its staff as well as the communities and social groups it is working with both in Colombia and abroad.

Most notably, the Commission has closed its offices and strengthened its website and email-related processes, postponed all public activity, moved to home working, begun focussing on reviewing sources that are already available, and implemented the self isolation of all staff members over the age of 65, including Francisco de Roux, President of the Commission.

The pandemic has also forced the Commission to reconsider the most appropriate ways to continue its work and complete its mandate which, unlike the other institutions within the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-recurrence, is limited to only three years, one and a half of which have already passed.

## Knowledge Management

One of the main pillars in the Commission's work is knowledge management, which focuses on the clarification, investigation, and gathering of information in order to develop a diverse understanding of the dynamics of the Colombian armed conflict. The purpose of this effort is to construct a collective narrative that takes into account such dynamics, acknowledging all sectors of society, most importantly the victims.

The knowledge management pillar has been the easiest to adapt to the pandemic. The Commission has started to focus on processing the information that has already been collected. The transcribing and coding of more than 7,000 individual testimonies is progressing, with around 2,400 processed to date.

However, the collection of testimonies has been affected by the pandemic, although virtual interviews are beginning to be conducted, following the maintenance of the Commission's security and confidentiality standards. The Commission has been focusing on interviews with perpetrators, as fewer testimonies have been collected from this group.



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## Social Dialogue

Another of the pillars of the Commission's work is social dialogue, which includes all the events and activities in which those actors directly or indirectly responsible for the violence committed in the armed conflict publicly acknowledge this responsibility, also recognising the dignity of victims, and promoting non-violence.

This pillar demands direct interaction with the different conflict actors, and it has been particularly affected by the current circumstances. Public events including the Encuentros por la Verdad (Truth Encounters) and the Diálogos por la No Repetición (Dialogues for Non-Recurrence) have been suspended in their current format. According to Commissioner Alejandra Miller, these activities are in the process of being made virtual, and related content is being produced for different channels of communication including virtual platforms, social networks, radio and television.

While the Casas de la Verdad (Truth Houses) are closed, the territorial teams are continuing their work on knowledge management, and the helplines remain open for victims in different territories of the country.

## The Other Pandemic

The Coronavirus pandemic clearly poses an enormous challenge to the work of the Commission, but new technologies have allowed the investigative work needed to publish a final report within the time frame of its mandate to continue. However, the killing of social leaders and the armed conflict in certain territories has also continued during the pandemic, affecting both the work of the Commission and peacebuilding more generally. In order to tackle this other pandemic, the Commission has added its voice to others calling for the initiation of peace talks with the ELN, and has invited all armed actors to cease violent activities.

**Embrace Dialogue recognises the effort made by the Truth Commission to adapt to the challenges posed by the Coronavirus pandemic and continue its work. This is fundamental to building territorial peace, recognising the dignity of victims and understanding the complexities of the armed conflict. We also express our solidarity with all the victims of the conflict facing difficulties amidst the pandemic.**



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