

The Commitment of Former Combatants with the Truth Commission

Although the 2016 Peace Agreement placed victims of the armed conflict at its centre, the engagement of former combatants with all aspects of the peace process is also vital. The Truth Commission is non-judicial, unlike the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), a separate transitional justice mechanism established to prosecute the worst abuses committed in the conflict. No individual, therefore, is legally obliged to assist in or cooperate with its processes.

The participation of former combatants in the Truth Commission, particularly commanders of armed groups, is key for realising one of the Commission's principal objectives: establishing which actors were responsible for atrocities committed in the armed conflict. This will also help the Commission clarify how and in what ways the conflict developed over the decades. This Snapshot analyses recent progress on this issue.

The FARC-EP Secretariat's Commitment to Truth

On 18 and 19 February 2020, the former members of FARC-EP Secretariat, today members of the FARC political party attended a meeting with the Truth Commission. They submitted written reports containing details on seven overarching topics related to the guerrilla group's activities to contribute to the process of truth-seeking: land and territory, counterinsurgency, insurgency, the FARC's military rank systems, the relationship between the FARC and the civilian population, the FARC's politics, and a self-critical analysis of their actions in the conflict.

The session was attended by several FARC party members: senators Sandra Ramírez and Julián Gallo, congress representative Rodrigo Granda, representative to the National Council of Reincorporation Pastor Alape, and party leader Rodrigo Londoño. The meeting was held privately, and little detail has been made publicly available.

It is known, however, that the Truth Commissioners raised questions regarding the information included in the FARC's submitted reports, and that all parties agreed on continuing with future communication. "We reaffirm our commitment to constructing the tragic narrative of pain and uprooting. This commitment is based on our pledge to dedicate all our efforts to ensure that we never repeat our actions, and to reach the peace that we have yet to achieve" said Pastor Alape.

Father Francisco de Roux, president of the Truth Commission said: "we will continue to hold more meetings on these topics. We always seek to compare and contrast the information we receive, in our aim of constructing a narrative that will help us to build a future for all Colombians."

In March, the Truth Commission listened to the former guerrilla group regarding the assassination of their members after the signing of the peace deal. This space was known as a Listening Space.



Rodeemos el Diálogo



@RodeemosDialogo



@RodeemoselDialogo



Rodeemos el Diálogo

The Contribution of the 19th of April Movement (M-19) Former Combatants to Truth

Vera Grabe, Darío Villamizar, Otty Patiño and Álvaro Jiménez, all former combatants of the M-19 participated in a public event which sought to contribute to truth, named “M-19: rebellion, negotiation, democratization”. This event was streamed online and was chaired by Commissioners Marta Ruiz, Alejandra Miller and Major Carlos Ospina.

The M-19 guerrilla group was active between 1974 and 1990. Their activity was more urban-based than other guerrilla groups, and focused more on political action rather than purely military action. Some of their most notable attacks include the Palace of Justice siege, the Dominican embassy siege in Bogotá, and the theft of Simón Bolívar’s sword, amongst others.

Commissioner Carlos Ospina questioned the participants about the M-19’s 1976 murder of union leader José Raquel Mercado, and the link this historical moment had with posterior cycles of violence against social and union leaders. Vera Grabe recognised that the situation had been poorly managed, noting that M-19’s intention of holding a “revolutionary trial” against Mercado was to create a dialogue with the government. However, she highlighted the importance of understanding actions within their context.

Former combatants also spoke about the experience of investigating the assassination of former M-19 commander Carlos Pizarro, who had signed peace only 45 days before his murder, and explained how they had found links between state entities and paramilitary groups with regards to this assassination. They said that saw limited interest among state organisms in investigating these links, and argued that this was one of the reasons for the continued impunity of this crime.

The compilation of these experiences of former combatants is key for the Truth Commission’s mandate to support non-repetition, particularly as almost 200 former FARC-EP combatants have been killed since the Peace Agreement was signed in November 2016.

Embrace Dialogue calls attention to the commitment shown by former combatants from both the FARC and the M-19 to clarifying the truth, and, likewise, the Truth Commission’s efforts to listen and allow their active participation in peacebuilding. The former combatants’ explanations of the past, without justifying their actions, is also vital for allowing society to understand what has happened. We invite Colombian society to recognise the current peace efforts of those formerly waged war.



Rodeemos el Diálogo



@RodeemosDialogo



@RodeemoselDialogo



Rodeemos el Diálogo