

# THERE IS FUTURE if there is truth

Truth Commission of Colombia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, which emerged from the agreements between the Colombian State and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC-EP, from its name in Spanish, guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), worked for almost four years to achieve its objectives. After listening to more than 30,000 victims from different regions and sectors of the country, studying more than 1,000 reports submitted by groups and organizations, and analyzing in depth the testimonies and the vast amount of information available, the Commission presents the results of its work in ten volumes and a "call for a great peace". Six of the volumes have a more general nature: the findings and recommendations, the historical account, the testimonies, the human rights violations, and breaches of International Humanitarian Law, the territorial and the impact, confrontations, and resistance volume. The other four address more specific issues: ethnicity, children, adolescents and youth, women and LGBTIQ+ population, and population in exile. The work also included multiple national dialogues, moving acts of recognition of responsibilities and coexistence initiatives.

Five main questions guided the work: What happened throughout this armed confrontation of more than six decades? Why did it happen? What accountability was there? What have been the impacts of this war and how have the victims been able to face its consequences, rebuild their lives, resist, and contribute to the search for peace? And finally, what are the main recommendations to try to overcome the war once and for all and build a peaceful society?

The Commission found that the armed confrontation has produced a serious violation of human rights, especially the right to life and personal integrity, and almost constant violations of IHL and the Medical Mission. Recognizing that it is impossible to establish the exact number of deaths due to the armed confrontation, the Commission finds around 450,000 as the total number of fatalities during the period between 1985 and 2018 with the aggravating factor that approximately 80% of them are non-combatant civilians, mostly young and adult men. The biggest perpetrators of these deaths are paramilitary groups (45%), followed by guerrillas (27%) and state agents (12%). The departments mostly affected by homicides were Antioquia, Valle del Cauca, Norte de Santander, and Cauca. Two homicide modalities deserved special attention: massacres (4,237 between 1958 and 2021 according to the National Center for Historical Memory, half of them committed by paramilitary groups), and extrajudicial executions, known as "false positives", committed entirely by State agents, often in alliance with paramilitary organizations and estimated by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace-JEP at 6,402 for the period 2002-2008, but estimated at 8,208 for the entire period 1958-2016.

# THERE IS FUTURE if there is truth

Truth Commission of Colombia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Forced disappearance was another of the most serious violations of IHL. More than 110,000 people suffered this form of cruelty, with paramilitaries (52%), FARC-EP (24%) and state agents (8%) also being the main perpetrators. Thousands of women, family members and victims' organizations continue the difficult task of searching for them. The Commission paid tribute to them in the city of Pasto in 2019. Kidnapping is another of the greatest violations of human rights and breaches of international humanitarian law. At least 50,000 people were victims of kidnapping, often in subhuman conditions, for long periods and with devastating consequences on the physical and mental health of the victims and their families - mostly large, medium, and small businessmen, traders, and cattle ranchers - with the FARC-EP (40%), paramilitary groups (24%) and the ELN (19%) being the main perpetrators. But the most frequent form of violence has been forced displacement: at least 8 million people have had to leave their land, their environment, and their culture since 1985, with the highest peak in 2002, with a daily average of 2,000 displaced persons. The most affected departments were Antioquia, Bolívar, and Magdalena. The Commission's attention was drawn to the fact that in almost 70% of the cases of displacement the responsible actor was not registered. The recruitment of children, boys-girls-adolescents and young people for the war exceeded 30,000 and was produced by the FARC-EP in 75%, by paramilitary groups in 13% and by the ELN in 9%. Through sexual violence, women's bodies were converted into spoils of war. This modality of violence particularly affected Afro and indigenous women, but also men and the LGBTIQ+ population. Including the above, in the volume of human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law, the Commission describes and analyzes a total of 17 modalities, showing that it is a dehumanized and degraded war wherein the main victims were part of the civilian population, wherein farmers were especially affected, and where ethnic peoples: indigenous, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero people suffered disproportionate damage.

The impacts of all of the above have been felt in the form of serious damage to life, physical and mental health - there are more than 400,000 registered disabled people -, daily life, tranquility, trust, and human dignity. There are many wounds and the human suffering produced by so many years of war is unspeakable. Democracy has also been affected by stigmatizing and persecuting social and popular organizations and political parties, murdering social leaders, tampering with electoral processes, and giving priority to arms over politics. Nature, for its part, has been not only the scene of war but also another of its victims, with devastating effects and shattering the relationship between human beings and nature. And culture, translated into ways of living and relating, of understanding the world and applying values, has been profoundly altered by war. But people and society have not allowed themselves to be subdued by war. On the contrary, they have shown courage, creatively developed multiple forms of solidarity, revival, and organization, put their lives back on track, and have tried in many ways to confront war and advance in the search for peace.

# THERE IS FUTURE if there is truth

Truth Commission of Colombia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In its attempt to understand the reasons for this long armed confrontation, the Commission was able to establish that it was not a struggle between two armies, one regular and the other irregular (in fact, 8 out of 10 of the fatalities that occurred in combat were civilians), nor a fight between good and bad actors, but a complex confrontation of both civilian and armed actors for economic - especially the possession and use of land and territory -, political - in particular the control of the State and its resources and the ideological domination over the population -, and military interests. This complex and changing framework has been presented and developed with some common elements, but with characteristics and intensities in the different regions of the country and in the different stages of the conflict. The singling out of political dissidents as adversaries who can even be eliminated. The emergence and persistence of drug trafficking, its penetration in the different actors of the armed confrontation and in all fields of economic, political, social, and cultural life, and its confrontation from a warlike and prohibitionist conception. The deep and undeniable relations of the paramilitary project with institutions and agents of the State. The high and growing levels of impunity and its consequences in the delegitimization of the State and society's loss of confidence in the institutions. The absence of the State in some moments and regions or its unbalanced presence, generally with military predominance. The perverse mix between legality and illegality in various spheres of social life. The particular appropriation of public resources. High levels of corruption. The application of security based on the protection of particular national and transnational interests and not on equal human dignity and the guarantee of rights for the entire population. And the persistence of long-standing inequalities, exclusions and discriminations based on ethnicity, gender, and region, are some of the threads of this complex network that originated and has perpetuated the armed conflict.

Consistent with the above, the Commission makes a series of proposals in the different volumes, especially in the findings and recommendations, aimed at resolving the conditions that have made the confrontation and its persistence possible, and at laying the foundations for an equitable society, guaranteeing basic needs, giving effect to fundamental rights, and resolving inevitable differences and tensions without violence. Accept the reality and gravity of what happened and assume the respective responsibilities of the armed actors, the State, civilians, and the different institutions. Recognize that war is definitely not the way forward. To take arms out of politics. Put life and its dignity and quality before any other project and interest. To solve the problem of drug trafficking in depth, changing the approach and strategies to confront it. Recognize that peace in Colombia is only possible if it is territorial and, therefore, guarantee the participation of the regions, rethink rural-urban relations and dignify the peasantry. To decisively fight impunity and corruption. Change the conception and structure of security, moving towards a human security, eliminating the practice of the internal enemy, putting the Armed Forces at the service of peace and the Police at the service of coexistence and citizens. Strengthening democracy by enforcing the 1991 constitution and effectively

# THERE IS FUTURE if there is truth

Truth Commission of Colombia  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



implementing the Final Peace Agreement, negotiating with the ELN, and subduing organized criminal groups, are some of the most important recommendations, whose implementation will only be possible with a solid commitment from society and the State, especially from the next governments.

In addition to this report, the legacy of the Commission consists of an extensive testimonial and documentary archive, multiple databases as well as the methodologies and audiovisual and artistic products that resulted from the broad process of social dialogue promoted during the Commission's mandate. All this material is available to Colombia and the world for communication, educational and social appropriation purposes for the implementation of the recommendations for non-repetition. There is future if there is truth.

To access the Legacy digital platform: <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/>

For direct access to the chapters of the final report :

**“There is Future if There is Truth”:**

<https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/hay-futuro-si-hay-verdad>

## THERE IS FUTURE if there is truth

Truth Commission of Colombia  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

