



**LEGACY**  
OF THE COLOMBIAN  
**TRUTH COMMISSION**

## **SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>**

### **To resist is not to endure**

### **Violence and damage against the ethnic peoples of Colombia**

**Final Report**

**Commission for the clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-repetition**

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<sup>1</sup> Translation and summary by the Swedish Foundation for Human Rights, October, 2022. Full report available at: <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/hay-futuro-si-hay-verdad>

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Truth Commission was mandated to reveal the violence and damage caused by the armed conflict to the ethnic peoples and territories of Colombia. The Ethnic volume of the Final report, collects the memories of historical violence – the invasion, the slave trade and the Colony – as well as the memories of the violence against the territory and nature, which have put at risk the collective future project of the indigenous peoples, black people, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, Palenquero and Roma people. Thanks to the many testimonies, reports, experiences and reflections received, the Commission was able to build a comprehensive story, narrated from the pain that has marked bodies and territories, and, in addition, to account for the terror that shook the collective being of these peoples and the bonds that have allowed each community to forge a vision of the universe and of life.

Several of the testimonies collected in this volume directly question the armed actors, the Colombian State and society about their responsibility in the dehumanization and disproportionate violence suffered by ethnic peoples as a consequence of the armed conflict. A violence with colonial heritage that maintains racism permeated in the mental, social and institutional structures, as well as in the imaginaries of those who participate in armed actions. The findings of this volume reveal the long periods of systematic and continuous violence which for generations has affected the bodies, lives, communities, cultures and territories of ethnic peoples.

## **FINDINGS**

The first finding of the Truth Commission documents the colonial treatment and structural racism experienced by ethnic peoples in Colombia throughout a continuum of violence in which the State, by action or omission, has failed to comply with its obligation to respect, protect and guarantee the rights of all citizens, without discriminating against or re-victimizing any sector of the population, either because of their skin colour, ethnicity or geographic location. The evidence indicates that colonial treatment persists in thoughts, speeches and practices based on the European identity project that subordinates other cultures to dissolve them within itself: a unique, mono-cultural and mono-lingual project that fosters colonial institutions and imaginaries. This finding has different connotations for each ethnic people.

The second finding shows that, as a consequence of beliefs and social practices based on colonial treatment and structural racism, the continuum of violence against ethnic peoples was assimilated and replicated in the actions of the armed groups in the armed conflict and caused disproportionate damage and impact.

The third finding shows the existence of seventeen corridors of the armed conflict in ethnic macro-territories. These corridors are dynamic and have been the epicentre of the confrontation of the armed groups that dispute these areas to develop legal and illegal extractive economic activities.

The fourth finding shows how colonial treatment and structural racism are expressed in the invisibility of statistical information on ethnic peoples, armed conflict narratives and historical violence, which has prevented Colombian society, under its own voice and analysis, knowing the reality of the history of ethnic peoples and the dimension of violence and damage suffered in the context of the armed conflict. Similarly, an institutional racism has been reproduced, since, in the face of an incomplete diagnosis and with structural flaws, the institutional responses do not guarantee the rights of ethnic peoples.

The fifth finding exposes the disproportion of the violence and the damage of the armed conflict and historical violence against ethnic peoples, due to the overrepresentation of victims of ethnic peoples, in terms of the total ethnic population, and the drastic decline in the population of some peoples and territories

(several have even disappeared or count very few members). The disproportionality is also apparent in the accumulated damage and violence of the different armed actors, which has generated serious affectations to the cultural survival as peoples, to the existence as a group, to the transmission of intergenerational knowledge, to their forms of government and organisation, and to the territory.

The sixth finding shows that, as living integrity and sustenance of life and cultural identity, territory and nature were victims of the armed conflict. These suffered multiple damages and were desecrated by the violent actions of the armed groups in association with economic or political sectors that benefited from the armed conflict.

The seventh finding indicates that the continuous violence against indigenous peoples show recurring practices that allow cultural imposition through processes of invasion, occupation of territory and subjugation of communities and their members, which contributes, in the context of the armed conflict, to the physical and cultural extermination of the indigenous peoples.

The eighth finding explains the deepening of the discourse of denial of existence regarding black people, which is directly related to the deprivation of rights to a territory, to a culture and to a community project free of racial discrimination. As a consequence, these communities have been recurrent victims, in the context of the armed conflict, of disproportionate cycles of deterritorialisation, occupation of territories, dispossession and lack of protection.

The ninth finding indicates that the main violations of the Roma people in the framework of the armed conflict have been cultural persecution, displacement and eternal exile. A people who historically has been victim of prejudice, racist beliefs, persecution and cultural stigmatisation.

## **RESISTANCE**

The resistance of the ethnic peoples has a historical character: from the Colony to the armed conflict, these peoples have resisted. At crucial moments of the armed conflict they developed actions to defend themselves against attacks, to propose negotiated solutions, to demand protection, and to undertake humanitarian action. For daring those actions of resistance and for the decision not to accept the logics and interests of the armed actors –beyond individual co-optations–, the conflict was raging with the ethnic authorities and leaderships.

Ethnic peoples have lived the experience of being victims and survivors due to the disproportion of the violence exerted against them. This does not mean that people or groups of indigenous, black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, Palenquero and Roma people not have participated in the legal and illegal structures of the armed conflict, but rather that this participation has not come from a collective decision of the political structures and community organisations.

The ethnic peoples have proposed and developed actions of resistance and for the defence of life and rejection of armed action. They have promoted dialogues and “humanitarian pacts” in their territories with the different armed actors – both guerrillas and paramilitaries – to preserve their life and integrity, and to be able to remain in the territory. Similarly, they have proposed to the Colombian State formulas for political negotiation and peace, offering their spiritual strength and even their territories as arenas for negotiations. The ethnic peoples themselves have developed mechanisms such as the Indigenous Guard or the Cimarrona Guard for the self-government and the self-protection of communities. Despite a long history of violence and exclusion, Colombian ethnic peoples treasure in their culture and in their connection with the territory, essential knowledge to rebuild the country on new foundations. In other words, a project of inclusion and

recognition, celebration of difference and respect for the sacredness of nature that, inexplicably and generously, continue to protect us.

## **SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Guarantee full and comprehensive compliance with the Final Peace Agreement, including the provisions of the Ethnic Chapter and gender measures. This implies clear goals and time lines, resources and the design of strategies for the construction of territorial peace in the areas most affected by the armed conflict and violence.
- Advance in the program of settlement, return, devolution and restitution of the territories of the Nukak indigenous people and the Embera Katío people of Alto San Jorge, Resguardo Cañaveral, as well as the territory of the community councils of Alto Mira and Frontera, Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó.
- Advance in the fulfilment of the commitment which established humanitarian demining in the cases prioritized by the Ethnic Chapter of the Final Peace Agreement.
- Implement, in consultation and with the participation of the peoples, a specific plan in a participatory process that considers the seventeen ethnic macro-territories most affected by the armed conflict and identified by the Truth Commission as strategic corridors of the armed groups. The plan must consolidate the peoples' own territorial development and good living conditions for the construction of peace with security guarantees. This must be done jointly with existing plans to ensure the strengthening of community governance, the access to public goods and services, economic recovery and reconstruction of the social fabric, without affecting the cultural integrity of the territories.
- Give the necessary guarantees for the economic, social and political reincorporation of ex-combatants of the FARC-EP with the creation of a harmonization program for ex-combatants of ethnic peoples that guarantees the implementation of the measures for reincorporation with a differential, gender and ethnic approach, and with actions that speed up access to land for housing and productive projects, as well as sustainability, whether individual or collective.
- Promote the construction, preservation and appropriation of the memory of the internal armed conflict with a territorial approach and taking into account the ethnic dimensions.
- The creation of an information system to unify institutional data on the collective and individual victims of the armed conflict – disaggregating for each one of ethnic peoples, gender, age and territories, among others – and those responsible, their situation regarding access to justice and documentation of impacts. This will serve to make public policy decisions regarding the priority of attention to victims.
- Emphasise on investigations into gender-based violence and sexual crimes committed against women, men and LGBTIQ+ people from ethnic peoples in the framework of the armed conflict. The high levels of invisibility of these crimes contribute to re-victimization; hence, research processes should contribute to identify risk factors and effective mechanisms for comprehensive support to victims of sexual crimes of indigenous peoples, black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, Palenquero and Roma people.

- Promote the effective protection of ethnic territories and the restoration of their integrity, biodiversity and resilience, in order to repair and compensate for the damage caused to victims. To this end, specific efforts must be deployed effectively to implement applicable regulations and policies, and the creation of new that preserve the territories as living spaces for ethnic peoples and as forms of protection of humanity and nature in the face of environmental emergencies.
  - Promote democratic coexistence based on respect for pluralism, diversity and equal dignity. To this end, specific actions are suggested: a) develop pedagogical and communicative campaigns to promote social and political relations without stigmatization, colonial treatment, racism (positive assessment of ethnic diversity and culture of the nation) or discrimination; b) promote a national dialogue that allows reflections on processes that strengthen the role of the media in the defence of respect for diversity, equal dignity and plurality.
  - Generate and implement policies and measures that contribute to the effective enjoyment of rights by the women of ethnic peoples, who have been exposed to multiple discriminations, and close the gaps in terms of access to their rights.
  - The creation by the Colombian State of a Historical Truth Commission for the indigenous, black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, Palenquero and Roma peoples, which recovers the oral and historical memory of the peoples. These reports must be known and disseminated in the national society and in the educational system of the country as a contribution to the recognition and knowledge of their cultures, as well as to the recognition of the historical damages experienced by these populations throughout the history of the country, which will help prevent future damage.
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