



LEGACY
OF THE COLOMBIAN
TRUTH COMMISSION

SUMMARY¹

Colombia outside Colombia. The truths of exile

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

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COLOMBIA OUTSIDE COLOMBIA. THE TRUTHS OF EXILE

The chapter of the Colombian Truth Commission dedicated to the exile reflects a process of listening, documenting, and acknowledging testimonies by organizations and victims in 24 countries with more than 2,000 interviews conducted abroad. During its work, the CEV set out to expose the consequences of violence regarding the and the victims' processes that beyond the physical subjective dimension includes multiple perspectives, voices, faces and impacts, but also recognizes the memory and resistance of a truth that has never been published before. Therefore, this chapter manages to recognize the invisible reality of Colombian exile as a human rights violation, which includes the rootlessness and the consequent rupture of the victims' life projects, but also reveals the institutional failures to recognize this history as part of the collective memory of the war.

The main questions that guided the research included the human rights violations that caused the forced displacement of the victims, as well as the personal, family, community, and territorial impacts. The research also asked about the resistance strategies of the victim population and the difficulties in accessing truth, justice, return and restitution of their rights.

The chapter addressed a collaborative methodology that included networks, organizations and individuals in territorial nodes aimed at addressing spaces for reflection on the Colombian exile. In Europe, the nodes were developed in 11 countries, including Sweden. In addition, the chapter also included reports submitted by the victims, and addressed the experiences of exile from an ethnic, gender and sexual diversity perspective, along with the damages and effects of the victims, including second and third generations.

Among the core subjects covered, the following were highlighted: the dimensions, stages and historical milestones of the conflict, the patterns of serious violations that forced the exile, the main routes, and the obstacles for the victims in the processes of recognition and integration. Other aspects included the differential impacts of exile and the loss of social roles of the victims but also, other forms of resistance, the support networks abroad and the conditions of return.

As main findings, the research managed to systematize that between 1982 and 2020 there were more than one million Colombians forced to leave the country, which indicates that exile would be the second largest violence in the country, in terms of number of people affected, after forced internal displacement, according to UNHCR. Regarding the status of the people interviewed, 41% had not had any recognition of protection, despite their status as victims and their situation of vulnerability.

The chapter of the exile identifies the dimension of the damages as a violation of human rights itself, characterizing the patterns of victimization and the impact on families, collectives and democracy. In addition, the research reveals the Colombian exile as one of the longest in the world, 60 years later it is still taking place.

As part of the most significant causes of the exile, it was possible to demonstrate in the study the interconnection between the persecution of political opponents of all social groups, territory control, recruitment of children and young people, lack of State protection, persecution of ex-combatants and threats against relatives of victims who were seeking for justice.

On the other hand, the research was based on the study of nine cases of analysis, representing the plurality of border displacement and events suffered by the exiled population. One of these cases refers to the intelligence operations developed by the former Administrative Department of Security (DAS) in Europe, with the so-called "Operation Europe" in 2003-2005. During these years, victims of exile and organizations supporting Colombian refugees continued to be persecuted. The DAS, a state agency, contemplated plans for attacks, accusations, threats and to kill defenders even when they were in countries such as Spain or Belgium.

Other findings of the chapter include revealing the direct responsibilities of all the armed actors involved in the war: paramilitary groups, guerrillas, Armed Forces and Police, but also State agents or institutions and civilian third parties.

Additionally, it was established that exile is a factor of impunity, since for most of the victims it is an obstacle to access to justice, which keeps the victims in a permanent state of uncertainty and vulnerability. On the other hand, the impunity of cases related to the internal armed conflict increased due to the persecution of judicial officials and human rights defenders, which resulted in the lack of investigations and sentences.

Finally, the report demonstrates that even though the prospect of return has always been part of the victims' expectations, the State does not have a specific policy that addresses their needs and does not provide sufficient guarantees for their reintegration and restitution of rights.

Therefore, the Truth Commission makes several recommendations that include providing legal mechanisms for the recognition of victims, recognizing state responsibility, and establishing specific mechanisms for comprehensive and differentiated reparation.

The CEV also recommended redesigning national return guidelines and programs and promoting the holding of an international conference on peace and exile regarding the applicability of international refugee law in migration laws and national protection systems.
