

To Be History (and make it)



Red

Rodeemos el Diálogo
10 YEARS

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Rodeemos el Diálogo-ReD

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This abridged version of the book 'A Ser Historia' serves as an overview and introduction to the full version available in Spanish. It offers the reader the chance to get to know how the project came about, who were the individuals who shared their experiences, what was the approach taken and insights gained by the young people involved, and what is their message for their peers, Colombian society more broadly and the world.

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Introduction

-Ah, he said. -Then you don't believe it either.

- What?

- That Colonel Aureliano Buendía fought thirty-two civil wars and lost them all," answered Aureliano. -That the army rounded up and machine-gunned three thousand workers, and that they took the corpses and threw them into the sea in a train with two hundred wagons.

The parish priest sized him up with a look of pity.

-Oh, son! he sighed, -It would be enough for me to be sure that you and I exist at this moment.

Gabriel García Márquez

One Hundred Years of Solitude

Translated by Beatriz Vejarano Villaveces

The exercise of building memory at a time of transition is a difficult task. Society is still divided by widespread violence, and the interests of different groups remain present amidst the building of peace. Everyone wants to be the good guys, the most just, the least barbaric, the only ones who have a justification for violence, the ones who were right. History, especially at a time of transition, is a long way from consensus. Those of us who are alive have an interest in coming across as well as possible in the history books.

Our understanding of recent history sets the way forward. How we understand the origins of the war and its consequences also informs our decision on what is needed to end the violence. Therefore, understanding what happened in our country, not only during the last sixty years but in its entire history, is more an exercise about the present than about the past. It has to do with having the tools, as a centennial generation, to discern the deep history, the one in which horrors and justifications coexist, the one that is full of dualities and paradoxes.

The construction of historical memory in the Colombian context cannot only be about agreeing with one or other of the combatants. For the victims, historical memory is more than an academic exercise: it is part of reparation, an acknowledgement of what was done to them, a demand

that those who did it accept their responsibility. Far from being passive in their context, they have become guardians of peace and promoters of non-repetition. Every time they tell their story, they remind society of what they lived through to ensure that, rather than resorting to vengeance and hatred, the wounds of the past are healed. The exercise of listening to their stories, of documenting and portraying them, is a tribute to their pain and resistance.

For decades, we young people have been seen as problematic and impressionable subjects, without any judgement or agency of our own. These ideas simply confine us as social actors. That is why it is important for us to distance ourselves from prejudices, to focus our efforts on peacebuilding that is based on our own experiences, and to engage in horizontal dialogues of learning.

One of the main benefits of the peace process is the transformation of the political culture of the young: as young people, we understand that we are not a social group that is isolated and indifferent to social events in the country. It is clear to us that our life projects and expectations are closely linked to national developments. Therefore, we are faced with the challenge of rethinking the country, based on an understanding of the complex peace process we are going through, but also of addressing the long tradition of violences that continue to evolve.

As a group, we are particularly struck by the idea that young people fertile ground for supporting the transition from armed conflict by political means. This is a transition that we weave and continue to weave in our encounters, through active listening and deep empathy towards both victims and perpetrators. We understand that before we can make the transition to participatory democracy, a profound social transition is needed, which comes about through the processes of memory. This is a memory constructed from oral sources and living narratives with the aim of reconstructing history, allowing us to revalue historically silenced subjects and thus suggest a way of rescuing the participation of actors that have, until now, been excluded from the debate. Listening to the different positions, sensitivities and individual experiences of the armed conflict is one of the features that make the testimonial approach we propose innovative. It is a methodology based on reflection that allowed us not only to listen to the stories of victims, perpetrators and peacebuilders, but also to subsequently scrutinise and analyse each of them.

The importance of youth action in the current context is painfully underscored by the recent violence against young people in Colombia. This has often been against those who, when they were children, had already experienced the war. We are horrified by massacres such as those in Samaniego, Llano Verde, Carmen de Bolívar and Buenos Aires. The exercise of rejecting violence in the face of the resurgence of war is an exercise in resistance. Remembering with determination and conviction all that happened in the struggle for peace is a tribute to all those who have fallen on this journey.

A great indigenous leader of the Wiwa people once said: "To remember is to walk the living

word of our ancestors" - and that is what we do at each of our meetings: we walk hand in hand with the people who generously tell us about their lives and their resistance, and in this way weave bonds of solidarity and support. As young people, we are the ones who must walk and listen to the words of those who are tired of mourning their dead, of those who are still searching for them, of those who want to return to their lands, of those who have been resisting against armed actors for decades, and of those who have found creative ways to stop the war.

As a group of young activists who support the Peace Agreement between the FARC and the State, we were interested in creating spaces for dialogue with those who experienced the war in body and soul. We knew that this would help us understand more deeply a history that is still alive; however, we did not expect this process to bring about such personal and collective transformation.

The project A Ser Historia, carried out by the transnational network Embrace Dialogue (Rodeemos el Diálogo, ReD), had its first meeting in March 2019. It gathered fourteen young people from different universities in Bogotá, who came together out of a curiosity to understand more about what had happened during almost sixty years of political violence in Colombia. Along the way we met more interested young people, both in Bogotá and in corners of the country far from the city, motivated by the construction of truth and memory.

We held 18 meetings between March 2019 and June 2020. Eleven victims of different acts of violence, as well as six former combatants from various armed groups, were invited to attend. We attentively listened to their stories in a supportive and generous atmosphere. Without formalities and with youthful energy, we created sacred spaces of trust for reflection on our history and the human condition. Their stories opened our eyes, not only to pain and loneliness, but also to what seems impossible in the midst of widespread violence: love.

The victims we listened to proved to be experts in what they experienced. As Pilar Navarrete told us, they turned into detectives, lawyers, forensic anthropologists, experts in transitional justice and in reconciliation. Resistance and resilience have led them to be each other's companions, and they have become their own spokespersons. Far from playing a passive or self-centred role, they have dedicated themselves to building a better country for the next generations. Today, they understand like no one else the challenges, complexities and contradictions of the moment we are living in. Their stories serve not only as examples, but also as sources of knowledge for building a peaceful country. Their narratives reveal a particular time in history, but also their unique ability to understand the paradoxes that arise.

From conversations with the former combatants, we learned of their deep commitment to a transformation of Colombia away from armed struggle. They have understood the importance of the truth and of taking responsibility for their actions in order to achieve reconciliation. They understand the damage they caused and defend the ideas that inspired them, without justifying

actions that can only be described, rather than explained. They showed us the possibility of ending violence without forgetting differences; of being opponents rather than enemies.

In small gatherings, with no more than thirty participants and an average of eighteen, more than a hundred young people were able to hear first-hand stories about the war and the road to peacebuilding. The reflections that emerged from this exercise are what inspire the pages that follow. The building of trust, both among the guests and the participants, was key to the creation of honest and supportive spaces. With trust as our core value, we were able to build empathy and let go of judgements about what we did not share or understand.

In the full report in Spanish, you will find eleven essays in which we reflect on the country we want, whilst being aware that Colombia today continues to be a country at war and scarred by profound inequalities. The texts we present show the contrasts experienced during more than a year of meetings, as well as the reflections of the young people who participated in them.

The first is entitled “The war we lived through in Bogotá”. In this text, we reflect on the effects of the attacks on the country’s capital. Above all, we seek to understand how the violence in this city, had a central impact on politics at the national level. In addition, we analyse the impact of forced displacement and of exclusion on the way the war was perceived in the capital.

The second, entitled “The role of young people in scenarios of conflict and reconciliation”, analyses the way in which young people became victims of the armed conflict through different dynamics of violence. It is also a tribute to those who, based on different visions of the country, have fought for a more inclusive Colombia. It explores the diverse ways in which different generations have understood social change and the tools they have used to achieve it.

Next, the reader will find “The war that we as women have lived through”. In this chapter, we identified and analysed the different ways in which women have experienced the armed conflict in Colombia. We saw that there are certain factors implicit in the traditional role imposed on women which also come to the fore within the dynamics of war. A crucial point we will discuss is the way in which feminised bodies are used in war as a way of conquering territories and communities. We will also discuss how women have been able to recover from the victimising events they suffered.

Further on, “The contradiction between war and democracy” analyses why Colombia, supposedly the oldest democracy in Latin America, also waged the longest war in the hemisphere. This, considering the existential incompatibility between war and democracy. The impacts of political violence on institutions such as elections and parties, as well as on guarantees for participation, have been profound enough to raise the question as to whether Colombia’s democracy can really be considered a democracy at all.

In the text that follows, “The importance of fulfilling peace agreements”, we take a look at the history

of some of the peace processes we have undertaken in Colombia, identifying the progress each achieved, as well as its failures. Understanding the history of peacebuilding in our country is central to being able to end the conflicts that have yet to be transformed into contexts conducive to peace.

This is followed by “peace identities”. This text seeks to contribute to the debate on the role of identity in conflict and peacebuilding, with an emphasis on the current national context. The transformation of identities not only led to the armed conflict, but also drives peacebuilding today.

The next essay is “The category of victim,” in which we recount the different perspectives of our guests with regard to the notion of victim and how the victimising events they suffered took place. We look at the scope of Law 1448 of 2011 and study the process of accepting their condition of victims and the forms of resilience and healing that they adopted and continue to practise in order to work towards non-repetition.

The eighth text is entitled “The human condition in war”. In it, we reflect on how both former combatants and victims have achieved healing processes, how they have managed to reconcile with life, even when they fail to find possibilities for reconciliation, and how this affects their relationship with peacebuilding.

The ninth essay, “The importance of social leadership”, is a tribute to social leaders who defend human rights. Their work is vital for the construction of peace in their territories, and we know that their physical elimination also way the elimination of their communities’ projects. This text is a reflection on the relevance of their work.

In “The role of art in peacebuilding” we take a look at the different art forms that have emerged throughout the conflict. There we see how art is a means of healing for people who have been caught up in the violence of the conflict, since it emerges as a way to create memory and offer tools for reconciliation.

In the last text, “Multidimensional Reconciliation”, we reflect on the longing for reconciliation. It is understood that it does not occur only through symbolic processes involving victims and former combatants, but that the country too bears a profound responsibility to achieve the material conditions to change the circumstances and contexts that fuel violence. In this sense, the state and society in general have a central role to play.

We thank our colleagues at Rodeemos el Diálogo whose support made this work possible: its director in Colombia, Karen Arteaga Garzón; its former director, Beatriz Vejarano Villaveces; its UK director, Andrei Gómez-Suárez; María Eugenia Díaz, for her editorial work; Carolina Gómez, for her administrative support; and, in general, ReD’s transnational team, whose members

accompanied this process and advised us at different times.

We also thank the more than one hundred young people who attended our events. Their contributions, questions and reflections were central to our work. In particular, we would like to thank María Paula Herrera, Juan Fernando Soto, Ángela María Gómez, Sara Trujillo, Sofía Porto, Angie Aguirre, Diego Contreras, Jonni Duquino, Laura Moreno and Manuel Delgado for their dedicated attendance to the meetings and their support in different tasks.

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Finally, we would like to thank Pilar Navarrete, Ciro Galindo, María Eugenia Guzmán de Antequera, Iván Calderón Alvarado, Isabela Sanroque, María Violet Medina Quiscué, Vera Grabe, Juan Carlos Villamizar, Olga Esperanza Rojas, Luz Marina Hache, Darllery Díaz, Rodrigo Londoño, Luis Arlex Arango, Óscar José Ospino, Alberto Vidal, Yolanda Perea Mosquera, Héctor Marino Carabalí Charrupí, Antonio Navarro Wolff and Aída Avella. Their generosity in joining us and telling their stories allowed us to understand how the conflict began and how it was transformed and dehumanised, the actors in the conflict, its impacts in the different territories and the efforts made to end the violence.

This text is dedicated to Héctor Jaime Beltrán Fuentes, Eduardo Umaña Mendoza, Elkin Galindo, José Antequera, Cristóbal Sanroque, Carlos Pizarro Leongómez, Mario Calderón, Elsa Alvarado, Gustavo Marulanda García, Eduardo Loffsner Torres, Sergeant José Vicente Rojas, María Ricardina Perea Mosquera, Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, Manuel Cepeda Vargas, Álvaro José Caicedo, Jair Cortés, Josmar Jean Paul Cruz, Luis Fernando Montaña, Léider Cárdenas, Óscar Andrés Obando, Laura Michel Melo, Campo Elías Benavides, Daniel Vargas, Bayron Patiño, Rubén Darío Ibarra, Jhon Sebastián Quintero and Brayan Alexis Cuarán, among the million people who were murdered and disappeared in our country. Their example and memory inspire the work for a peace that guarantees that what happened to them will never happen to anyone again.



Chapter 1

On the 'To Be History (and make it)' Project

The 'To Be History (and make it)' project, part of the ReD Youth initiative, emerged as a response to Colombian society's denial of the past. We decided to bring together young people from Bogotá who had not experienced the war directly with the stories of those who lived it first-hand.

Between March 2019 and May 2020, we held eighteen meetings. We were able to talk to thirteen victims and six former combatants, of whom nine were men and ten were women, two were Afro-Colombian and one was a Nasa indigenous person. The average number of participants in each of these meetings was eighteen young people. In total, more than one hundred young people attended at least one meeting.

The last thirteen meetings had to be held virtually, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. This allowed us to broaden participation and we were joined by young leaders from different parts of the country. The participants came from Montes de María, Urabá, Chocó, Buenaventura, among other regions. Their profound reflections contributed to our understanding of the conflict in the territories and the construction of peace at a generational level.

At every meeting we held, both guests and participants showed generosity and solidarity. For two to three hours once or twice a month, ReD Youth sat and listened to stories that seemed less and less distant. Stories of deep love cut short by violence, like those of Pilar Navarrete and María Eugenia Guzmán de Antequera. Stories of self-recognition, like those of María Violet Medina and Iván Calderón. Dreams of change at different moments in our history, such as those of Vera Grabe, Rodrigo Londoño, Juan Carlos Villamizar and Luz Marina Hache. Stories of amazing, resilient women, such as Yolanda Perea and Darllery Díaz. Stories about the power of forgiveness, such as those of Óscar José Ospino, Luis Arlex Arango, Isabela Sanroque and Olga Esperanza Rojas. Stories of social transformation, like those of Ciro Galindo, Héctor Marino Carabalí and Alberto Vidal.

At all times we prioritised the creation of trust in our spaces in the belief that only by recognising each other as human beings could we weave points of convergence in the midst of polarisation. This is why we believed, from the beginning, that these spaces should not consist of an exchange of monologues. They could be neither lectures nor interrogations – they had to be real dialogues. To achieve this, we studied the experiences that we had found useful in Rodeemos el Diálogo with dialogues about conflict. In addition, we drew on the creativity and imagination of our team

of young people. We understood the importance of getting to know each other, and so at the beginning of each space there was a brief moment for each person to introduce themselves, including the guests. In the opening questions we liked to hear who they were, before getting into the various controversies of this historic moment we are living through. The conversations always covered both what was experienced in the war and attempts to build peace and reconciliation. Finally, to reciprocate the generosity of our guests, we held an activity in which participants could also express what they were taking away from this space.

All the sessions were carefully planned, which meant that only young people interested in listening to the testimonies in a non-judgmental way were invited to participate. They were always held according to rules of confidentiality, and the recordings have been used only for the purposes of this report. The guests gave their consent verbally prior to the conversations. Over the next pages, you can read a little on each of the victims that took part in this project.

Pilar Navarrete

Pilar Navarrete never thought she would become a widow at the age of twenty. She met Héctor Jaime Beltrán, or Jimmi as she liked to call him, when she was still at school, at the age of 15. They met at Jimmi's sister's house when they were practising for the play *Toque de queda* (Curfew). Five years later, when Pilar was barely twenty, they were already married and had several children. Jimmi was disappeared between 6 and 7 November 1985 during the seizure of the Palace of Justice. He had gone to work in the cafeteria as a waiter thanks to a friend's recommendation. Previously he had lost several jobs because of his character, and his family had sent him to the Army hoping that he would come to his senses. At least in this job he earned the minimum wage.

Pilar, together with the other relatives of the disappeared, became an investigator. Along with lawyers such as Eduardo Umaña Mendoza and Rafael Barrios, she has succeeded in forcing the Colombian State to take responsibility for the disappearance at the Palace of Justice. The most important achievement in this regard was the judgement of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2014. Although they have already been awarded compensation, several reparation measures are still pending.

After almost thirty years of struggle, the family of the magistrate Julio César Andrade found part of Jimmi's body. It had been handed over by Medicina Legal to Andrade's family and it was thanks to their willingness to exhume it that Jimmi's body was found. Today, the body of Magistrate Andrade is still missing and his family is living what Pilar experienced for so many years. Despite the progress made, there are still many unresolved questions: Why was Hector's identity card intact while he himself was burnt? Why was he shot in the hip? Why was his body handed over to Andrade's family and not to his own?

Ciro Galindo

Ciro Galindo has been haunted by war for most of his life. He was born in Coyaima, Tolima. From a young age, he was interested in community work and so he joined the Patriotic Union in 1985. He lived through the persecution of this political movement, in the Eastern Plains, and in particular in La Macarena where he became an ecological tourism guide. He had three children. The first drowned in Caño Cristales when he hit his head on a rock after a fall. The second, whom he affectionately called Memín, was forcibly recruited by the FARC-EP at the time of the demilitarised zone. Despite his father's efforts, Memín was forced to join the guerrilla.

During Álvaro Uribe's government, Memín benefitted from a programme for the demobilisation of minors. The State promised him a productive project and educational opportunities in exchange for collaboration with the authorities. Memín was recruited by the security forces to gather more information and because of what he knew, he was handed over to the Centauros Bloc of the Self-Defence Forces of Colombia. When he tried to escape from this group, he was kidnapped and killed.

Ciro's other son, Esnéider, was also recruited by a paramilitary group while looking for work. He managed to escape but still faces security problems, including several attempts on his life. As a result of the security problems, his family was forcibly displaced several times, once to Bogotá where they lived in extreme poverty for several years. This difficult situation led to the death of Hiro's wife, Anita, from depression and cancer.

Ciro is a community leader in the San Antonio neighbourhood of Villavicencio. He was given a free house by the State in this neighbourhood. The struggle for decent housing has been central to his resistance. Through the Justice and Peace Law, he was able to find out the truth about Memín's murder. He is still waiting for the State to acknowledge responsibility for using his son and handing him over to the paramilitaries. His story is told in the documentary *Ciro y yo*.

María Eugenia Guzmán de Antequera

María Eugenia and José were worlds apart. María Eugenia was born into a very poor family where she had to borrow novels in order to be able to read. She had to pay for her studies even before she finished school. She was expelled from the School of Sociology at the University of the Atlantic for calling for the dismissal of incompetent professors. She went on to study law at the Free University. There she met José. He, in contrast, was from a wealthy family from Barranquilla, the son of a lawyer. José studied law at the University of the Atlantic and had been a student leader from a very young age. At university, he organised different student movements at the national level.

José and María Eugenia were active together in the Communist Party, and in 1985 joined the Patriotic Union. They moved from their native Barranquilla to Bogotá to take up official party duties. At that time, José was a facilitator of peace efforts and even worked with Álvaro Gómez Hurtado to achieve a broad national accord. But the two also experienced the pain of the constant assassinations of fellow activists.

On 3 March 1990, José Antequera was assassinated at Bogotá airport on his way to his parents' home in Barranquilla. Because of student protests following his death, it took five days to bury his body. Even Érika, his daughter, had to ask the mayor to allow the rite. María Eugenia was left a widow with a four-year-old son and a nine-year-old daughter, and it became a tradition in her home to talk about what happened and the different effects it had on their lives over the years.

María Eugenia was a pioneer of memory, ensuring that her two children never forgot their father. For this reason, she still uses “de Antequera” as her second surname. She worked with other women victims of the genocide against the Patriotic Union and took the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Today, retired from her professional activity, she still lives in the same house she and José bought when they first arrived in Bogotá.

Iván Calderón Alvarado

Iván Calderón Alvarado grew up with four parents. Two of them were those who raised him and the ones he knew as he was growing up. Two of them he knew only through photos, as they were assassinated when he was only 18 months old.

His father, Mario Calderón, was a retired Jesuit priest and sociologist. He had studied in France and when he returned to Colombia, he sought to work with the peasant communities of the Sumapaz Peasant Reserve Zone. His mother, Elsa Alvarado, was a social communicator. They both worked at the Centre for Research and Popular Education (CINEP).

They were murdered on 19 May 1997, along with Carlos Alvarado, Elsa's father. Only Elvira Chacón, Elsa's mother, and Iván survived. The attack was perpetrated by hired assassins sent by the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia. According to judicial investigations, it was Carlos Castaño himself who ordered the assassination by the La Terraza gang, also responsible for other assassinations in Bogotá around the same time.

Iván grew up trying to keep a low profile in order to avoid security problems. He decided to study sociology, perhaps in spite of his father, and for his thesis returned to Sumapaz to research dehumanisation as a phenomenon of armed conflict. Although he does not see his work in terms of his parents' legacy, he continues to work for the Sumapaz they fought for.

María Violet Medina Quisqué

María Violet Medina Quisqué is a Nasa indigenous young woman from Tierradentro, on the border between the departments of Cauca and Huila. She says that when she is older she wants to study abroad in order to return to her territory and become governor of her council or mayor of her municipality.

As a traditional teacher of Corewaje children in the department of Caquetá, she became a frequent witness to the forced recruitment that the FARC-EP, in particular, perpetrated. After growing tired of seeing her students recruited and abused by this group, she decided to confront a commander. This led to her forced displacement to Bogotá.

Despite her traditional education and having previously been a primary school teacher, the city received her in a cold and distant manner. From that moment on, she noticed that in the city there were no differential opportunities for indigenous people forced to displace from their territory. There was no respect for her traditional knowledge and no possibility to continue pursuing her life projects.

After receiving psychological support to cope with her trauma, she found ways to organise with other indigenous people in Bogotá. She joined the municipal council that operates in the Kennedy locality and began to advocate for a local policy for indigenous victims in Bogotá. She was active in various spaces to ensure that the different public policies of the district took an ethnic approach, emphasising the differences among the many indigenous peoples. She has devoted the years she has spent in Bogotá to guaranteeing indigenous life projects in the city. Today she is an indigenous representative on the District Victims' Roundtable and is studying psychology.

Juan Carlos Villamizar

For Juan Carlos Villamizar, exile was the chance to leave home; he says he would not have done it any other way. He left the country very young, when he was a Political Science student at Javeriana University. At that time he was a communist militant and student activist, and was particularly involved in promoting the talks between the national government and the FARC-EP in El Caguán, a region of the country he visited frequently.

After a kidnapping on the university campus, he began to be threatened by the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia. After some time under security protection, he was forced to seek asylum in Spain. By then, several comrades from the student movement had been assassinated. He finished his degree at the University of Deusto in Bilbao. He was linked to political movements

in Spain, with which he worked in the Catalan Parliament, and with Colombian movements in Europe. He was a member of the International Forum of Victims, as well as of the Polo Democrático Party and later the Patriotic Union, a party for which he was a candidate representing Colombians abroad.

After being invited to be part of the victims' delegation in Havana, Cuba, during the peace negotiations, he decided to return to Colombia. Today he works at the International Center for Transitional Justice coordinating projects with former combatants of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, of which he was a victim.

Olga Esperanza Rojas

Olga Esperanza Rojas was always a girlfriend, never a wife. When her husband, Sergeant José Vicente Rojas, took his holidays, he spent them with his parents and his family. Sergeant Rojas always dreamed of living a quiet life in his own home when he retired from the Army. He never lived this dream, however, because he was kidnapped and disappeared by the FARC-EP.

Olga had to raise her family alone as she continued her search. She gave birth to her youngest son, Emerson, when her husband was already missing. She was forced to live a precarious life with little state support in the difficult situation of a single mother and head of household.

In the years following the disappearance of Sergeant José Vicente, Emerson was very ill. The situations that Olga experienced were so difficult that she even considered suicide. But through her faith she decided to recover her will to live and to give her family a better life.

For her, the end of war comes when we see one another as human beings. That is why she participated with the Mothers of Soacha in an exercise of reconciliation between victims of different armed groups. She has also met with former guerrilla combatants with the same interest.

Today she is still searching for her husband in the hope that he will turn up alive. Together with her son Emerson, she joined other families of kidnapped and disappeared soldiers in an organisation called Acomides O. V. This organisation advocates for the rights of military victims and their families by working with the agencies of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition in order to be included in the transitional justice process.

Luz Marina Hache

Luz Marina Hache started working at the age of 13 years old. Her education came from the trade union movement, which she joined at 17 and where she became a committed Marxist. For much of her life, until her recent retirement, she was a trade unionist and helped organise various trade union movements, including those that led to the 1977 civic strike.

Eduardo Loffsner was a 19th April Movement (M-19) militant and trade unionist. He and Luz Marina had met in the trade union struggle and later became a couple while Eduardo was in prison and Luz Marina worked with political prisoners. He liked Pielroja cigarettes, reading, coffee and lentils. Before his disappearance, he worked as a trade unionist at the Pedagogical University and had distanced himself from the M-19. Eduardo was disappeared in 1989, while Luz Marina was on a trip to Santa Marta. Two months earlier, he had told her that in case he disappeared, she should not act like the women who at that time were marching with the banners of their disappeared.

After 14 years remaining silent on the disappearance of her partner, Luz Marina organised to demand the rights of the detained-disappeared. She co-founded the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE). Her human rights work forced her to go into exile in France with Iván Cepeda, who was also a founder of that movement. She is still working to find the truth about Eduardo's disappearance, as well as those of other victims of State crimes.

Darllery Díaz

Darllery Díaz was born on her farm in Gaitania, Tolima. She was always very close to her father and enjoyed country life. She lived a rural childhood, only interrupted by her pregnancy at the age of 16. Her rural life ended in 2003 when she was displaced by the FARC-EP with her father and brother to Bogotá. From a very young age, she was interested in social leadership.

Her father kept the family together during the harsh displacement. As a result of the displacement, they had to find new ways to survive. After a few years in Bogotá, Darllery went to Mosquera to live on a farm on loan from the company where her husband worked.

In 2013, Darllery was granted a flat in Plaza de La Hoja, the free housing project in the centre of Bogotá. It was there that she began her leadership of women victims in the city. The women began to notice that they missed life in the countryside and, despite the difficulties, started to plant basil and make pesto on the terrace of the building. They also became empowered in their personal lives and began to change their personal relationships. As a result, they became involved in the administration of the complex with the aim of defending the rights of the victims from that space.

When she returned to visit her place of origin, she came across the ETCR in Planadas, where those who had displaced her now live. Today she works with them selling the coffee they produce and repeatedly recommends their tour of Marquetalia, which is also in the municipality of Planadas. Although she sometimes wants to return to Tolima, she has decided to stay in Bogotá and continue to grow with her family.

Alberto Vidal

Alberto Vidal is a native of his home territory of Alto del Palo in Caloto, Cauca. He was a victim of violence from a very young age when a massacre took place in his village. Seven people were killed, including Alberto's relatives, and they were forced to leave for Tuluá. Life as displaced people in Tuluá was hard and they felt compelled to return to their farm despite the violence of all the armed actors present in the territory. But they were not able to stay for long; only months later they were displaced again to Caloto's urban centre.

Alberto became a leader at a very young age. It was a leadership inherited from his grandfather, who was also involved in organisational processes. He was given the opportunity to study traditional Cauca dances with a scholarship and then decided to set up an academy of Caucan music and dance. It was called the Foundation of Art and Culture of Caloto. He was also a teacher in a school for Nasa Indians, with whom his community cohabits in the north of Cauca, and learned to speak Nasa Yuwe.

Today he represents young victims at the National Victims' Roundtable (Mesa Nacional de Víctimas), as well as at its municipal and departmental levels. He works with victims throughout the country to promote the comprehensive care of victims of the armed conflict.

Yolanda Perea Mosquera

Yolanda Perea Mosquera was born in Riosucio, Chocó. She lived happily in the countryside during her childhood. She liked to climb trees and pick fruit, ride horses and fish. She was free on the family farm where she lived with her mother, grandparents and uncles. She was the darling of the house, especially of her grandparents. One day, a member of the FARC-EP ended her happiness by raping her in her grandparents' house when she was only 11 years old.

When her mother found out, she went to complain to the FARC-EP camp near the farm. This led the same men, who had denied raping Yolanda, to go to the farm again and beat her, which triggered an abortion. Yolanda was not even sure how she could get pregnant. Later on, her mother was murdered.

And so ended Yolanda's childhood and her earthly paradise, which she had to leave months later. Far from her native Riosucio, Yolanda had to work in Urabá from the age of 16. In addition, she began to have security problems when she started working with organisations such as the Peaceful Route of Women (Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres) and the Women's Initiative for Peace (Iniciativa de Mujeres por la Paz). This security situation led to her forced displacement to Medellín. She is still being persecuted.

Yolanda began working for the defence of victims of sexual violence in the context of the armed conflict. Today she is a representative of women victims of sexual violence in the National Roundtable of Victims and is also part of the National Peace Committee.

Héctor Marino Carabalí

Héctor Marino Carabalí's belly button is buried in the village of La Toma, between the municipalities of Suárez and Buenos Aires in the department of Cauca. From a very young age, he began to take part in meetings of elders, where he learned from community leaders. This inspired his own leadership and led him to serve on the municipal council when he was only 19 years old.

Frustration with electoral politics and violence quickly distanced him from it. With the arrival of paramilitarism around Naya, it became much more dangerous to lead his community. Since 2008, Héctor has suffered personal threats against his life, and today he can only move around his territory in an armoured van with bodyguards. Someone even went so far as to kill his cousin, Ibes Trujillo, as a way of trying to prevent his work.

Héctor created the organisation 21st Century Reborn (Renacer Siglo XXI) to work with Afro-Colombian victims in Northern Cauca. He leads the struggle against extractivism in his territory and is organising a Guardia Cimarrona as a form of non-violent self-protection for his community. This and other efforts led him to be part of the commission of Black activists who drafted the Ethnic Agreement as part of the Peace Accord in Havana, Cuba.

He has also been part of the National Victims' Roundtable, as well as of other spaces representing victims. He has participated in tours to raise awareness about the situation in Colombia and is the protagonist of the documentary "Nos están matando" ("They are killing us").

Aída Avella

Aída Avella has been a central figure in the history of Colombia for more than forty years. A schoolteacher, from a very young age she was a communist militant and trade unionist. She was involved in organising the 1977 civic strike. She then became a Patriotic Union militant when the party was founded in 1985. She took on various elected positions as a member of this party, as a delegate to the National Constituent Assembly and as a member of the Bogotá City Council. She was also a leader of the Patriotic Union and became the first woman to be president of a political party in Colombia.

Nevertheless, she was a victim of the violence against her political party. She saw hundreds of her fellow activists die, such as Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa and Manuel Cepeda Vargas. She is one of the few survivors of the party leadership of that time. She was also the victim of an attack in Bogotá in 1996 that forced her to go into exile for more than a decade in Switzerland.

In Switzerland, Aída was forced to experience what was happening in Colombia from afar. She had to put aside her political struggles in her home country and take up the work typical of immigrants and refugees in Europe. She had to learn the language and customs amidst the pain of exile and the murder of her comrades. She lived in these conditions for 18 years.

Aída left her family in Europe and returned to Colombia in 2014 to become a politician with the Patriotic Union. She was Clara López's vice-presidential running mate in 2014. She then became a candidate for the Bogotá City Council but was unable to regain the seat that the war took away from her. She was elected senator in 2018.

Isabela Sanroque

Isabela Sanroque was born Carolina, the name given to her by her mother. She grew up in the low-income neighbourhoods of northern Bogotá as the only child of a single mother. She graduated from high school and went on to study for a degree in social sciences at the Universidad Distrital. In her neighbourhood she met a man who did clandestine work with the FARC-EP and with the Clandestine Communist Party, mainly propaganda. She started to do this work while she was studying.

She intended to finish her degree before going fully into the guerrilla, but military and paramilitary persecution made it too dangerous to continue working in the city. She left a series of letters to her mother to make her believe she was OK and joined the guerrillas in Sumapaz. For more than a decade, she operated between Sumapaz and Yarí, areas where she became a commander and

was an authority among the communities where the guerrillas had influence.

During the peace talks, after having led a mission that ended with several captures, Isabela was commissioned to work on communications at the negotiation table. She travelled to Havana and, in addition to working on communications, was part of the gender sub-commission where the gender approach was developed. Since then, she has been part of the Comunes party (formerly FARC party) leadership in Bogotá and of the National Peace Council. She has also been a candidate for the party on two occasions: for the Chamber of Representatives from Bogotá in 2018 and for councilwoman of Teusaquillo in 2019.

Vera Grabe

Vera Grabe is Colombian of German descent. The daughter of a carpenter, she grew up in a middle-class home. She studied at the local German school (Colegio Andino) and then began her studies in anthropology at Los Andes University. From a very young age, she was educated in the values of social justice, and through her closeness to theatre groups she got to know the different left-wing movements of the seventies. Just as she became close to them, she also became aware of their sectarianism.

Vera joined the M-19 from its beginning. She was in prison after the Cantón Norte arms robbery (1978-79) and until the Betancur government's amnesty of 1982. During this period she suffered severe human rights violations, which she still remembers. After being released from prison, she participated in the organisation of the guerrilla in Antioquia, as well as in various tasks in the so-called "guerrilla diplomacy". As a guerrilla commander, she experienced the machismo of Colombian society and of her comrades.

With the demobilisation of the M-19 in 1990, she became a member of the Chamber of Representatives without even campaigning in Bogotá. At that time, the M-19 innovatively opted for demobilisation and laying down their weapons, while other guerrilla groups did not believe in this option. She was a congresswoman in 1991, after the National Constituent Assembly. She also served in the diplomatic mission in Spain, where she became interested in conducting research on the culture of peace. This led her to academia, and she later wrote her doctoral thesis entitled *La paz como revolución* (Peace as revolution). Today she devotes her life to building peace through everyday changes and through the culture of peace.

Rodrigo Londoño

Rodrigo Londoño is a small farmer from Quindío. He came from a communist family and has been involved in leadership activities since school. When he was a student, he used to post Communist Party propaganda on the bulletin boards. The first time he attempted to join the guerrillas, they tried to persuade him not to do so. However, his stubbornness won out and he joined the guerrilla at the age of 17.

In the FARC-EP, he quickly rose through the ranks. In 1986, he became a member of the guerrilla's General Staff, where he commanded the Eastern Bloc and the Magdalena Medio Bloc. He participated in the peace processes under presidents Betancur and Pastrana.

After the bombing that killed Alfonso Cano, Rodrigo (alias Timochenko) was elected to the guerrilla leadership with the major challenge of continuing the peace process that was being explored with the Santos government. Despite the internal difficulties that the guerrillas were experiencing, he decided to support the agenda that had been agreed with the State. This decision was upheld throughout the most difficult moments of the process.

Today he is president of Comunes political party (formerly FARC party), which resulted from the Peace Accord. He continues to honour his commitments and is a strong critic of the dissident splinter groups that have arisen. He has appeared before the Special Jurisdiction for Peace regarding several cases. He has a son born after the signing of the Peace Accord who constantly accompanies him in his public engagements.

Óscar José Ospino

Óscar José Ospino is a man from the coast. His dream was always to have his own farm and work the land, just as his family did when he was growing up. He was a cattle rancher and family man. This all came to an end when the ELN displaced them, killed several of his family members and took their farm. After this, Oscar joined the Northern Bloc of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC).

While a member of the Self-Defence Forces, he led a double life and was a cattle rancher in the eyes of his family. He worked under the orders of Jorge 40 and was in charge of areas in Cesar, around Valledupar and the Serranía del Perijá. It was one of the areas that most strongly and violently experienced the phenomenon of the Self-Defence Forces, as Óscar himself understands it.

This bloc of the AUC took part in the demobilisation process negotiated with President Álvaro Uribe. The Northern Bloc demobilised in 2006. Unlike former leaders of the bloc, Óscar did

not surrender to the authorities and was captured in Venezuela in 2010. He was included in the Justice and Peace process that followed the Law of 2005, where he contributed to clarify hundreds of cases. He was convicted of these crimes and served nine years in prison.

While in prison he met several former combatants from different guerrilla groups. Today he is involved in various activities related to reconciliation, primarily with his victims, whom he frequently assists both in and out of court. In addition, he regularly meets with former combatants of the guerrillas he fought against on the Caribbean coast, and has developed joint projects aimed at non-repetition.

Luis Arlex Arango

Luis Arlex Arango is from the plains. He grew up in a farming family of which half aligned themselves with the armed left and the other half with the armed right. He grew up in a violent environment and in the midst of confrontation. This led him to join the self-defence forces of the Llanos at the age of 14. He believes he wasted his youth and would love to be able to make up for the time he lost in the war.

Once Luis Arlex was in the self-defence groups, these were merged with the house of Castaño. The 1997 Mapiripán massacre marked the beginning of this alliance in the Orinoco region. Over time, the bloc became increasingly involved in the narcotics trade, which led to an increase in violence and sharp rifts among the combatants.

He went through the Justice and Peace process and served almost ten years in prison. Among the crimes he paid for was the assassination, after a court martial, of his commander Miguel Arroyave. He has since participated in important meetings with his victims, which are portrayed in the film *El mayor regalo* (The Greatest Gift). These stories show the magnanimity of the victims, who generously embraced their former victimizer.

Today he continues to work for peace, in particular to prevent forced recruitment, a crime for which he admits responsibility. He continues to collaborate with the judicial authorities, especially those stemming from the 2005 Justice and Peace Law, where he is still shedding light on forced disappearances and extrajudicial executions that took place in the Eastern Plains.

Antonio Navarro

Antonio Navarro is from Pasto. He studied chemistry and became dean of that faculty at the University of Nariño. When he was a professor, he observed the state of democracy during the National Front and decided to commit himself to social change. He joined the M-19, where he originally operated in the city and was later moved to the rural guerrilla. He was imprisoned after the 1978-79 theft of weapons from the Cantón Norte army base in Bogotá.

In 1985 he was the victim of an attack in a cafeteria in Cali. A grenade was thrown at him, causing him to lose a leg and the mobility of the left side of his tongue. He had to travel to Cuba and Mexico for treatment and recovery as well as to keep safe during his rehabilitation. While abroad, he lived through the peace negotiations with the Barco government and the end of the M-19's war against the State.

On his return to Colombia, Antonio Navarro ran for mayor of Cali, where he was relatively successful even though the process of demobilisation as a guerrilla had not been completed. In April 1990, he was forced to take over the leadership of the M-19 party when Carlos Pizarro was assassinated, less than two months after the laying down of arms by the group. This led to his becoming a presidential candidate that year, as Pizarro's replacement, and a delegate to the National Constituent Assembly. As one of the leaders of the three most voted parties, he became co-president of the Assembly with Horacio Serpa and Álvaro Gómez, who had himself been a victim of the M-19. He also shared the Assembly with Jaime Castro, who had been a victim of the guerrillas when he was Minister of Government.

After the National Constituent Assembly, Antonio went on to have a long political career, serving as a senator, governor of Nariño and mayor of Pasto.



Urgent actions

In light of the meetings held as part of the To Be History (and make it) project and the drafting of this report, we believe that there are structural changes that need to be made by the State, Colombian society, the armed groups in this country, and the international community. These are our recommendations:

To the State:

- Investigations into the killings of social leaders, human rights defenders and former combatants must be expedited. Such investigations must not only lead to the punishment of those responsible, but also provide the authorities with the necessary information to stop the extermination and guarantee non-repetition.
- It is the duty of the State to reject all violence, especially violence against innocent young people. The State must not engage in revictimization through stigmatising and justifying killings, nor use euphemisms in the face of barbarity.
- The national government must insist on a negotiated solution to the armed conflict. History shows that military solutions carry a higher social cost than society is willing to pay. Only by negotiating with the ELN and bringing dissident and paramilitary groups to justice will territorial peace and security in the countryside be achieved.
- The national government's support for the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repitition (SIVJNR) must be public and unrestricted. To continue attacking the institutions of the System puts the rights of victims at risk.
- The SIVJNR, in particular the Truth Commission [this institution completed its mandate in 2022], must continue to provide spaces for reconciliation and public acknowledgement of the truth. Both perpetrators and victims should be present in these spaces for recognising the truth. They create important imagery for the nation's public culture.

- The Final Agreement to End the Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace [of 2016] must be fully implemented. Each successive government must commit itself to its own tasks, without postponing what is urgent. The State must also take up the commitments pending from previous processes and fulfil them, even though they might be unplanned.
- Congress must return to the draft legislation for the Special Territorial Peace Circumscriptions, agreed in point 2 of the 2016 Agreement. This is the only way to give victims the place they deserve in national politics.
- Comprehensive reparation for victims must include but go beyond compensation. The victims' reparation policy must include truth, justice and non-repetition, as well as facilitate spaces for reconciliation and acknowledgement within Colombian society.
- Reparation must be truly differential: designed for women, different indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant communities and people living in exile or displacement, among others. Comprehensive reparation in these cases implies solutions to the different victimising situations involved.
- It is not enough to put an end to direct violence: the State must fight to solve the problems that have caused the violence. This implies lasting transformations of rural areas, in particular rural development and its connection to the problem of illicit drugs.

To the armed groups:

- Colombian society demands acts of peace. This means an immediate end to attacks against the civilian population and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, such as kidnappings and massacres.
- Peace will only be possible when the lives of social leaders are respected. Each assassination weakens the possibility of peace and development in Colombia.
- The desire for peace implies also the possibility of dialogue, negotiation and agreement. This demands generosity and self-criticism, with the aim of overcoming armed confrontation, achieving the necessary structural transformations, and guaranteeing the rights of the victims.
- We count on your commitment to transitional and restorative justice, to truth, reparation, and non-repetition after demobilisation.
- We are counting also on your commitment to reconciliation. Only with the commitment of former combatants to these spaces can we create opportunities to meet and build peace.

To the international community:

- We are grateful for your unconditional support for the 2016 Final Peace Agreement between the Colombian State and the FARC-EP guerrilla, as well as for your participation in other peace processes. We ask that, despite the difficulties we are experiencing in Colombia, you continue to insist on supporting these peace processes. A generation is working to make peace possible.

To Colombian society:

- Colombian society needs to listen to victims from all sides without questioning their stories, understanding the sacrifice that their resistance has demanded of them.
- We must open spaces for reconciliation with former combatants from different groups. We must support their productive projects and their reintegration into working and social life, as well as listen to their stories and work hand in hand with them to ensure non-repetition. It is also important to build bridges with retired military personnel and their families in their process of reintegration into society.
- An understanding of the conflict must go beyond the rational analysis of the ideologies and strategies used by the different actors. Only by understanding the fears and hatreds that have been generated can these be transformed into love and hope.
- Education must rethink the way it teaches what has happened in Colombia. It cannot continue to perpetuate the oversimplification of the war as one between good and bad, the just and the unjust. The war must be taught in its complexity and always with an interest in guaranteeing non-repetition. The arts are, we believe, an essential means to do this.
- Colombian society can never again fall back to justifying violent death. To overcome violence, we must also overcome the stigmatisation of people and the normalisation of murder, disappearance, kidnapping and rape, among other very serious crimes that have taken place in Colombia.
- Peace is not only about ending direct violence. Working for peace also means working for social and environmental justice, as well as for an end to sexism, classism, racism, misogyny and transphobia, among other injustices.
- Civil society must be part of the reconciliation process. We must insist on improbable encounters and dialogues so that we can see each other as human beings again.
- We must reject death in all its contexts, and never justify a violent end to life.



Generational Manifesto

The centennial generation in Colombia was handed a country bled dry. We grew up watching the kidnappings of politicians and soldiers on television, as well as news of the extrajudicial executions of so many young people. We also saw mothers mobilising to have their children returned home, on both sides of the conflict. We were born and have grown up in the midst of major takeovers and massacres. Our childhood was permanently marked by war.

But we are also a generation filled with hope. We are the generation that became adults with the peace process between the State and the FARC-EP. Our memories of our adolescence will always be marked by the moments when we first saw delegates from the FARC-EP and the Santos government in Havana talking about the country's problems; by the meetings between the former enemies, and by the presence of the former insurgents in Congress.

We still believe in that country which was promised by the 1991 Constitution and the 2016 Final Agreement from Havana, understanding that achieving it will require extensive work. We have learned to recognise and respect the different social struggles in our country, such as people of historically marginalised ethnicities. While different perspectives may bring about conflict, we believe in the peaceful transformation of conflicts and condemn violence in conflict resolution.

We believe in justice. However, beyond institutionalised vengeance, we want a restorative justice that guarantees truth and reparation, that allows us to close the cycles of violence, that includes environmental and social justice. A justice that truly treats us as equals and allows us to feel equal in society.

We understand that peace goes deeper than just the end of direct violence. There are cultural and structural violences that still haunt us as a society. As young people, we reject the stigmatisation directed against us and against our causes. We believe that wanting a more just country is not the same as being a vandal or a subversive.

We remain committed to learning about the past. We understand that the key to building a country different from the one we are inheriting lies in the study of history. We are convinced that a history that includes those who have always been excluded, that takes into account their stories, is the only way to create a shared vision of our country.

We thrive on differences. We reject any attempt to annihilate them. We are convinced that only through dialogue can we understand each other's humanity, and thereby seek solutions to the problems we share. We are committed to sharing the territory, understanding diversity not as an obstacle, but as a great tool for change.

We will work with generosity and self-criticism to hand over to our children a country at peace to our children. A country where respect for human rights is the norm and where no one will suffer the violations that took place in the 20th Century and which continue to take place in the 21st. A country where no one loses their life for what they think or for the struggles they take up.

Our commitment goes beyond our youth, it binds us for a lifetime in the pursuit of peace. It is a commitment that will only end when we achieve that goal and that compels us to hand over a better country than the one we have received. This commitment encompasses not only the political struggle for peace, but also the personal transformation that this struggle requires, based on honesty and solidarity.

But, for this very reason, we demand that the country that is handed over to us be better than the one we received. We will be the steadfast allies of a State that unequivocally commits itself to peace. We will stand alongside armed groups that lay down their arms and integrate into society. We will be there as Colombian society takes its first steps towards reconciliation.

We are forever committed to building peace in Colombia.



Making History (and make it)

“This challenge from the heart of the youth of Rodeemos el Diálogo (Embrace Dialogue) comes at the right time. Our youth want to talk. Our youth demand to be heard. Our youth are proposing a manifesto for the future in the face of the past. This book is an intergenerational lesson that invites Colombian society not to stop believing in peace: TO BE HISTORY”.

Andrei Gómez-Suárez

Senior Fellow at the University of Winchester's Centre for Religion, Reconciliation and Peace
Co-founder of Rodeemos el Diálogo.

“A Ser Historia is the demonstration that young people are not the future but the present of this country. A creative and innovative wager on what Colombia cries out for: spaces for dialogue to rebuild trust in the other, to listen in order to understand, and to make diversity our greatest strength. This book is a moving account of the multiple dialogues between young people and actors in the armed conflict, and of this new generation's conscious and determined decision not to return to war”.

Karen Arteaga Garzón

Director Colombia
Rodeemos el Diálogo (Embrace Dialogue)