What makes international partnerships meaningful in transitional processes?

The case of the Colombian Truth Commission (2018 – 2022)

Maria Prada Ramírez

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Acronyms

APC: Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation

CTC: Colombian Truth Commission

FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – Army of the People (in English)

JEP: Special Jurisdiction for Peace (in English)

SIP: Special System for Peace (in English)

ODA: Official Development Aid

UBPD: Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed as Disappeared (in English)

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

UNSG: United Nations Secretary-General

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

About The Author:

Maria Prada Ramírez is a Colombian advisor and facilitator with extensive experience in inter-institutional coordination for political engagement and public diplomacy. Her focus includes dialogue, peace, and transitional justice processes. She has 20 years of experience in public service in Colombia, as well as advising internationally on dialogue and peace infrastructure projects in Germany, Sri Lanka, and the United States. Maria is a multilingual Economist with postgraduate studies in International Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance in Crisis Countries from the Université Paris 1 Panthéon–Sorbonne and a Fellow from the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. As a former advisor to the Colombian Truth Commission, she is committed to promoting and advancing its legacy both nationally and globally, as well as advocating for participatory and restorative approaches to peacebuilding and transitional justice worldwide.

Executive Summary

Colombia's peacebuilding efforts are recognized worldwide as a standard for negotiation processes and implementation strategies that confront the past while promoting truth-seeking rooted in participatory and dialogue-driven approaches. This policy report reflects on the collaborative partnerships developed between the Colombian Truth Commission (CTC) and the international community understood as the diplomatic corps, Embassies and its bilateral agencies, multilateral actors including the United Nations and its agencies; as well as international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations, philanthropic and private foundations as well as international universities and think-and-do tanks.

These various international allies took on different roles based on their own mandates and the needs that emerged during the CTC's work. On this basis, political support flourished, as did technical assistance and financial contributions that strengthened the institution, its processes, and the outputs of its mandate.

This policy report draws from the author's extensive observations and lived experiences gained during her three years as the Director of the Office of Cooperation and Partnership and as a permanent advisor to the President of the CTC, Francisco de Roux. It briefly describes both parties in this experience (the CTC and the international community); analyses how the story of political relationship-building emerged in a particular context, summarizing the three main contributions from the international community to the CTC; highlights 7 enabling factors and best practices within this experience; and drafts specific recommendations that can inspire future practice in this field.

The collaborative model that defined the partnerships between the CTC and the international community was characterized by a cooperative attitude and a shared commitment from both parties to contribute to truth, non-recurrence, and the dignity of the victims. In these relationships, direct dialogue, trust, transparency, and complementarity prevailed over protocols and formalities. Furthermore, this collaborative international partnership demonstrates that cooperating was advantageous for both sides. On the one hand, the international community wanted to contribute to Colombia and its peacebuilding agenda, while on the other hand, the Colombian experience provided an example for future global contributions to security, peacebuilding, and transitional justice policies.

In a moment when there is greater recognition of the unequal exchanges and relationships between the Global North and Global South, the case of Colombia and how the CTC managed and developed its international partnerships should be taken as a new benchmark for future processes.

① Introduction

In a global context marked by the highest level of armed conflicts since the end of World War II, Colombia's peacebuilding efforts have attracted significant interest from policymakers, practitioners, and academics. Even though the ongoing implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement faces significant challenges in achieving its goals and armed confrontation and human rights violations are increasing due to new forms of violence,[1] the country has implemented official negotiation and transitional justice processes, policies, and mechanisms that are recognized worldwide for their level of comprehensiveness and innovation.[2]

In response to academic and political debates advocating for a more equitable exchange between the Global South and the Global North, peacebuilding and transitional justice strategies have begun to address colonial patterns of collaboration, where Western visions, agendas, and practices frequently dictate the standards of practice.[3] A deeper analysis of cases from the Global South with positive peacebuilding experiences can foster meaningful debate across continents and cultures. A review of established practices and the development of lessons learned from new standards for peacebuilding and transitional justice will help peacebuilders grapple with contemporary challenges.[4]

Within this context, this policy report aims to identify the key factors that helped facilitate meaningful partnerships and alliances between the Colombian Truth Commission (CTC) and the international actors by addressing the following questions:

What was the relationship between the Colombian Truth Commission (CTC) and the international community?	How did the international community contribute to the CTC's mandate for truth-seeking?	What can be learned from this experience regarding locally driven international support for domestic peacebuilding affairs?

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1   With permanent mutations and the emergence of criminal actors with international alliances: https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/20/world/americas/colombia-catatumbo-rebel-violence.html

2   Last year, the Fundación Acordemos was launched to train and advise other countries (i.e. Niger, Egypt, Thailand) on their negotiation and peacebuilding processes, drawing on the expertise and knowledge gained during the 2012-2016 Colombian peace negotiations and implementation of the 2016 Final Agreement. It also seeks to contribute to the ongoing peacebuilding processes in Colombia.

3   Peace Direct, 'Transforming partnerships in international cooperation' (September 2023). Available online: https://www.peacedirect.org/transforming-partnerships/ and https://www.shiftthepowersummit.org/

4   Emma Murphy, Gender as an analytic lens for agonistic peace: insights from Colombia's Truth Commission, Peacebuilding, (2023). Available online: https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2023.2247723

This report analyzes the various strategies used during the process and makes recommendations based on these practices to assist actors in supporting Colombia's peacebuilding processes. It also offers wider lessons for future international support in other regions, with a particular thematic emphasis on peacebuilding and transitional justice processes.

The international community's relationship with Colombia, its armed conflict, and its peace efforts fluctuated over time according to the historical moment of the armed conflict and to changing geopolitical dynamics. As stated by the CTC report named "There is a Future if there is Truth", these actors' missions varied widely from a political spectrum of possibilities ranging from contributions to "win the war" to providing humanitarian aid to save lives and encouraging dialogue and peaceful resistance to end the conflict[5].

While recognizing that the international community is not a homogenous entity and that its members possess a variety of objectives and motivations, this report proposes a broad understanding of the international community that includes all international and bilateral actors present in Colombia and abroad who supported the CTC's work through their mandates and political presence as well as through technical and operational resources.

The policy brief draws from the author's extensive observations and lived experiences gained during her three years as the Director of the Office of Cooperation and Partnership and as a permanent advisor to the President of the CTC, Francisco de Roux. As Director, she was responsible for designing and implementing the CTC's alliance and partnership strategy. This firsthand account and analysis are complemented by interviews with 13 international actors, including ambassadors, heads of multilateral and bilateral agencies, and representatives from international and private organizations. It is also informed by the perspectives of several former members of the Truth Commission team, including commissioners and staff from various working groups and locations.

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5   Volume on Findings and Recommendations https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/hallazgos-y-recomendaciones-1, Pages 617 - 621 (2022).

② A Matter of Human Dignity

This collaborative international partnership under the CTC mandate was advantageous for both sides. On the one hand, the international community wanted to contribute to Colombia and its peacebuilding agenda, while on the other hand, the Colombian experience provided an example for future global contributions to security, peacebuilding, and transitional justice policies.

In light of a significant increase in human suffering, supporting the CTC was a matter of human dignity. Recognizing this, an ambassador involved in the processes stated: "It was an example of a contemporary way of listening to issues that are difficult for a nation."

Based on feedback from the interview participants, three common political principles are woven throughout this experience of collaboration: truth-seeking, humanity, and peace through non-violent means.

The principle of truth-seeking stemmed from the perspective that it was not only a domestic issue to be faced in Colombia, nor a purely institutional responsibility. On the contrary, truth-seeking was perceived by the allies interviewed as a universal and societal value, thus allowing external actors - including parliaments, academia, and civil society - to deeply support and engage with the CTC's mandate beyond foreign governments and the established duties of diplomacy.

The principle of humanity is rooted in the recognition that human suffering knows no borders. In this way, the commitment from abroad was not only confirmed with regard to the victims living in Colombia, but also extended to support for the exiled population and the work of the CTC in twenty-four different countries[6]. This fact has contributed to strengthening Colombia's internal accountability towards its victims, including those living outside Colombia.

The third principle centered around a hope for peace through dialogue and political agreements. The international community sought to support Colombia's efforts to confront a history of violence that spanned over six decades of armed confrontation, and created over nine million victims, most of whom were civilians. Thus, the international community's support and partnership supported the implementation of the most globally comprehensive peace agreement, which has resulted in Colombia experiencing its lowest political violence rate since the 1950s.

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6   For further information on this specific work: https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/etiquetas/exile-0

The CTC was created as part of the implementation of Point 5 of the Final Peace Agreement signed on November 24, 2016, between the National Government of Colombia and the guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP).[7] Within the framework of the Special System for Peace (SIP), the CTC was mandated to establish a historical narrative based on the evidence and testimony of the conflict victims and participants that would explain what happened during the sixty-year long armed conflict. The CTC was also tasked with promoting the recognition of responsibility for harm, fostering peaceful coexistence in the territories, and creating proposals to prevent violence recurrence[8].

Due to the characteristics and socio-political context of the armed conflict in Colombia, the Commission faced profound challenges in carrying out its work thoroughly and with high quality. These challenges included political, mandate-related, and even global issues.

On the political side, the CTC faced immediate difficulties when the peace agreement failed to pass the national plebiscite in October 2016. This was a challenging moment for the entire peace negotiation process. The agreement was renegotiated by the parties[9], and a few weeks later, ratified by a direct vote in Congress. Following this, the agreement moved to its implementation phase; however, as a result of the plebiscite and the political debate around it, this phase began with a significant lack of social and political legitimacy and a very polarized society around peace.[10]

This development was followed in 2018 by the election of the presidential candidate Ivan Duque, who had led the political opposition to the peace process. Duque governed Colombia during the four years of the Commission's mandate, and his political narrative constantly questioned the legitimacy of the agreement, particularly the SIP. Then, in 2019, Colombia experienced a massive national strike with high levels of confrontation and violence from both citizens and police forces, leading to damaged social and physical infrastructure and hundreds of victims. Thus, when the

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7   Point 5 defines the Integral System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Guarantees for Non-Repetition (also known as the Integral System for Peace or SIP), which is composed of two more entities: the Special Jurisdiction for Peace - JEP, and the Unit for the Search for Persons deemed as Disappeared - UBPD; as well as reparation measures.

8   For the complete mandate, see: https://web.comisiondelaverdad.co/images/decreto-588-de-2017-comision-verdad-mandato-funciones.pdf

9   PDF document with the new version of the agreement after the re-negotiation phase (with track changes): https://www.juanitaenelcongreso.com/_files/ugd/883ff8_3fb603bd95974fd7b531c874f28f61ae.pdf

10   Gwen Burnyeat, 'Reverberations: Political Identity Boundaries after the Colombian Peace Referendum,' Journal of Language and Politics 23(5) (2024): 1–22. Available at: htps://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.24099.bur

TCT started, it was already operating in a polarized political environment.

The mandate of the CTC presented another challenge to address. It was assigned a very extensive mandate, not only due to the research period exceeding 60 years but also because of the numerous actors involved and crimes committed. The initial timeframe of three years was short when considering the number of victims and the thousands of previous research efforts led by institutional and civil society actors in Colombia and abroad. Another significant challenge was the historical mistrust of state institutions by civil society. The CTC was a public state institution, and even though it was independent of the government, Congress, and the judiciary, it "embodied" the state, which was an actor in the armed conflict responsible for human rights violations. Alongside these institutional challenges, some victims and responsible parties felt vulnerable and experienced fear, mistrust, or skepticism about providing their testimony due to the ongoing violence in different regions.

Finally, the global context presented additional external challenges that affected the CTC's work. Two of these challenges are worth mentioning: first, the COVID pandemic impacted the institution at the beginning of its second year in 2020. The pandemic erupted just as the CTC had managed to navigate and find solutions to the social and political challenges. Due to the state-mandated lockdowns and social distancing, it had to rethink its strategies and quickly adapt its implementation methods. Another significant challenge was the deaths of two of its commissioners in 2019 (Alfredo Molano) and 2020 (Ángela Salazar). These two commissioners served as a direct channel of communication and legitimacy for the victims and communities in the areas most affected by the armed conflict.

In these complex circumstances, the CTC fulfilled its mandate and delivered a comprehensive report in June 2022. It did this while promoting the broad participation of victims, perpetrators, witnesses, and all sectors of society through public and private interviews and dialogue processes in Colombia and across twenty-four other countries. Beyond fulfilling its mandate, the CTC established a Legacy Strategy[11] to allow further social ownership, advocacy work, peace education, and truth and memory initiatives to continue beyond its three-year mandate. Today, over 2.3 million users have accessed the CTC's final report, as well as additional documentation on its listening process, methodologies, and public testimonies through the public digital platform created by the CTC **www.comisiondelaverdad.co** to allow public access to all the public material that the CTC gathered and produced during its mandate.[12]

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11 Prada, Wingender, "Listening and Preparing Society to Engage", IJTJ, Special Issue (2025). Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijae042

12 Through a license signed between the Commission and the University of Notre Dame, this Transmedia will remain online for perpetuity.

Although Colombia is classified as a middle-income country, it receives relatively high levels of international cooperation and official development assistance compared to other countries in the region. This discrepancy between the country's income level and international aid is a consequence of specific challenges in Colombia, such as high rates of violence, armed conflict, human rights violations, and, more recently, the implementation of the peace agreement and the migration crisis from Venezuela, which peaked in 2020.

The Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC) identifies twenty-seven countries that provide bilateral Official Development Aid (ODA) contributions to the country. Colombia is notable in the region for having one of the largest presences of the UN system, hosting twenty-four agencies and organizations, as well as international NGOs. The country also hosts branch offices of some of the most recognized foundations in international philanthropy, including the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundation, and, more recently, the Rockefeller Foundation. Other private foundations that have made specific contributions to peacebuilding in Colombia include Humanity United and Porticus.

The Colombia 2016 peace process was a direct negotiation between the Government and the FARC-EP, without mediation. However, the international community accompanied the peace process during its three phases: exploratory, negotiation (and renegotiation after the plebiscite), and implementation. The roles of international actors varied according to their mandates, experience, and the needs of each phase. Throughout the process, technical and operational contributions were made. During the negotiation phase, a guarantor role was assigned to Cuba and Norway, and for the implementation phase, which is still ongoing, several countries and multilateral agencies and the University of Notre Dame acquired specific roles to assist in the design, execution, and monitoring of the agreement's implementation. This international backing was coordinated and aligned by the Colombian Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz-OACP; Eng. High Commissioner for Peace).

These financial and in-kind contributions were evidence of the international community's strong political support for a negotiated solution to the armed conflict. The United Nations Security Council, in addition to endorsing the Final Agreement, deployed a Verification Mission to accompany the parties during the implementation with

particular support vis-á-vis four points of the agreement.[13] Moreover, to strengthen a comprehensive implementation of the agreement, two multilateral funds were created in 2016: The European Trust Fund for Colombia (EUTF), comprising twenty-three international contributors,[14] and The Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Peace for Colombia (MPTF), a trilateral mechanism established by the United Nations, the Colombian Government, and over nineteen international contributors, with the participation of civil society.[15]

The peace agreement began its implementation at the end of 2016, despite a lack of domestic legitimacy due to the failed referendum. However, the international support for the agreement's implementation has been consistent and robust. Thus, it became the baseline for building a relationship between the CTC and the international community. As one international center director recalled: "Our engagement with the CTC began before the institution was formally established. We supported the selection process of the commissioners, as well as the legal constitutional process regarding the drafting of its mandate, with input from civil society."

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13   The mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia today includes a mandate to support the implementation of specific items related to four Points of the Agreement; Point 1: Integral Rural Reform; Point 3: Reintegration of the FARC - EP into civilian life in economic, social, and political aspects and security guarantees; Point 5: Victims and Transitional Justice (related to the specific sanctions of the JEP) and Point 6: related to the implementation of the ethnic chapter.

14   https://www.fondoeuropeoparalapaz.eu/en/about-eutf/

15   https://en.fondoonucol.org/elfondo

③ A Short Story of Political Relationship-Building that Focused on Peace and Victims and was Based on Trust and Dialogue

The CTC established dynamic and enduring relationships with national and international actors grounded in a collaborative model. This model contrasts with a traditional transactional approach to cooperation, which is more extractive and one-sided. Throughout its mandate, the CTC engaged with 3,000 allies.[16] Around 15% of those partnerships were international collaborations (409 actors inside and outside Colombia). The collaborative model that defined the partnerships between the CTC and the international community was characterized by a cooperative attitude and a shared commitment from both parties to contribute to truth, non-recurrence, and the dignity of the victims.

As previously stated, the ethical and deeply human issues addressed by the CTC were meaningful for several international allies. In some instances, they recognized their own legacies of slavery, racism, exclusion, xenophobia, and responsibility in the arms industry, believing that their contribution to this cause was an indirect contribution to the truth of humanity. This motivation explains the continuous strategic support throughout the years of the CTC's mandate and even after the publication of its report. As confirmed in interviews with several ambassadors, the international community was surprised by the Colombian courage to confront the truth in such a profound way. As an ambassador declared: "They [the international community] were in solidarity with the burden of doing so."

Through the leadership of the Cooperation and Partnerships Office, the CTC built a universe of relationships with international actors that included 32 embassies; 23 bilateral cooperation agencies and funds; 23 multilateral organizations, including United Nations agencies and programs; 9 private centers and philanthropic foundations; 104 universities, academic institutes and think tanks; and 218 civil society organizations present in Colombia and in the twenty-four counties where the CTC worked with Colombians in exile. In these relationships, direct dialogue, trust, transparency, and complementarity prevailed over protocols and formalities.

According to the Commission's Strategy for Cooperation and Partnerships, the various international allies took on different roles based on their own mandates and the needs that emerged during the CTC's work. On this basis, political support flourished, as did

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16   https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/con-quien-lo-hicimos-0

technical assistance and financial contributions that strengthened the organization, its processes, and the outputs of its mandate. This triad of political, technical, and financial support was quickly transformed by the commissioners and the CTC´s staff into various opportunities to address the political challenges of legitimacy and in some cases fear among the victims, as well as the time constraints for developing the mandate alongside additional disruptions from COVID.

In addition, flexibility and a sense of opportunity characterized the collaboration. This type of support encouraged the CTC´s teams to tackle challenging and demanding tasks. As one former staff member of the CTC stated: "We never felt alone; or rather, we always felt accompanied."

3.1 The International Community's Main Contributions to the Colombian Truth Commission
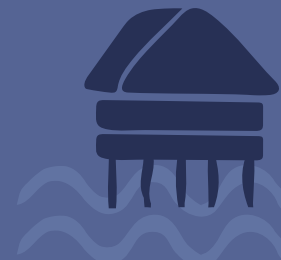
Political support: The international community's presence facilitated the opening of social and political space for the CTC to develop its mandate. In an environment of polarization and violence, their presence during the processes, as well as its public narrative of recognition and support inside and outside Colombia, was essential to legitimize and promote the integral implementation of the peace agreement. The contested political narrative surrounding peacebuilding and the 2016 peace agreement impacted not only society but also the dignity and determination of the victims and ex-combatants to transition from armed confrontation to building a democratic future.

The international presence was also decisive in broadening the participation of communities and key actors, such as the private sector and the security forces. To those who observed the process with skepticism from the outside, this constant and consistent presence of 409 international allies, including diplomats, academics, and international civil society organizations, brought some serenity and leveraged their contributions.

Moreover, in times of internal tensions, disagreements, and debate, the international community knew how to facilitate dialogue among members of the CTC with caution and sensitivity.

Technical support: The collaborative effort with various international actors, both in Colombia and abroad, aimed to enhance public strategies that dignify victims, promote acknowledgment of responsibility, and engage society in a shared commitment to coexistence and non-repetition.

The CTC directly exchanged ideas with former members of various Truth Commissions around the world, including those from Guatemala, Argentina, South Africa, and Peru, as well as the current Truth Commission from Mali. These exchanges and collaborations reinforced the capacity to implement international standards, such as the UN 1325 Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the UN 2427 resolution aimed at protecting children in wartime. In some cases, the CTC exceeded global standards in areas such as LGBTIQ+ rights, inclusion of ethnic peoples, psychosocial issues, and, to a lesser extent, disabilities, sharing its insights with international actors.

Additionally, dialogue with international experts in transitional processes facilitated the integration of innovative strategies, including cutting-edge multidisciplinary research projects, truth approaches rooted in art and culture, the establishment of the UNESCO-recognized Documentary Fund, the development of innovative social mobilization projects, and ultimately, as a lesson learned from other truth commissions, defining and implementing a strategy for the aftermath.

Financial and operational support: International financial resources supporting the Commission's mandate amounted to approximately US$10 million annually from 2019 to 2022, through nearly 300 projects funded by 35 different international actors. In its first year of mandate, in 2019, the CTC faced a 40% cut in its planned domestic budget. Following various international and diplomatic efforts, the deficit was mitigated, but it continued throughout the mandate, exacerbated by COVID and the migration flows from Venezuela, which the Colombian government prioritized during this time. Consequently, the international resources managed by the CTC were allocated to broaden the scope of what could be accomplished with the domestic budget[17], including, for instance: the extensive territorial and extra-territorial deployment that the CTC achieved with 28 Houses of Truth and work with nodes in twenty-four countries; a robust public communications strategy; the development of **www.comisiondelaverdad.co**; and the psychosocial support for the staff.

The Commission defined two types of financial support: bilateral and trilateral projects[18]. The bilateral projects were primarily funded by allied countries, their bilateral agencies, multilateral partners, and philanthropic foundations to support the institution and the effective development of its mandate. A total of 177 of these projects were implemented.

The 120 trilateral projects secured USD 13 million, accounting for over 30% of the international funding managed by the CTC. In these projects, in addition to an allied donor and the CTC, civil society actors played a crucial role. These projects were developed through a collaborative dynamic between the CTC and civil society partners and were consecutively presented to donors or submitted for multilateral funding. All the projects directly contributed to the institution's mandate, enabling the CTC to innovate and adapt in various circumstances. For example, gathering testimonies from sexual violence survivors and LGBTQI+ communities or ethnic communities in remote areas during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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17 The domestic budget of the CTC between 2019 and 2022 totaled US$25 million annually (with an average exchange rate of 1usd = 3,639 COP). Author's calculation based on working archives.

18 Additionally, dozens of the financial collaborations emerged and were directly coordinated by the international nodes that implemented the work on exile.

In addition to the formal commitments from each side – including the political or "mission-based" commitment to peacebuilding and the execution of the peace agreement by international actors, along with the mandate to collaborate and seek international funding for the CTC – this report concludes that seven enabling factors contributed to this positive experience of collaborative cooperation within the practice of transitional justice in Colombia.

From the International Community:

1 **Recognition of Colombia´s sovereignty as well as its knowledge, experience, and capacities for peace:**

Colombia has initiated more than twelve national peace processes since the 1980s, not all of which have been successful; nevertheless, the country has extensive experience with the concepts, notions, and practice of peacebuilding and transitional justice, ranging from institutional to more civil society-led initiatives. Colombia is recognized for its legislative, advocacy, and academic agendas on human rights, inclusion, differential approaches, mobilization, memorialization and remembrance[19]. The international community shows genuine interest in learning and deriving lessons for future experiences.

According to one ambassador: "Colombia is very aware of its sovereignty and therefore very open to exchange with honesty, to see what can be offered from abroad and to consciously identify what to take away that could be an added value." Recognition of domestic leadership provides legitimacy and long-term ownership over the process and its outputs. The international community has been very aware of the importance of preserving national ownership. This experience confirms that the international community can participate, support, and then step back, strengthening national leadership but never overtaking it.

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19 Los Aliados Internacionales en el Camino a la Verdad (International Allies on the Road to Truth - english subtitles): www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtCtQZbP36A

2 Unanimous political support:

International comparative research has shown that, on average, a high implementation rate of a peace agreement will produce a longer peace period than an agreement that is only partially implemented."[20] This is a very well-known reference for international and multilateral actors generally, especially at the UN Security Council. Therefore, ensuring consistent and strong support for the launch of the CTC (the initial step in implementing Point 5 of the agreement) and sustaining this support throughout its mandate was essential for the international community.

Moreover, Colombia represented the potential for establishing peace through nonviolent methods in a world facing significant political violence, embodying a possible global "hope for peace." Maintaining this perspective on the political agenda of multilateralism was (and still is) important.

Three and a half years of unanimous support from the United Nations Security Council, comprising thirty-five countries worldwide, with the United Kingdom as Colombia's penholder,[21] and the continuous backing of over 405 public, private, and social international allies, have been crucial in establishing this relationship, in which Colombia has consistently upheld its leadership role. At the end of its mandate, the CTC visited the UNSG and UNSC in New York, as well as the UNHCR in Geneva, to submit the report, acknowledge the world's solidarity with this process, encourage the continuation of international cooperation for peace in Colombia, and share, on behalf of over 9 million victims, Colombia´s call to end all wars worldwide.[22]

3 Long-term and comparative perspectives:

The long-term perspective of the international community also helped the CTC manage moments of uncertainty and instability during its mandate. As explained by an embassy officer: "It is a privilege, as well as a formal commitment to have supported the negotiations and now the implementation. It is not the same Colombia as that of 2011. It has a stronger democracy, even if it is difficult for Colombians to determine it so clearly daily." This long-term perspective was also fundamental for embracing the Legacy Strategy proposed by the Commission at the end of its mandate and committing to its political, technical, and financial support once the institution ended.

Additionally, sharing comparative cases of truth commissions that faced similar challenges, such as slow process progression and high levels of impunity, helped

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20 Joshi, Madhav, and Jason M. Quinn. 2015. "Implementing the Peace: The Aggregate Implementation of Comprehensive Peace Agreements and Peace Duration after Intrastate Armed Conflict." British Journal of Political Science 47:869–92. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123415000381

21 The five permanent members of the UNSC (China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, and the United States Of America), plus the 30 non-permanent members between 2018 and 2022: Albania, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Ivory Coast, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, Poland, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Sweden, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam

22 Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_o6HXtV0Qw&t=1s

manage moments of frustration for the CTC staff. These perspectives motivated and assisted the various actors involved in the truth-seeking process to gain strength by learning from other processes and continuing their search for the best strategies to move forward.

> **From the Colombian Truth Commission:**

4 **Ethical engagement and collaborative approach, from leadership to institutional action**

The President of the CTC, Francisco de Roux (SJ), had a long-term relationship with the international community, thanks to his long history of working for peace. His presence and modest demeanor fostered an environment of trust, credibility, respect, and legitimacy. As noted by a multilateral partner: "his unique combination of simplicity, modesty, and eloquence made us feel sincerely welcome to accompany that huge endeavor." Furthermore, his background as a Jesuit priest was an advantage in dealings with more conservative governments or political parties.

De Roux and several staff members participated in the peace negotiations in Havana. Additionally, most of the staff have previously worked on peacebuilding initiatives at both Track One and Track Two. Therefore, there was a clear understanding of the historical contributions of international actors to democracy and peace, and their commitment to implementing Point 5 of the agreement was very welcome. Thus, from the initial phase of the CTC, political will and openness to foster collaborative international cooperation were evident.

The members of the CTC distinguished themselves through their technical and multidisciplinary experience, and diligent work, as well as their dedication and compassion. A multilateral ally commented that the CTC's staff's sensitivity and commitment to the process and their work inspired the international community to continue providing support and assistance. The team built trust-based personal relationships with the international allies, which led to strong institutional relationships.

5 **Quality, innovation, and legacy of peacebuilding and transitional justice in Colombia and globally**

In addition to obtaining a significant number of voices and testimonies (nearly 30,000), the quality of listening was a priority. "People felt listened to; they told us that everywhere we went," commented an ambassador, affirming that the report restored some dignity to victims. Moreover, the international community emphasizes public interactions between victims and former armed actors as the foundation for restorative justice within the SIP.

The CTC established a diverse array of strategies and methodologies recognized by its allies, including its public communications strategy, the psychosocial approach, the thoughtful strategy for exiled Colombians, and the ongoing design of new methods to address context-related challenges and mission-driven difficulties. These different

conceptual, methodological, and operational approaches were viewed as opportunities to cooperate, create and expand alliances.

Likewise, the CTC utilized technology and digital platforms to continue the reconciliation and national healing process after the closure of the CTC and the publication of its report. Delivering a "trans-media report" and establishing a Legacy Strategy bound to civil society, the Follow-up and Monitoring Committee for the implementation of the Recommendations for Non-Repetition and the SIP, clearly contributed to fostering the broader impacts of the truth-seeking process as a long-term initiative, both nationally and with an outreach overseas.

In addition to effectively implementing existing international transitional justice standards, the CTC introduced innovations and made significant efforts to produce new knowledge in the field through additional publications, according to its learnings and recommendations. The international community acknowledges the CTC team for their ambitious commitment to implementing, reflecting on, and capitalizing on learning throughout this challenging process. As stated by a UN senior advisor, "The work of the CTC marks the field of transitional justice and leaves the bar high for future experiences."[23]

6 A strategy of Cooperation and Partnerships consistent with the mandate, and a specific team assigned to it.

Since the beginning of its mandate, the CTC has developed a cooperative strategy based on its political relationship with the international community, always placing the right of victims to the truth at the forefront and striving for non-repetition as a goal.

To this end, the CTC´s Cooperation and Alliances Office implemented internal coordination strategies to prioritize cooperation needs based on the institution's complementary requirements for achieving its annual planning or addressing contextual challenges. This centralized, or "one-voice strategy," initially faced dissent from some commissioners and staff. However, it quickly demonstrated its benefits, and the established monthly Cooperation and Partnerships Committee, composed of the four management teams, a commissioner, and the Secretary General´s Office, was recognized as a strategic coordination body within the CTC. This strategy facilitated dialogue with international allies and strengthened the international community´s political accompaniment, as well as its technical and financial support throughout its mandate. This internal cohesion, along with a continuously updated strategy reflecting the institution's status (kick-off, mid-term, closing, and aftermath), was essential for an entity with a three-year mandate that faced many profound challenges.

"The strategy led to a special bond, stronger than that held by other institutions," a partner from a bilateral agency confirmed. Four main features of the Strategy of Cooperation and Partnerships highlighted in this report are:

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23   As an example of international contributions, see this closing event from the CTC "Truth and non-repetition: The legacy for Colombia and Transitional Justice Globally" www.comisiondelaverdad.co/truth-and-non-repetition-legacy-colombia-and-transitional-justice-globally-event. And its policy, practice, and scholarly publication: www.comisiondelaverdad.co/truth-and-non-repetition-legacy-colombia-and-transitional-justice-globally-publication

◎ **Direct and timely communication with the international community,** favoring efficient channels and methods - often leaving protocols and bureaucratic formalities in the background - allowed the international community to understand the various phases the CTC was experiencing, its needs and challenges, and to swiftly engage in providing political support or opposition, depending on the specific moment of the mandate. As mentioned by an ambassador: "we understood very well what was happening behind the microphones."

◎ **Invitation to participate in regional processes and to experience first-hand the challenges of truth-telling.** The international community's presence meant they were able to directly experience the truth-seeking process. Their presence also contributed added value to the space and the participants, through symbolic contributions, such as the reading of anonymous testimonies of victims or perpetrators, sharing life testimonies on memory, truth, and reconciliation from their regions, or bringing in comparative inputs that specifically contributed to the topic. In public events, this contribution was assigned to one international actor who, "in the name of the international community," addressed the audience. This was defined as a one-voice strategy, where each would take turns representing the collective international community instead of inviting each representative to speak individually at every event. A no-logo policy was also agreed upon by the partners, allowing full visibility of the CTC´s logo. This ensured that attention and visibility are maintained on the victims, the signatory parties, the CTC, and Colombian society throughout the entire process.

◎ **A single commitment that is transparent to all.** In addition to the bilateral relationship with each ally, the CTC convened a semi-annual dialogue with all its partners and allies in the international community. These meetings, attended by an average of 50 different actors from the international community, facilitated direct, open, and honest dialogue, allowing for contributions to the development of the mandate, addressing politically sensitive issues, and providing executive reports on the technical and financial contributions received. Diplomatic representatives from European, and North, Central, and South American countries regularly attended. Countries that are geographically more distant, such as Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Australia, and Morocco, also regularly participated in these meetings. Cuba, Norway and the UN Verification Mission were always present to continue their commitment as guarantors during negotiation and implementation, respectively. One representative of a philanthropic foundation contended: "The Commission coordinated the work with the international community in a very strategic way; we put ourselves in their hands. They shared with us the strategic planning and mapping of each contribution, explaining how each contribution fitted into the plan. It was a very smart thing to do, and it gave us confidence".[24]

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24 Here is an example of two of these semi-annual dialogues convened by the CTC: web.comisiondelaverdad.co/actualidad/noticias/comunidad-internacional-apoyo-unanime-a-comision-de-la-verdad and web.comisiondelaverdad.co/actualidad/noticias/comision-de-la-verdad-mostro-sus-avances-a-la-comunidad-internacional

◎ **The Cooperation and Partnerships Office** was established to facilitate these relationships with the international community. The office was attached to the Presidency of the CTC and coordinated with the Secretary-General of the CTC. The decision to attach the office to the Presidency was strategic. It enabled the sharing of regular, up-to-date, and timely information and knowledge with diplomats and technical teams from the international community on the institutions' political challenges and financial and technical needs. This meant that the office could facilitate necessary support or aid from international partners quickly and in response to any political, technical, and financial issue during the process. This team established a strong collaborative culture, engaging in dialogue and a spirit of complementarity with the almost thirty teams of the CTC at regional and national levels, and with the international nodes. This office was created at the beginning of the CTC, and some of its members remained until the institution's closure, continuing to promote the Legacy Strategy. At any one time, the office had seven staff members who came from diverse backgrounds, including experiences in peacebuilding processes, political sciences, international affairs, and working with social movements.

The initial kick-off of the SIP in 2019 was conducted by the Cooperation and Alliance Offices under the leadership of the CTC, owing to the rapid development of its short mandate. The annual dialogue -held during the CTC´s three-years mandate-, between the international community and the SIP strengthened the implementation of Point 5 and pushed the three entities – CTC, JEP and the UBPD- to seek better dynamics for the work as a system, always in favor of the victims and the signatory parties[25].

The Civil Society in Colombia and abroad:

7 **Civil society: The invisible backbone of reliable partnership**

Civil society has historically played a central role in peacebuilding in Colombia. This continued to be the case during this truth-seeking process. This trend was known and appreciated by the commissioners and staff, many of whom were active members of civil society organizations before taking up their posts at the CTC. From its formal mandate to its methodologies and implementation strategies, guaranteeing broad participation and contributions from civil society remained an institutional requirement.

In addition, the international community recognized that Colombia has a robust and organized civil society, especially among women, ethnic groups, youth, and the LGBTIQ+ community. They highlight young people's ability in the country's most remote areas to resist, envision an alternative reality that can be built, and even take personal risks for collective causes. "The more the region is forgotten, the more courage you find

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25 This brochure about the SIP, in English, was the first result of the collaborative work among the three offices for Cooperation and Alliances, vis-á-vis the international community: www.jep.gov.co/DocumentosJEPWP/4SIVJRNR_EN.pdf

in the leaders, in the women," underlined an ambassador. The ongoing and essential activities that place civil society organizations and social leaders at risk (according to the CTC, 80% of the victims of the armed conflict were registered as civilians) have been supported over the decades by various international actors, both inside and outside Colombia.

From the start of the peace agreement's implementation, it was evident that many of the international resources that had gone directly to civil society actors were redirected to the new infrastructure for peace. This affected many civil society organizations. In light of this reality, the CTC also aimed to integrate civil society capacities and expertise into its mandate, which allowed international resources to flow through these partners, contributing directly and harmoniously to the development of the CTC´s mandate[26].

Thus, both domestically and internationally, civil society organizations, NGOs, universities, think tanks, and social leaders maintained a continuous connection between the Commission's mandate and the support offered by the international community. This was fully the case with the exile approach, which was developed entirely through collaborative action, including voluntary contributions. Thus, reaching out to twenty-four countries was clearly beyond domestic institutional human and financial capacity[27].

3.3 Some Challenges While Collaborating for Peace

When looking back on this experience and according to the interviews, three main challenges stood out.

The first challenge is global and not particular to this case. There was an added complication and an additional burden in working with so many international actors, each of whom has specific procedures and methodologies for reporting their financial and technical support. Designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating nearly 300 projects from various financial sources over three years and in more than 50 locations (both in Colombia and abroad) represented a burden for the CTC staff. It required significant time for drafting projects, gathering verification sources, and reporting. Having a qualified team, possessing knowledge in project management along with sensitivity and expertise in peacebuilding, and maintaining partnerships based on dialogue and trust helped manage these well-known bureaucratic challenges.

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26 See trilateral projects described previously in this report.

27 Beristain, "Experience of the Truth Commission in Giving a Voice to the Colombian Exile Population", Deusto Journal of Human Rights, Special Issue on Transitional Justice and Reconciliation, 2025. http://www.deusto-publicaciones.es/deusto/index.php/es/

Also related to bureaucratic limitations, financing the work on Exile represented a permanent challenge. Even though it was clear for the diplomatic corps that the Colombian victims exiled in their countries had the right to participate in this truth-seeking process, granting ODA for it to happen was only possible in a handful of cases.

A more complex challenge was in the political sphere and related to the dissonance of international presence when supporting peacebuilding and truth-seeking while at the same time having economic objectives that harm this purpose. For this reason, extra careful analysis and decision-making were required whenever an international actor was invited to support the activities of the CTC. One such dilemma concerned financial support from USAID. On the one hand, the USAID provided a significant financial contribution to the implementation of the peace agreement; however, on the other hand, the US still designated FARC ex-combatants as terrorists, which restricted their funds from being used for activities where former guerillas were present. This created an operational challenge and required that the CTC provide very clear narratives to prevent possible misunderstandings and further polarization or mistrust among communities. Another example was when ambassadors would deliver public speeches at local level events encouraging reconciliation and peaceful coexistence, while enterprises from their country deployed extractive activities in those areas. A third and even more problematic example occurred when a partner country engaged in bilateral cooperation for peace, while its government or private entities within the country provided arms. The CTC staff and communities often argued about these dissonances or contradictions. This required careful analysis of how to allocate financial support to operations and how to frame and encourage political support from international actors.

Finally, for the international actors, a significant challenge was to limit or manage their proactive stance to support the CTC through offering international exchanges, high-level visits, and conferences focused on lessons learned, expertise, and best practices from other experiences of transitional justice. Sometimes, their proactive efforts were even perceived as competing agendas among them. In such a short mandate, the CTC needed to ensure that the support being received was the most valuable and balanced and that efforts were not being duplicated or made redundant. In the CTC's initial phase, many proposals emerged for this type of support. A primary institutional message of gratitude was shared with the international allies, also requesting time and space to identify specific needs and to genuinely listen and absorb insights from past experiences in the most significant manner, according to the CTC's mandate and challenges. During the final phase, the political support was still very strong and stable. However, due to time constraints, it was not possible for the Commissioners to attend all the invitations extended during these six months; priority was given to the internal debates, the final decision-making, and the finalization of the report.

Although this collaborative practice was considered positive and meaningful for the CTC and the international partners, these challenges were also part of the experience and could shed light on future experiences.

④ Conclusion

While internal, the armed conflict in Colombia has significantly influenced the region and has clear international implications, both during the war and in peace.

This experience confirms that international actors have played a key role in the implementation of the peace agreement. The importance of this role was particularly clear concerning the CTC. Regardless of the nature of the historical contributions made to Colombia concerning the internal armed conflict or its peacebuilding efforts, on this occasion, advancing the victims' right to truth, justice, reparation, and non-recurrence received unanimous support from the international community.

Along with political protection, technical support, and funding, this cooperative experience is grounded in respect for a country's sovereignty and autonomy, as well as recognition of its domestic capabilities. The relationship of trust and mutual respect established from the outset allowed for a sincere and critical dialogue on an ongoing basis that included the mention of truths that were uncomfortable for some actors in the international community.

This experience went beyond orthodox cooperation. In this case, the very solid relationship that took place has to do with three elements: support for a country seeking peace through a constitutional agreement, including support for the signatory parties and civil society; mutual understanding of the task and the support needed to accomplish it; and the willingness of people on both sides—Colombian and international actors—to make cooperation for truth a reality under challenging circumstances.

Finally, the Colombian experience also evidences a gap between the negotiated agreement and the implementation phase. While this gap is natural because of changes to the actors and context, it led to the need to review and seek the best ways forward to accomplish the agreement and maintain peace permanently. In this case, civil society and the international community have been guarantors for continuity, supporting the newly created state institutions of the Integral System for Peace to navigate difficult times and advance under new circumstances while maintaining their systemic perspective of transitional justice for victims.

This type of relationship ensures the sustainability of results beyond the mandate of the institutions created by the peace agreement, thus contributing to social ownership. It is a type of cooperation that contributes to the time required and the challenges a society faces in transition.
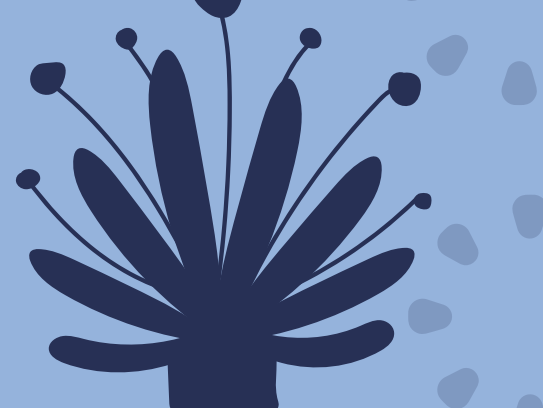
Moreover, the international community's support has been fundamental in ensuring that the innovations of the peace agreement, in particular those of the CTC and the SIP in general, can be transferred as lessons learned to other countries currently confronted with the legacies of violence. This is especially true for multilateral actors who wish to contribute to new security notions based on peace and coexistence.

The Colombian experience, while still facing challenges in consolidating national and territorial peace, confirms that these are the forms of international cooperation needed to build peace: support to address the past, confront the present, and advance toward a social agreement to overcome it definitively and avoid repetition. As recommended in the CTC´s report, this also requires international commitment and a readiness to update diplomatic strategies and transform military cooperation policies[28].

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28 Recommendation 4: To the national government, formulate a new international policy based on the need to overcome armed conflict and build peace in Colombia. As part of this policy, it is important to restore relations with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and strengthen relations with neighboring countries. The aim is to improve the security and living conditions of communities in border areas and the migrant population. Recommendation 29: To the national government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to reformulate its international drug policy, especially with the United States government, to adapt it to a new vision that will allow progress in legal regulation and make the field of action of foreign agencies in Colombia more transparent (De Roux et all, "Hay Futuro Si Hay verdad". Volumen "Hallazgos y Recomendaciones").

⑤ Recommendations

To the international community in Colombia:

◎ To maintain and strengthen support for Colombia, to extend and consolidate peace with determined efforts similar to those that led to the peace agreement with the FARC-EP, while at the same time supporting the victims and Colombian society.

◎ Further cooperate with Colombia to reinforce a global perspective of security based on peace and peaceful co-existence.

◎ To support the Follow-Up and Monitoring committee and national allies in increasing the long-term impact of the report and its findings during the ownership process; it should be disseminated as widely as possible.

◎ Scale up what is being done in Colombia through international knowledge transfer, maintaining the collaborative cooperation that marked the CTC during its mandate, and continuing to avoid colonizing approaches, instead adopting principles of respect and recognition.

To the international community for further peace and transitional justice practice beyond Colombia:

◎ When setting up new infrastructures for peace, to create an Office for International Cooperation and Alliances with a close bond to the leadership and enough autonomy and capacity to build collaborative relationships within the institution and at the same time among the international actors.

◎ When contributing to other peace processes, to foster partnership building based on lessons learned from different peace experiences worldwide, which highlights, for example:

- the importance of national or local ownership and visibility during transitory processes;

- the do-no-harm approach when offering assistance (assess what is needed and makes a difference);

- to engage with and support the aftermath of transitional justice mechanisms to maximize their long-term impact. The impact of truth commission reports must be intergenerational; therefore, it is essential that they reach new generations.

- to establish more horizontal relationships based on dialogue and trust rather than imposing what should be done.

To the Follow-Up and Monitoring Committee for the Recommendations for Non-Repetition:

To continue to update and further implement the strategy of cooperation and alliances with international and national allies established and executed by the CTC.

To Colombian public institutions:

In response to the global dynamics surrounding the reduction of resources for international cooperation, it is essential to strengthen institutional strategies for relations with the international community. This entails shifting from the notion of a donor to that of an ally, favoring permanent and effective strategies for dialogue, coordination, and accountability.

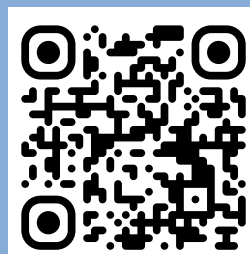# Annex: List of Interviewed international allies

1   Embassy of the Delegation of the European Union to Colombia

2   Embassy of Ireland

3   Embassy Kingdom of the Netherlands

4   Embassy of Norway

5   Embassy of Sweden

6   Embassy of the United States of America

7   UN Verification Mission in Colombia

8   United Nations Development Programme - UNDP

9   Multi-Partner Trust Fund - MPTF

10   German Agency for International Cooperation - GIZ

11   German-Colombian Peace Institute - CAPAZ

12   International Center for Transitional Justice – ICTJ

13   Porticus

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