

Seventh *Conversatorio* on Colombian Peace Talks

London, June 13 2014

The Seventh *Conversatorio* was held at the Institute of the Americas at UCL on 12 June 2014, three days before the runoff of the presidential elections, with the purpose of analyzing the statements made public by the negotiating table in Havana on June 7 regarding Point 5 of the agenda: victims. Twenty-two Colombian and British citizens participated in a discussion facilitated by Andrei Gómez-Suárez (associate researcher at Oxford University) and which had as guest speaker Rosa Emilia Salamanca, a committed human rights defender, with emphasis on the rights of women, and director of *Cooperación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica* (CIASE).

It took as starting point the ten points proposed by the negotiating table, and these revealed immediately the symbolic value and practical and critical importance of this fifth point, as it takes into account the shortcoming of the negotiations thus far: the lack of direct participation by civil society at the table. Without a doubt, the topic of the victims becomes the humanizing theme in the negotiations, turning the victims into political actors engaging in the dialogue; a dialogue that is difficult but beneficial and necessary in order to reveal the truth, which is a pivotal element in order to “win the peace.”

The transition of the dialogue from the Fora to the Tables, and the complementary impact thus generated, deserves special mention, as it underlines the need to give the victims their very own, direct voice – those victims who are occasionally seen but unknown, who become victims once again through being turned invisible by sectors of society who do not trust them and single them out as liars, insisting that the victims “do not exist.” The need thus becomes evident not only to know these victims but also to acknowledge that they are victims, which implies recognizing the dimensions of the conflict and addressing practical issues such as their protection, which in turn promotes trust among them and respect toward them. Only through such basic criteria as trust and respect can Colombians begin to talk about truth, which establishes how the victims came about, prevents that the actors involved in, and accountable for, the victimization “get away with it” – in short, truth without impunity. This effort to create trust will inject new life into the mechanisms already in place, making it possible for the process to go forward efficiently and with the support of essential actors.

With regard to the mechanisms beyond the Fora mentioned above, the participants also discussed the importance and the impact that a Historic Commission on the Conflict could have, a space that would include participation of external experts, and that would complement of the National Council for Peace and set up the path for the Truth Commission. The participants welcomed the proposals and considered that these mechanisms complement other processes that strengthen the peace process as a whole. However, the faith in these mechanisms clashes with the threat that the candidate Zuluaga represented and the possible actions he might have taken against the process. In the discussion, in which the participants did not turn a blind eye to what could be called Santos’s opportunism, there were different opinions. A minority felt that the process would have continued regardless of who won the elections on 15 June, thanks to the strength of social movements and to the mechanisms already in place. A majority perceived a critical threat not only to the peace process but also to the security and stability of the country if Zuluaga should have become president. This “fear” had its roots in the “campaign full of lies” surrounding the peace process. The discussion

turned to whether the fear that this campaign generates is synonymous with the fear that some sectors of society feel when confronted with the truth.

However, the obvious attempts to sabotage the process were not what motivated the conclusion of the discussion. Spaces for dialogue must be inspired by empathy and trust; that is why the participants placed their bets on the challenge of a framework for peace that is able to administer the process of revealing the truth. Furthermore, they felt that such a framework serves as a basis for generating public policies developed within a comprehensive concept of human rights: civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, guaranteeing non repetition of the conflict. Rosa Emilia and CIASE are evidence of this option: the power of dialogue and truth has been a key element during their long struggle. This is why the participants congratulated Rosa Emilia and looked forward to the next point in the agenda, the most important one: the one about the victims.



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