

## POLITICAL COMMENTARY

## The Peruvian Truth Commission's *Centro de Información para la Memoria Colectiva y los Derechos Humanos*

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The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report in August 2003 to acclaim and controversy. The nine-volume *informe*, disseminated on the Internet, CDs, and in different published versions, castigated just about all political organizations and major institutions in Peru for the horrific violence that scarred the country from 1980 to 2000. In contrast to other truth commissions such as those of Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, and South Africa, which found governmental forces guilty of the vast majority of the bloodshed, the report held Shining Path responsible for approximately sixty percent of the nearly 70,000 people killed. It documented the group's wanton use of violence and their leaders' indifference to the human cost of their efforts. The report highlighted as well the violence prompted by the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru (MRTA). Yet it also brought to light the brutality of the Peruvian Armed Forces and police, pointing out that most of the state-sanctioned violence occurred during the democratic regimes of Fernando Belaúnde and Alan García. It debunked the myth that Alberto Fujimori had "defeated" terrorism, and chronicled in grim detail his creation of a corrupt, authoritarian regime. The report did not stop there. It criticized the Church, the left, and others for abetting human rights abuses or overlooking the danger represented by the Shining Path. It also underlined the socio-economic and racial nature of the violence. Seventy-nine percent of victims lived in the countryside and 75 percent had Quechua or another indigenous language as their native language. The 1993 census indicates that these groups make up respectively 29 and 16 percent of the population.

While experts laud the quality and rigor of the report, written in the wake of the secretive Fujimori regime, most political organizations in Peru received it with

hostility or strategic indifference. The fact that its criticism had been so broad meant that most parties found reasons to dislike it. Rarely had a truth commission reflected so negatively on groups at the center of a democracy. Bowing to pressure, President Alejandro Toledo received the report with seeming apathy. To many commentators, this confirmed his unfortunate transition from a leader of the democratic anti-Fujimori campaign, to a mediocre politician beholden to the powers that be. Paradoxically, the quality of the Peruvian Truth and Conciliation Committee's final report meant that it was received with trepidation and resentment by leading political groups.

As its name indicates, the Commission sought to elucidate the causes of violence and facilitate future reconciliation. Yet there is another, perhaps less lofty benefit of its work: the Commission produced rich material for the study of Peru in the final decades of the twentieth century. As a key member of the Commission, Iván Hinojosa, noted, they had to "write the history of Peru from 1980 to 2000." In doing so, they collected 16,917 testimonies, 13,696 audiocassettes, 1,109 videos, 104 compact discs, and 13,139 photographs. All of this material is available to researchers at the Defensoría del Pueblo's "Centro de Información," housed in downtown Lima. The documentation includes testimonies about the violence, forensic reports about mass graves, and interviews with leaders of the Shining Path, MRTA, and political parties. It can be used to understand the policies of the Belaúnde, García, and Fujimori governments, to examine a particular massacre or assassination, or to search for a disappeared loved one. It contains detailed information about some of the surprising and grisly findings of the Commission: the escalating number of dead, which most initially calculated at around

30,000 but has risen to nearly 70,000; the brutal genocide and uprooting of the Asháninka people of the Amazon; and the tactics and internal organization of the Shining Path. Researchers can use the database to search for material as well as the small library focused on human rights and violence. The photo collection, a selection of which has been exhibited throughout Peru and in Europe, has an astounding breadth, moving from the elite to the undocumented victims and from Lima to Peru's most marginal corners.

The Centro confronts many challenges, unusual in other historical archives. The testimonies contain confidential information and accusations and thus their use has to be screened. According to Ruth Borja Santa Cruz, Director of the Center, users must clarify their objectives and a committee must approve requests for particularly controversial material. Those accused of violence or human rights abuses must have a court order to review the material. Researchers or relatives of victims, however, face few hurdles and have surprisingly open access to the rich material. Approximately 10 to 15 people a day arrive at Jirón Miró Quesada to be attended by the Centro's small but efficient staff. To date, the majority of the Centro's users are people who seek information about the fate of their loved ones. Many request a *constancia de desaparición forzosa* in order to clarify the situation of a *desaparecido* and perhaps to request reparations. The Commission recommended that some form of individual or collective compensation be offered, in part to force the state to recognize the victims of the violence. Congress is currently considering the possibility of reparations.

The Centro's fate beyond 2006 is uncertain. The documentation could be turned over to the Archivo General de la Nación in 2007. This archive has little available space and

## Report from the Program Chairs

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WALKER continued...

has had difficulty in recent decades making new material accessible to researchers. Everyone who supports the efforts of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Committee expressed their hope that the Centro would find a secure, permanent home.

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### Truth Commission

<[www.cverdad.org.pe](http://www.cverdad.org.pe)>  
(This open access document is available on other webpages, which can be easier to download.)

### Two key summaries of its findings:

*Un pasado de Violencia; Qayna akariyninchik* (Spanish-Quechua, 2003)

*Hatun Willakuy: Versión abreviada del Informe final de la Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación del Perú* (2004) ■

En estos últimos meses se ha estado trabajando en el envío a las directoras de circuito las propuestas de mesas para el congreso. A finales de noviembre los dictámenes de las ponencias y sesiones del Congreso de LASA en Montréal se enviaron al Secretariado de LASA con las evaluaciones de los circuitos, así como las propuestas de los apoyos para viajes. Nosotros estamos en el proceso de evaluar dichos apoyos y enviar nuestro dictamen a LASA. La tercera semana de enero, estaremos armando el programa en Pittsburgh y de ahí nos trasladaremos a Montreal a la reunión del Comité Ejecutivo. En esa reunión, presentaremos el programa armado y listo para su circulación.

Entre tanto, les enviamos un saludo de nuevo año.

### **The Latin American, Caribbean & Iberian Studies Program (LACIS) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison will offer an Intensive Portuguese Institute in Summer 2007.**

This special eight-week course is designed for people wishing to study intensively beginning Brazilian Portuguese. Graduate students, faculty, and other researchers, and advanced undergraduates who need to develop communication skills and reading knowledge for research will find this special Institute particularly useful. The Institute will take place during the eight-week summer session at UW-Madison, June 18-August 10, 2007. There will be an orientation scheduled for June 15, 2007. Instruction is five days a week, four hours a day, and the course (listed as Portuguese 301-302) carries 8 semester hours of credit. The institute will be directed and taught by Professor Severino Albuquerque who will be assisted by a lecturer or teaching assistant. Knowledge of Spanish is required (2-3 years equivalency). The application deadline is May 12, 2007. Forms and details are available from the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, 1018 Van Hise, 1220 Linden Drive, UW-Madison, Madison, WI 53706, (608) 262-2093, <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/spanport>. A limited number of Title VI FLAS Fellowships are available to graduate students in conjunction with the Institute. Contact LACIS, 1155 Observatory Drive, 209 Ingraham Hall, (608)-262-2811, or <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/lacis>.