



*The Patriotic Union: Memories for Peace and Democracy*

# THE PATRIOTIC UNION: MEMORIES FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY



La unión patriótica: memorias para la paz y la democracia

Unión Patriótica: memórias para a paz e a democracia

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## ABSTRACT

This text covers the emergence and political action of the UP as well as the systematic extinction of its members during these decades. This political extinction is the result of the political intolerance carried out through plans executed to establish elimination strategies and methods within different sectors. We used secondary sources and methodological contributions of social sciences to study the importance of the reconstruction processes performed in order to highlight the historical memory the victims of the UP genocide represent. This aims to dignify them and to search for truth, justice, reparation, and a non-repetition guarantee. However, it is important to note the complexity of these reconstruction processes in Colombia due to the endless armed conflict existing, which generates tension and challenges.

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## RESUMEN

En este texto se plantea el surgimiento y el accionar político de la Unión Patriótica, así como el exterminio sistemático a que fueron sometidos sus militantes y simpatizantes en el curso de las décadas de 1980 y 1990. Este exterminio político es visto como producto de la intolerancia política, el cual se llevó a cabo a partir de un conjunto de planes diseñados y ejecutados para establecer estrategias y métodos de eliminación en diversas modalidades. A partir de fuentes secundarias y aportes metodológicos de las ciencias sociales, se trata la importancia de los procesos de reconstrucción de la memoria histórica que han venido adelantando las víctimas del genocidio contra la Unión Patriótica, que, además de dignificarlas, les está permitiendo dar pasos hacia la búsqueda de la verdad, la justicia, la reparación y las garantías de no repetición. Sin embargo, se pone de presente la complejidad de estos procesos de reconstrucción de memoria en Colombia en cuanto se enmarcan en un conflicto armado que todavía no cesa y, por tanto, genera múltiples tensiones y desafíos.

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## RESUMO

Em este texto se aborda o surgimento e acionar político da UP, assim como o exterminio sistemático a que foram sometidos os seus militantes e simpatizantes no curso dos anos 80 e 90. Este exterminio político é visto como produto da intolerância política, o qual se levou a cabo a partir de um conjunto de planos desenhados e executados para estabelecer estratégias e métodos de eliminação em diversas modalidades. A partir de fontes secundárias e aportes metodológicos das Ciências Sociais aborda-se a importância dos processos de reconstrução da sua memória histórica que têm vindo adiando as vítimas do genocídio contra a UP, que além do mais de dignificá-las, lhes está permitindo dar passos para a procura da verdade, a justiça, a reparação e as garantias de não repetição. Porém, põe-se de presente a complexidade de estes processos de reconstrução de memória na Colômbia em tanto se enquadram num conflito armado que ainda não cessa e, por tanto, gera múltiplas tensões e desafios.

**Keywords:** Patriotic Union, memory, truth, justice, reparation, genocide. **Palabras clave:** Unión Patriótica, memoria, verdad, justicia, reparación, genocidio. **Palavras chave:** União Patriótica, memória, verdade, justiça, reparação, genocídio.

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## *THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HISTORICAL MEMORY OF UNIÓN PATRIÓTICA*

Unión Patriótica (UP) is a name that evokes different meanings: a political and democratic project that brought together different sectors, a party that was the subject of genocide or a political gamble that sought to change the country's antidemocratic structures. Each of these meanings is part of the memory of the victims and the survivors of this movement.

Memory is not univocal or homogeneous but is diverse instead, as are the experiences themselves. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to speak of memories, in the plural, rather than of a single memory. This multiplicity of experiences gives rise to many different contradictory and ambivalent tales, and their wealth lies in allowing the opposite to coexist to let phenomena emerge in their complexity, but also to make way for different stories (Calveiro, 2006).

The processes of reconstructing historical memory in Colombia are still complex, given that they are framed in an armed conflict that is still going on and therefore cause fear and silence. However, these processes are crucial insofar as historical memory is a scenario for dialogue, negotiation and recognition of differences to establish a democratic and inclusive project with the purpose of overcoming the armed conflict (National Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation, Area Historical Memory, 2009). Likewise, historical memory can be understood as a mechanism to empower the victims through the

search for truth, justice, comprehensive reparation and guarantees of non-repetition as inalienable rights.

The reconstruction of the memories of the UP is framed within this scenario of empowerment of the victims that seek to discover the truth about the genocide and the mechanisms to obtain justice and secure reparation. Through the reconstruction of its memories, this movement seeks to make known to the public that its dreams are still alive and that the lessons of the past, while they should be useful for the construction of our present and future, also teach us that the struggles for democracy and peace make it possible to build a different country.

The construction of memory is not an easy task for a political movement that has been the target of multiple human rights violations. However, the commitment to the reconstruction of the historical memory of the UP will make the experience visible, known and understood based on the importance of protecting differences, democracy and the construction of peace.

For Calveiro (2006), memory has two purposes: to recover the meanings of the past for its leading characters, and to discover the meaning that memory can have in the present. It is, therefore, a connection of meanings that makes it possible to recognize and link processes, with their continuities and their breaks, rather than the remembrance of extraordinary and isolated events.

The purpose of the reconstruction of the historical memory of the UP is precisely to link historical processes with the present and future of the country and not to understand them from the standpoint of the pain of genocide. The memories of this political

movement, rather than vindicating the dead who have fallen as a result of human rights violations, want to reclaim the life and dreams of the UP. The dreams of transformation and change for the construction of a society in peace and, above all, a democratic country that respects difference.

***THE DIGNITY OF THE VICTIMS OF  
THE UP: THEY CAN KILL A  
FLOWER, BUT NOT THE SPRING***

The recovery of historical memory contributes to the dignity of victims and affected communities in the armed conflict. These processes rescue the victims' voices to overcome the silence imposed by human rights violations. These voices that were silenced but want to speak again are the beginning of the reconstruction of the social fabric, which leads to the development of democratic and politically active societies that are constantly seeking to exercise their citizenship rights.

For the Area of Historical Memory of the National Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation (2009), the recovery of historical memory has a very important effect among the victims, whether they are considered individually or collectively: raising their status and that of their relatives. Recovering memory must therefore rescue the dignity of the victims, their actions, their efforts, and their enormous capacity for resistance, creativity and rehabilitation.

The recovery of the historical memory of the UP has raised the status of the victims, which can be observed in their capacity to resist and to follow the dreams they once had, in their capacity for organization and in the search for truth, justice,

reparation and guarantees of non-repetition. For the survivors of the UP, the genocide killed their dreams, but not their ability to dream and, therefore, after two decades of genocide committed against this political organization, they do not think based on the memory of suffering and war, but rather based on their dreams and hopes.

Raising the status of the victims as one of the crucial components of the processes of recovery of historical memory allows us to look ahead into the future, reconstruct identities, revalidate projects and, in essence, build memory for the future. Understanding the processes of historical memory by raising the status of victims prevents feelings of revenge, revictimization and taking on victims from the standpoint of pain.

In order to understand the dynamics that led to the genocide of the members of the UP and the processes of recovering its historical memory and raising the status of victims, it is necessary to reconstruct the history of the political movement and the circumstances that led to its victimization. This document seeks to understand the context of emergence of the UP, the ideology behind of its political platform, who its voters were and the genocide of its members.

***THE UP: MEMORIES FOR PEACE***

The UP emerged as a convergence of political forces within the negotiation process advanced in the mid-1980s between the government of President Belisario Betancur and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

In 1984, the La Uribe Agreements were signed in La Uribe, municipality of Mesetas in the

department of Meta, which consisted of a set of commitments between the parties that highlighted the emergence of an opposition movement as a mechanism that would allow the guerrillas to gradually return to legal life. The conditions that would achieve this transition consisted of an official commitment to fully guarantee the political rights of the members of the new party and a series of democratic reforms that would ensure the full exercise of civil liberties. From this moment on, FARC would begin its political work by promoting this new political movement (Cepeda, 2006).

According to these agreements, the first phase would consist of a ceasefire declared by both parties. Second, the Government would undertake to promote reforms to expand democracy, such as the election of mayors and governors and the statute for the rights of the opposition. In addition, the Government declared its determination to promote an agrarian reform and dismantle paramilitary groups. With the consolidation of these measures, the guerrilla would become a legal political movement within the democratic framework during the truce.

Since its inception, the movement invited different sectors of the population to join, and the UP was therefore created as a broad movement of democratic convergence comprised of the most varied national and regional left-wing, liberal, conservative and civilian forces which sought to change the country's political practices. Even though it did not seek to change the current regime, the party wanted to promote political and economic reforms by proposing the redistribution of wealth, the dismantling of paramilitary groups and the modernization of the State. Likewise, it was known as a political movement contrary to any

sectarian, exclusionary or hegemonic concept (Ortiz, 2008).

In short, the UP emerged as a logical development of the agreements of La Uribe, which stipulated that the members of FARC would have the right to freely organize themselves politically, economically and socially, for which the Government would grant the relevant guarantees and incentives in accordance with the mandates of the Constitution and the law. FARC committed to establish and support the platform of the UP, and many of its leaders joined to do political work. Later, the UP started to acquire its own political dynamics thanks to members from regional sectors of the Liberal Party, independent sectors and the left. A year later, in 1985, the UP held its first meeting to define its political program with a National Directorate, and was founded as a civil, political, legal and legitimate organization.

### ***THE GREAT RECEPTION OF THE UP AND ITS SUCCESS IN LOCAL, MUNICIPAL AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS***

When it participated for the first time in an election a year after being established as a political force, the UP obtained the highest vote achieved of any other left-wing party to date. Without having the structure or the history of other parties, it achieved political results that translated into patriotic meetings with the presence of neighborhood, local, rural and union organizations, which voted both for president and organized bodies. The UP obtained 329 000 votes in the 1986 election, which corresponded to 4.5% of the

electoral census, and elected five senators, nine representatives, 14 congressmen, 23 mayors and 351 councilors. In less than six months, the UP had held 2229 patriotic meetings and had gathered more than one million people in 572 political acts.

With these results, the UP was effectively subverting the order imposed by the establishment for many years and led to expectations that it would soon hold political power throughout the national territory. Its success in the 1986 election led to widespread optimism no other independent party had achieved these results before (Romero, 2011).

In some areas of the country, the UP became an unprecedented political force. Urabá, an area of massive banana production for export, was one of the regions where the UP was the strongest. The UP achieved its best success in Urabá by become the second political force in the municipalities of Chigorodó, Turbo and Murindó, and providing an important vote in the municipalities of Apartadó and Mutatá. The subsequent election of UP mayors in Apartadó and Turbo, the latter in coalition with the sectors of the Liberal Party represented in 1988 the strength and breadth of mass political work conducted by the Communist Party, the UP and the regional guerrilla fronts ( Ortiz, 2008).

The UP also had an important participation in the department of Meta. In 1988, with the first popular election of mayors, the UP won in the municipalities of Vistahermosa, Mesetas, Lejanías and El Castillo and obtained representation in the councils and made its way to the Departmental Assembly in most municipalities.

In this order of ideas, already towards the end of the 1980s, the UP became a force with an option to

access national power, and its candidate for the presidency, Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, was included in the polls as one of the favorites, with the expectation that he would exceed one million votes.

### ***PEACE AND DEMOCRACY IN THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF THE UP***

The UP proposed a political platform designed and structured for the construction of a democratic and peaceful country. Real democracy was one of the main components of the party's political proposal, and this was understood from a set of actions that sought to break with the traditional order, such as lifting of the state of siege, respect for human rights, dismantling the monopoly of traditional parties and the opening of scenarios for popular participation to the majorities. This set of actions understood democracy from a broader perspective, in which political participation encompassed new, deeper and more active examples.

During the 1980s, the antidemocratic context in the country was characterized by the bipartisan continuity left by the National Front. This traditional model had not been able to break with the exclusion and political repression of independent parties, movements, social protests and grassroots organizations. Likewise, the overreaching of the powers of the military forces questioned the country's status as a social state based on the rule of law. This was the antidemocratic context in which the UP proposed the need for structural changes and transformations.

In addition to the democratization of the different instances of the State, the UP proposed an economic policy focused on social welfare where

economic development depended on the majorities. This economic policy implied better living conditions based on salary increases, dignified employment plans, reduction of military expenses and an increase in the budget for health, education, science, culture, agriculture and public works. The provisions in terms of education and health marked a turning point, because for the first time these two sectors were given the importance they deserved as to the social welfare of the nation.

The concept of *national sovereignty* was also a significant component of the movement's political platform. The nationalization of mineral resources, of banks and monopolies, the refusal to pay the external debt and follow the impositions of the multilateral organisms, became the key aspects of a policy that wanted to focus on national needs and the wellbeing of the Colombian people instead of foreign interests.

The progressive character of the UP'S political program was reflected in a set of projects that had not been contemplated by Liberal and Conservative parties. Its platform included different sectors of society in their needs and in the vindication of their rights. Peasants, indigenous people and women were being considered the first time as subjects who deserved special treatment. Peasants were included because of the need for a real and democratic agrarian reform, the indigenous communities to the extent their status would be raised and their rights would be respected, and women with policies of equality and the vindication of their rights.

In short, this platform was part of a peace project understood from the standpoint of social justice and respect for human rights. Peace was conceived

as the vehicle that would allow a democratic, inclusive society with decent living conditions. Its project around peace would have to be the backbone to move forward and leave behind the long periods of political violence that had bled the country dry and had generated so much intolerance and exclusion.

### ***END OF THE PEACE TALKS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND FARC***

The dream of the UP was soon disrupted due to the end of the peace talks. This process between the Government of Belisario Betancur and FARC was affected by a number of obstacles that would soon end the ceasefire, truce and peace agreements initially agreed upon. This situation was decisive because it frustrated the dreams of peace and led to the development of what was later the genocide against the UP.

The military forces were one of the greatest limitations to the materialization of the ideal of peace within the peace talks. This establishment radically opposed the ideas of the President of the Republic and had power thanks to attributions given by previous governments, and especially within the scope of the National Front and the Security Statute.

For Ortiz (2008), the failure of the peace process had to do with several factors that have always characterized Colombia: a weak government, the inability to keep the military forces in check, public order and the radical actions of guerrilla groups. There were several obstacles during the peace talks that ultimately doomed the agreements: the



President did not have a real government party, the estrangement of civil power and military power in terms of peace, which made the construction of a project of national reconciliation impossible, and finally the fragmentation of the guerrilla groups, which did not allow them to act as a unified front.

In short, the 1984 Peace Agreements failed due to the inability of President Belisario Betancur to isolate those who obstructed the process within his government and, above all, the radical nature of the military forces that were not willing to see themselves displaced in their military actions. In addition, the President's failure to put an end to paramilitarism made it spread throughout the national territory and was later one of the main forces behind the escalation of the conflict.

At the end of 1986, FARC ended the truce and ordered that the leaders assigned to political work within the UP to return to the fronts of the armed struggle. With this, the agreements ended and any possibility of continuing the peace talks vanished.

### ***THE GENOCIDE BEGINS***

For the victims of the UP, the political genocide committed against this movement has been inscribed in a process of extermination of opposing political forces, and has become a representative case of the annihilation of the members and leaders of a group because of their ideological convictions, as well as the persecution of their sympathizers and the destruction of their social environment. The set of criminal actions against this organization is not about a random elimination, but rather a genocide in its clearest meaning.

The General Assembly of the United Nations defines genocide as the denial of the right to exist to entire human groups, including racial, religious or political groups. This definition of genocide was subsequently accepted in article 4 of the statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, the statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the Rome Statute, whereby the International Criminal Court was created.

The word *genocide* comprises a set of implications that are consistent with what happened with the UP. Genocide differs from mass murder to the extent the latter consists of the successive and periodic murder of isolated individuals, while genocide is a denial of the right of existence to human groups as a whole. Genocide is massive in nature and therefore needs the effective collaboration of a social structure.

The genocide of the UP was based on a set of extermination plans designed by an organized structure of the military, paramilitaries and dark forces within the State, which, ignoring the democratic character of the country, broke with the institutions and committed the worst crimes and human rights violations.

The genocide of the UP began after the peace talks ended between the State and FARC. From this moment on, not only was any possibility of a negotiated solution to the conflict suppressed, but it also gave way to a process of systematic elimination of UP militants. Although the beginning of the harassment and attacks against UP militants began in 1984, it was after the end of the peace talks that the extermination of this movement became more open and frontal.

For Cepeda (2006), the members of the UP, once the talks ended, were at risk to the extent they were being openly accused of being spokesmen for the armed insurgency and were not given any effective protection. The genocide that the members of the UP experienced from that moment on is one of the most tragic moments in the contemporary history of Colombia, since, in order to prevent at all costs for this movement to be represented in State institutions or in the organized bodies, they were the subjects of a cruel elimination policy.

What had become a historic victory for the UP because of its success in elections paradoxically signified its disgrace. On the one hand, with the excuse of the fight against guerrillas, death squads began their extermination with a wave of selective crimes against senators, representatives, councilors and deputies of the UP. In a decade, the UP lost 145 councilors, all killed in the extermination campaign, which means 14 per year and more than one leader each month. In addition, 15 mayors in office, nine candidates to mayor, 11 congressmen, 12 candidates for assemblies, three representatives, three senators and two presidential candidates were also killed (Romero, 2011).

In addition to the crimes against its political leaders, the popular movement was also deeply affected. Thousands of supporters of the UP had to abandon their lands to save their lives. In the areas where this movement was the first political force, terror paid off with multiple massacres against the movement in less than ten years.

Faced with this human catastrophe, political institutions not only kept silent, but they also implicitly justified this situation by considering the

movement as the political arm of subversion. For the new liberal administration of Virgilio Barco, the supposed ambiguity of the new movement explained paramilitary action. With this, his Government ignored the fact that the dead were not combatants, but rather unarmed civilians with a long tradition of legitimate political action.

### ***PARAMILITARISM AND ITS LEADING ROLE IN THE GENOCIDE***

The onslaught of paramilitarism since the 1980s and its criminal actions against the popular movement and in this case against the UP led to the genocide. In the areas of the country where the UP had strong electoral support, the paramilitaries arrived and applied their most horrendous mechanisms of terror. The relationship was directly proportional: to greater electoral support more selective killings. Between 1986 and 1988, which were electoral years, widespread crimes occurred in the areas of influence of the UP. This violence was felt especially in those municipalities and cities where the political group gained local power and began to develop government programs, which included the construction of public works, hospitals and schools.

One of the electoral strongholds of the UP was the department of Meta, and it was also there where a significant number number of militants and political leaders were eliminated, displaced and disappeared. In 1988 16 mayors and 256 councilors won the election. Meta became the movement's electoral stronghold with the election of four mayors and 47 councilors. The paramilitaries saw this triumph as evidence of the influence of FARC in its natural sanctuary, which made this department one of the first targets of self-defense

groups, including those led by El Mexicano and Victor Carranza.

Between 1986 and 1988 some 300 UP militants were killed in Meta. In El Castillo, one after another, four mayors of the UP were either removed from office or assassinated together with other officials of the local administration of the same affiliation. In this same municipality, in the township of Vista Hermosa, the paramilitary, with 5,000 men, carried out one of their first massacres, where they murdered 17 UP militants.

The situation was the same in the Urabá region of Antioquia. In 1986, the name of Fidel Castaño Gil was already associated in Segovia with the foundation of the paramilitary group MRN (Death to the Northeastern Revolutionaries), which had just begun a campaign of threats and death against regional leaders of the UP and that months later they would vindicate the assassinations of several political leaders and trade unionists, no longer in the northeast of Antioquia, but in Urabá.

The emergence of the MRN in 1986 is consistent with the first electoral participation of the UP, considered, as has already been pointed out, an electoral phenomenon with the highest vote ever achieved by the left in history. Jaime Pardo Leal, top leader of the UP and presidential candidate of that political group, who would later be assassinated, publicly accused members of the Armed Forces stationed in Segovia and Remedios of being involved with the MRN in the death and selective disappearance of leaders of the UP. At the end of 1987, the threats of the MRN focused on the municipalities of Remedios, Segovia, Zaragoza and El Bagre, where the UP had obtained a high vote the year before.

The case of the massacre of Segovia is quite telling and evidences not only paramilitary actions, but its connivance with sectors of the military forces in the systematic elimination of the UP. In the 1988 election, the movement won the mayor's office of Remedios and Segovia and conquered a large number of councilors in the municipalities of northeast Antioquia. The election of Rita Ivonne Tobón as mayor of Segovia effectively ousted the Liberal Party.

Since that moment on, attacks against important regional leaders of the UP were the prelude of the great mortal blow that arrived on November 11, 1988 and that has become one of the worst massacres in the recent history of the country. That day, three campers with armed men toured the main streets of the town and left 43 people dead and 50 wounded. In their retreat, the murderers used the road where the Bomboná headquarters were located without the soldiers noticing (Ramírez, 1997).

The paramilitary groups specialized in the use of torture and cruel treatments in public as a way to terrorize the population, and to warn them about the implications of their sympathy towards left-wing militants. The set of massacres carried out resulted in the social isolation of the survivors or the displacement of those who refused to leave the regions. In Segovia, the paramilitaries left a message before leaving the town: "don't vote for Unión Patriótica ever again, unless you want to die."

## ***EXTERMINATION PLANS FRAMED IN THE GENOCIDE***

The genocide of the UP was carried out based on a set of extermination plans designed and executed to establish strategies and methods of elimination in various forms: massacres, displacements, forced disappearances, threats, harassment, exiles, murders, imprisonment, destruction of venues, dispossession of legal status, denial of crime and impunity. These plans, which were known as Operation Condor (1985), the Baile Rojo Plan (1986), the Esmeralda Plan (1988) and the Golpe de Gracia Plan, claimed the lives of thousands of militants, political leaders and supporters of the UP. Its purpose was to put an end to the supports of the political organization in various regions of the country and with its most prominent leaders.

Each of these plans sought the elimination of this movement based on multiple strategies and different municipal, local or national scenarios. In addition, the collaboration of some sectors of the armed forces and the paramilitaries were crucial to the successful execution of these plans.

The Esmeralda Plan (1988), for example, was aimed at eliminating the influence of the UP and the Communist Party in the departments of Meta and Caquetá; two of the regions with the best results in the elections with more votes than the Liberal and Conservative parties. Furthermore, left-wing leaders denounced that Operation Condor and the Red Baile Plan were conceived to undermine the movement's national leadership structures and assassinate or kidnap its leaders elected to public office (Cepeda, 2006).

The magnitude of the genocide is incalculable. According to the Reiniciar Corporation, the number of victims between 1984 and 2006 was 6,528, of which about half were murdered and

forced to disappear. As pointed out by Ivan Cepeda, this picture includes massive and arbitrary detentions against the surviving members of the movement, displaced populations from their areas of influence, dozens of bomb attacks against their offices and entire families in exile.

During this period, the figures of displaced populations in areas of influence of the UP increased considerably, which led to an increase in the number of exiles and their families. In 1996, after an attack against her with no repercussions, the President of Unión Patriótica, Aída Abella Esquivel, had to go into exile. According to the figures of the movement, around 200 persecuted families took refuge at this stage, due to the fact that one or several members formed part of the organization.

In short, criminal actions against the UP extended throughout the national territory. The leaders of the political movement denounced publicly the systematic crimes against their members and supporters to State entities, but they kept silent and failed to provide guarantees to the movement's political activity (Campos, 2003).

Symbolically, but also with the purpose to put an end to the UP as a political party, on September 30, 2002, the National Electoral Council issued Resolution 5659 in which it withdrew the legal status for the operation of Unión Patriótica as a political party. The justification for this measure was that the group did not meet the number of electoral votes (50,000 votes) needed to maintain its legal status.

That year, the UP obtained 1,185 votes for the House of Representatives and none for the Senate

or for the presidential elections, because the party had no candidates. As no one was elected and it failed to obtain the number of votes necessary to exist, the party lost its legal status.

Electoral law determines that a political party loses its rights if it does not reach a certain number of votes or does not stand for election. This measure was lawfully adopted, not knowing that the UP was the subject of an extermination policy not applied to other parties.

### ***SILENCE AND IMPUNITY***

The genocide committed against the UP is clear proof of the levels of political intolerance in this country, as all sectors of society and State institutions remained silent during the extermination process. Approximately 6,500 victims were only consoled by their relatives and comrades because the Church, State institutions, other political parties, and mass media never said anything about the genocide that was being committed against an entire political movement.

Without a doubt however, and as Romero points out (2011), the horror of genocide must be added to the horror of impunity. To date, and according to the coordinator of the Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor's Office, 1,316 victims and 136 convictions have been recorded, involving 191 people, 90 convictions with a guilty plea for 106 people and 11 acquittals for a total of 238 rulings and 297 convicted persons. These figures show the limitation of the administration of justice in the country and above all the high levels of impunity for a case of the magnitude of the UP.

The political genocide of the UP is not consistent with a set of individual, unrelated crimes, but rather with the elimination of an entire human group, which required the effective collaboration of a social structure. This has connotations regarding the administration of justice. The fact that the crime of the UP is considered a genocide implies, according to Ivan Cepeda, the need for an investigation that may clarify from a methodological standpoint not only particular events, but the context, the responsibility, the modus operandi, intent and patterns that have been used to commit the genocide.

The Prosecutor's Office has been unable to carry out a joint investigation to unravel the organized structure that allowed the violations and their causes, their beneficiaries and their consequences. The lack of procedural unity in terms of the joint investigation of the crimes and assassinations of the UP has made it impossible to deal with this impunity.

Therefore, the National Directorate of the UP, the Reiniciar Corporation and the Colombian Commission of Jurists presented the case of the genocide of the UP before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 1993. Cases such as the assassination of Senator Manuel Cepeda Vargas was also brought before the IACHR individually because of its particular circumstances where members of the national army of different rank and members of paramilitary groups played a part.

The IACHR accepted the class action for the genocide of the UP and in its admission report stated: "The facts alleged by the petitioners expose a situation that shares many characteristics with the

phenomenon of genocide and could be understood as such, according to the current interpretation of this term.” This is a step that seeks to uphold the right to truth and justice through supranational means, to the extent national justice has been very limited.

In the course of the proceedings before the IACHR, the State and the petitioners began to explore the preliminary steps leading to an eventual friendly settlement. In March 2000, they signed an agreement to seek clarification of the facts and the realization of the rights to truth, justice and comprehensive reparation. However, in 2006, there was a break in this process, after the Uribe Velez government gave a disrespectful treatment and stigmatized the victims and relatives of the UP.

Based on this situation, the IACHR was asked to conclude this “friendly” stage and move on to the merits stage, where it had to make a decision regarding the responsibility of the Colombian State in the extermination of the UP.

***STEPS TOWARDS TRUTH, JUSTICE  
AND COLLECTIVE REPARATION IN  
THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF  
PEACE TALKS***

Two decades after the start of the genocide against the UP, the steps towards truth, justice and reparation have been tepid at best. The process of reconstruction of the historical memory of the UP while allowing a certain degree of understanding of what happened to gradually raise the status of victims, still deserve greater visibility and attention.

There is still a long way to go in the process of building historical truth. In this process, we still need to find out the truths that surrounded the genocide, its true authors, its structures, the institutions and the apparatus that provoked and financed it. We need to know what happened and who are responsible, because it is only then when we will be able to move forward with the processes of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition.

With regards to justice in the case of the UP genocide, it has been extremely limited. The search for justice continues to be a fundamental element so that this painful process is not forgotten and the victims and the Colombian society as a whole understand that history cannot repeat itself. However, there has been no actions from national justice to carry out a joint investigation that makes it possible to unravel the framework of relations and alliances that determined the genocide of this political movement. Absolute impunity has been constant in the case of the UP over the last decades, to the point that the victims have more trust in supranational justice mechanisms.

The condemnation of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Colombian State for the crime of Manuel Cepeda in June 2010 was a paradigmatic event in the processes of truth, justice and reparation for the victims of the UP. The Inter-American Court established that the Colombian State, in addition to being responsible for actions and omissions in the political murder of Senator Cepeda, was guilty for violating a set of fundamental rights, denying justice and maintaining impunity for the persons responsible who ordered and planned the assassination, denying the criminal alliance between the sectors of

the armed forces and the paramilitary groups and attempting against the freedom of speech of this leader of the UP.

This conviction represented an important advance in the search for truth and reparation in a case that, although it was analyzed individually, evidences the web of criminal relationships that haunt the genocide against the UP.

Another sentence of great importance in the case of the UP is related to the Segovia massacre. On March 14, 2011, the Supreme Court of Justice unanimously decided to accuse César Pérez García as the person who made the decision regarding the Segovia massacre that took place on November 11, 1988, in which 43 people were killed and dozens were injured. Pérez García, known liberal politician of Antioquia and former president of the House of Representatives of 1986, was taken to prison accused by several former paramilitaries of being the intellectual author of the massacre of Segovia, after having lost in 1988 the elections in said municipality at the hands of the UP when the first popular election of mayors took place.

This is an emblematic case in which Colombian justice system ruled to clarify the motives and circumstances that led to this massacre, but above all to reach the intellectual actors who orchestrated and plotted this crime. Even though this was an individual conviction, it is a one more step on the long road to justice.

reparation process to the extent it is the first initiative that raises the need for integral reparation to the victims of the conflict. This law is part of a process conducted by the victims of the UP, which seeks to find out the truth of what happened, justice for those who are guilty and collective reparation for the victims.

The restoration of the legal status of the UP in July 2013, after a decade of legal battles, is an important part in the reparation processes. This political movement managed to get the State Council to accept its arguments and bring it back to the political scenario. However, there is a long way to go and the legal status after years of extermination implies a great challenge.

However, in the peace talks in Havana (Cuba) between the national government and FARC, the case of the UP once again plays a leading role. In order to have a peace process for the purposes of reconciliation, the truth of the genocide of the UP must come to light. Only then can we make progress in a real peace process in which the victims are compensated for their right to truth, justice and reparation. As pointed out by Ivan Cepeda, “the UP is essential in any political process for reconciliation. What happened with the UP is consistent with those types of crimes regarding which Colombian society cannot find peace unless they are solved.” Only the truth and justice about the crime against the UP can lead to real steps towards the construction of peace.

## ***CONCLUSION***

What happened with the UP must be known, understood and disseminated with the right educational tools. Children and young people of

this generation must know what the UP was, the dreams and hopes underlying their proposals and the antidemocratic scenario that led to their genocide. The knowledge of our history should serve us to understand that a genocide like the one committed against the UP cannot happen again and that this harsh lesson should help us have a better future.

A central component of the construction of memory and historical truth is visibility. Those who are not direct victims of the genocide of the UP are completely unaware of what has happened to this political movement and ignore the relevance of their proposal and the value of their ideas for the construction of a real democracy. Children, young people and even many adults are not aware of what the UP is, the context of its emergence, the political ideas that structured its platform and, of course, the genocide it was subjected to.

Not knowing what the UP was is detrimental to our understanding of our recent past and the lessons we should learn. Hence the importance of generating spaces for visibility and reflection that will make it possible to make people who are not direct victims aware of this process to help them understand the importance of democracy and the defense of human rights.

For the victims, these visibility and awareness processes are also important to the extent it allow victims to affirm their dignity through seeing and understanding each other as political actors who continue to claim their right to be different and to political tolerance.

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