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November Roundtable: Introduction

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November Roundtable: Introduction

Abstract

An annotation of:

Healing the Past, Protecting the Future. By Alejandro Toledo. *Americas Quarterly*. July 13, 2009.

Keywords

Human rights, Peru, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Shining Path, Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement

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[Healing the Past, Protecting the Future](#). By Alejandro Toledo. *Americas Quarterly*. July 13, 2009.

An Annotation

In this month's centerpiece, "Healing the Past, Protecting the Future," the former President of Peru (2001-2006), Alejandro Toledo, discusses the role of his government in addressing the human rights abuses committed by the Peruvian state and the armed opposition groups during the internal armed conflict that lasted over twenty years between 1980 and 2000. **"When I became president of Peru in 2001, one of the first items on my agenda was restoring the democratic institutions that had suffered from a steady deterioration during the previous decade. Moreover, our country needed a full accounting of the atrocities that had occurred in previous decades."**

It was under Toledo's administration that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was constituted to provide a democratic and institutional setting in order to examine, for the first time in two decades, the human rights violations committed by both the rebel groups, [Shining Path](#) and [Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement](#), as well as the state of Peru. **"It was a harrowing document, and it was of unquestionable historic importance not only for our country, but for the entire world. It revealed, for the first time, the structural causes of merciless violence that led to more than 70,000 deaths or disappearances at the hands of subversive organizations or state agents who acted without regard to our legal institutions."**

One of the main findings of the Commission was that the violence perpetrated by the armed opposition groups and State officials aimed at the most vulnerable sectors of the Peruvian society, namely, the indigenous and peasant communities, who had limited economic resources and lower education levels than the national average. Furthermore, the TRC finds that the severe racial, social and gender discrimination that exists in Peru contributed to the silence and inaction of the powerful Peruvian groups despite the killing of thousands of Peruvian men and women. **"For many reasons, some of which probably have to do with my own ethnic and social origins, I am among those who believe that knowledge of the historic truth helps to achieve national reconciliation, which in turn can truly become an engine for development and integration. To see and recognize ourselves in the same mirror as a society helps us to acknowledge our diversity and to respect our legitimate differences. In Peru, a country of contrasts, we are all different; but at the same time, we are one"**.

Yet, as indicated by the contributors, post-conflict situations require the consolidation of democratic institutions and the expansion of civil, economic and social rights to all citizens regardless of societal identity. Peru is still in an arduous struggle toward generating a more just, representative, inclusive and equitable form of government for all its citizens. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a significant step towards that direction. It does not only document the extension of human rights abuses, but it also points out clearly to the idea that persistent social, racial and gender discrimination could fuel future mass atrocities and gross human rights violations. The Peruvian TRC was also a key landmark in opening the space for future trials in search for justice, as illustrated by the recent conviction of former President

Alberto Fujimori. As one of our contributors highlights: **“Let the fitful, volatile but persistent truth and justice process of Peru serve as a powerful global precedent.”**

These issues and others are considered in this month’s Roundtable.