

MAPPING COMMEMORATIVE CULTURES, BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

CASE STUDY: El Salvador

1. Background describing the period of violence being examined

From 1980 to 1992, El Salvador endured an internal armed conflict that claimed the lives of at least 75,000 victims.¹ Over 8,000 people were disappeared; torture and sexual violence were widespread, and over a million people were forcibly displaced due to conflict violence, including scorched earth military campaigns and devastating massacres.² The vast majority of grave human rights violations were committed by the armed forces and death squads allied with the Salvadoran government against people considered to be political opponents, including students and teachers, trade union members, and those involved in the Catholic Church's social work. The opposition force *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) was also responsible for human rights violations such as selective killings and other forms of violence against civilians, although to a much lesser extent than the Salvadoran State.³

El Salvador's brutal internal conflict came to an end in 1992, when the government and guerilla groups signed peace accords in a process overseen by the UN Secretary General. The Chapultepec Peace Accords included provisions for economic, security and judicial reforms, along with human rights policies and specific commitments to uphold the human rights of the conflict's victims.⁴ Theoretically, a central pillar of the peace accords was to end impunity for grave human rights violations committed during El Salvador's conflict. However, numerous legal and political obstacles to accountability, including an amnesty law that protected State actors who committed human rights abuses during the civil war, were put in place, and the government's message was that Salvadorans should forgive and forget the past and move on, thus never truly meeting their obligations to the conflict's victims.⁵

2. Background describing the significant date or event that is being commemorated

The El Mozote massacre was the largest and cruelest massacre of civilians in Latin America in the second half of the 20th century.⁶ It occurred during the period of institutionalization of violence (1980–1983), the timeframe that saw the greatest number of deaths and human rights violations of the Salvadoran armed conflict. According to the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador ("Truth Commission"), attacks against non-combatant civilians dramatically increased during this period, and "violence became systematic... terror and distrust reigned among the civilian population. The fragmentation of any opposition or dissident movement by means of arbitrary arrests, murders and selective and indiscriminate disappearances of leaders became common practice."⁷ In their report, the Commission underscored how these crimes were carried out by civilian and military groups with total impunity, while State institutions remained indifferent.⁸ Other massacres committed during this period included the massacre at the Sumpul River (May 14–15, 1980) and the massacre at the Lempa River (October 20–29, 1981); repression of groups in urban centers also increased, with the government targeting political organizations, trade unions and other organized sectors of Salvadoran society.⁹

Following the formation of the FMLN in late 1980, in January 1981 the first large-scale military offensive of the conflict took place, leaving hundreds of people dead. The same year, Salvadoran Armed Forces carried out the massacre in El Mozote and other surrounding villages. On December 10th, in the hamlet of El Mozote in the department of Morazán, all men, women, and children in the area were taken captive by units of the Atlacatl military battalion without resistance. They were held overnight locked in houses; the following day, December 11, 1981, they were "deliberately and systematically executed in groups."¹⁰ According to the Truth Commission's final report,

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[f]irst the men were tortured and executed, then the women and finally the children were executed in the same place where they were locked up. The number of identified victims exceeds two hundred. The number increases if the other unidentified victims are taken into account. These events occurred in the course of an anti-guerrilla action called "Operation Rescue," in which, in addition to the Atlacatl Battalion, units of the Third Infantry Brigade and the San Francisco Gotera Commando Training Center participated.¹¹

During the course of Operation Rescue, later that day and in the days that followed, massacres of the civilian population were also carried out in the La Joya canton, the La Ranchería farmhouse; the Los Toriles farmhouse; the Jocote Amarillo farmhouse; and the Cerro Pando canton. According to official figures, 988 executed victims and 48 surviving victims¹² have been identified to date, among whom at least 552 were children or adolescents, and twelve were pregnant women.¹³ Many victims still have not been identified.¹⁴

More than 40 years have passed since these terrible events. Victims and their families carry out acts of commemoration to preserve historical memory, and as a measure of reparation, demand for justice and guarantee of non-recurrence. This document intends to take a descriptive approach to the commemorative events of the El Mozote massacre, from the perspective of victims and civil society organizations as well as from the State.

2.1 Background describing the official/dominant narratives and the narratives of victims and survivors around the significant date or event

THE POSITION OF THE STATE: RESISTANCE

The official narrative from the military spheres presented the El Mozote massacre as an armed confrontation, where the Armed Forces had carried out a successful operation against the guerrilla forces. This position extolls the perpetrators as heroes of the nation. This version of the events has not officially changed within the Armed Forces.

A complementary strategy to the qualification of the El Mozote massacre as a legitimate war operation was denialism. The president of the Revolutionary Government Junta – and later President of the Republic – José Napoleón Duarte, denied that the massacre had occurred.¹⁵ Duarte maintained that the reports about the massacre were part of a plan to discredit the government's policy of respect for human rights, at a time when the U.S. Congress was discussing the continuation of military aid to El Salvador.¹⁶ This narrative has echoed outside of El Salvador: in 1983, the U.S. government reportedly issued a communiqué stating that the evidence was not conclusive and that, despite civilian deaths, the massacre could not be confirmed.¹⁷

This policy of denial continued throughout the war and even after its end, despite the fact that the brutal details of the massacre became widely known with the publication of the Truth Commission's report.

One manifestation of this denialism was the justification of civilian deaths in El Mozote as "collateral damage" in the framework of legitimate war actions. Years later, the El Mozote massacre case was heard before the Inter-American Commission on Human rights (IACHR).

Following the Commission's decision (in 2010), El Salvador presented its position; the State admitted that "as a result of the armed confrontations that took place during the Salvadoran conflict, there was a lamentable loss of human lives as collateral damage from the confrontations." However, they stated,

at no time during the conflict was the civilian population considered a military target.

On the contrary, people were protected and assisted, to the extent possible, by the government institutions responsible for providing the needed humanitarian aid, without distinction of any kind (emphasis added),¹⁸

maintaining their position of denialism and an official State narrative that denies responsibility for the atrocities committed against civilians.

Another strategy adopted by the government was that of oblivion. With the official rejection of the Truth Commission's report¹⁹ and the establishment of the blanket amnesty, the State of El Salvador practically kept silent about the atrocities of the war, refusing to recognize or uphold the rights of victims. As scholars María Sol Yañez and Amalio Blanco observed, "for three decades the victims were ignored and abandoned and kept silent about the horror they had lived through."²⁰ The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence echoed this analysis in his 2020 report, noting that

mechanisms of impunity [in El Salvador] were accompanied by an institutionalized and generalized system of denial and forgetting of past violations that profoundly affected the social fabric and the collective narrative of the Salvadoran people. In this process, the victims of aberrant crimes of the past were forgotten and made invisible.²¹

2.1.1 Scope could include state enabled oppression

In contrast to the long-dominant official narratives of denial, victims and survivors' narratives about events during the conflict, including the El Mozote massacre, lay bare the unjustifiable atrocities that were committed and the State's accountability for said atrocities.²² The victims and survivors' narratives place the massacre within a context of systematic violence perpetrated by the State against civilians throughout El Salvador's internal conflict, and calls out the widespread and ongoing impunity that exists for perpetrators. The victims' narrative aligns with the narrative promoted by the UN-backed Truth Commission, as well as by foreign national and regional courts and other international actors, including journalists, investigators, and forensic teams, who have independently verified the human rights violations committed and contributed to understanding about the level of government planning and involvement in the violence carried out against non-combatant civilians during the conflict.

2.2 Are there/what are the gaps or points of contention that exist between official narratives and the narratives of victim and survivor groups?

While the official historical narrative has long denied responsibility for what took place at El Mozote – whether by denying the facts of what occurred or attributing the loss of civilian life to ‘collateral damage’ within the context of legitimate military activities – and has helped to maintain impunity for State actors, the victims and survivors’ narrative emphasizes the State’s responsibility for the vicious massacre. Victims and survivors’ narratives demonstrate the sheer brutality of the acts committed by Salvadoran armed forces, but also draw attention to the ongoing impunity and lack of accountability for those responsible (which was for many years, from 1993 until 2016, ensured by the amnesty law).

3. How is the significant date or event commemorated in the public sphere by officials?

The dominant official policy of silence around El Mozote began to change gradually, in large part thanks to the actions of victims and national and international human rights organizations before the Inter-American System for the Protection of Human rights. After several rulings on enforced disappearances of children during the conflict and in the El Mozote massacre itself, the State of El Salvador finally publicly recognized the massacre committed at El Mozote and began to adopt acts of reparation and redress in favor of the victims. In 2011, it even recognized, *motu proprio*, its responsibility in the massacre, in response to the IACHR’s submission of the case to the Inter-American Court of Human rights (IA Court).²³

Since then, the Presidents of the Republic have participated in commemorative acts and carried out various actions aimed at making reparations for the massacre of El Mozote. In 2012, President Mauricio Funes (president from 2009–2014), accompanied by high authorities, acknowledged in his commemorative speech the murder of nearly a thousand people, the majority of whom were children, at the hands of the Atlacatl Battalion of the Salvadoran Armed Forces, as well as “a countless number of barbaric acts and human rights violations” including torture, sexual abuse, enforced disappearance, and forced displacement.²⁴ He also asked for forgiveness to the victims and the Salvadoran people and committed to carry out actions of moral and material compensation.

In 2017, President Salvador Sánchez Cerén (president from 2014–2019) during acts to commemorate the El Mozote massacre, paid homage to the murdered victims and expressed solidarity with the victims and families, and emphasized that

*what happened should not be repeated under any circumstances in the history of El Salvador. This date makes us reflect on the terrible consequences of the abuse of power and demands from us a deep commitment to solidarity, which must become a reality through reparations and the preservation of historical memory.*²⁵

Sánchez went on to describe the events as part of a genocide that was kept in the shadows for years without being recognized by the Salvadoran State.²⁶

The current President of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, in his speech on December 17, 2020, also expressed a desire to support the community of El Mozote, stating that what happened was terrible and the need to “continue fighting to bring... truth and justice [to the victims].”²⁷ He also discussed the need to invest in the community so that the relatives, descendants and neighbors of the massacre’s victims can have a good life and future.²⁸

The shift in the position of the Executive Branch led to greater State intervention and investment in the area, with infrastructure, services and reparation programs in the areas of health, education, housing and technical assistance programs. In this context, the original memorial erected by the victims was modified and improved, replacing the wooden plaques with granite plaques with the names of the massacred people, and memorials were built in Cerro Pando and La Joya²⁹ cantons. All these actions were adopted in consultation with the victims, through the *Asociación Promotora de Derechos Humanos de El Mozote* (Association for the Promotion of Human rights of El Mozote, or APDHM).

In 2013, the Executive also established a Reparations Program for victims of serious human rights violations that occurred in the context of the internal armed conflict via Executive Decree 204.³⁰ The program, in general, corresponded to international reparation standards and included commemorative measures, including the “identification of assets that have special relevance for the historical memory of the facts constituting serious human rights violations in the context of the Salvadoran armed conflict, or that represent commemorative relevance for the communities” and the implementation of commemorative activities in the national education system.³¹ There have also been official publications on the Truth Commission’s Report, official texts in the national education system acknowledging the massacre, the publication of a special issue on memory and the conflict by the Secretariat of Culture of the Presidency of the Republic,³² and a special publication by the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women as a tribute to the girls and women killed in the massacre.³³

These acts and measures, while important, have been largely symbolic, and should not obscure the fact that there has been a general lack of State intervention in favor of the victims or to uphold their rights. No comprehensive measures have been implemented for the benefit of the victims and, in fact, many State actions show that there is no real commitment to truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. There are many examples of this reality.

For instance, after Funes’ 2012 speech at El Mozote, on October 23, 2013, the Armed Forces paid homage to two military officials bearing great responsibility for the massacre, Lieutenant Colonel Domingo Monterrosa and Major José Azmitia Melara.³⁴ Although the name of Lieutenant Colonel Monterrosa was removed from the facilities of the Third Infantry Brigade, the tributes to him and other perpetrators of the massacres continue. In his country visit report, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence

received with concern information about the numerous commemorations and tributes to high-ranking military commanders who fought in the armed conflict and who were accused of participating in aberrant acts, such as massacres, among them Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, who was identified by the Truth Commission as responsible for the El Mozote massacre.³⁵

The Special Rapporteur noted that these acts were carried out in spite of explicit orders from former President Funes, and that their names continue to be displayed in military battalions and in atriums or commemorative monuments inside military installations. He went on to state that the leadership of the Armed Forces, including the President, as Commander General of the Armed Forces, and the Minister of Defense,

must remove the names, atriums and monuments to military personnel accused of serious human rights violations from the battalions and detachments of the armed forces, as well as prohibit the commemoration of official honors in their name.³⁶

In addition, it must be noted that no officer of the Armed Forces has asked for forgiveness on behalf of the military institution for any of the war crimes committed during El Salvador's armed conflict, including El Mozote. Despite the provisions of Executive Decree 204,³⁷ no commemorative events have been held in other State institutions, such as the educational system, nor is there any systematic study of the events of the civil war from the perspective of the victims.

To date there has been no promotion of justice or accountability from the State, despite official recognition of the existence of the crimes. No one has been convicted of war crimes and/or crimes against humanity, nor has any State institution promoted the repeal of the amnesty law.³⁸ In addition, access to the military archives of the time has been systematically denied, even to the Prosecutor's Office and the Judge presiding over the El Mozote case, alleging reasons of national security or the non-existence of the archives. The judge in the case was even denied access to several military installations to carry out inspections of the archives.

The Armed Forces have also refused to comply with several judicial resolutions ordering the reconstruction of the archives and have failed to comply with the order of the Inter-American Court of Human rights to "adopt measures to guarantee justice operators, as well as Salvadoran society, access to the archives that contain useful and relevant information for the investigation of cases of human rights violations during the armed conflict," including sufficient budgetary allocations.³⁹

The abovementioned reparations program, established by Executive Decree 204 for victims of the El Mozote massacre, has been widely criticized, including by the international community. Both the UN Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Recurrence, Fabián Salvioli, and the Inter-American Commission on Human rights (IACHR) have urged the Salvadoran State to adopt a truly comprehensive reparations policy that is in line with international standards.⁴⁰ When he took office in June 2019, President Bukele eliminated the Secretariat of Social Inclusion, which was the institution in charge of administering reparations at the time.⁴¹ Bukele created a new institution, the Ministry of Local Development, staffed with people with little experience or expertise on reparations, to administer the program; in addition to lacking personnel, the new institution lacks sufficient funding and resources. As a result, the reparations program has regressed, and its future seems uncertain.⁴²

Regarding symbolic reparation measures and interventions in El Mozote, it should be noted that the recently created Municipal Works Directorate began to make modifications to the central plaza and memorial areas at the El Mozote memorial sites, without information, dialogue or consultation with APDHM, the victims, or the communities.⁴³ In fact, President

Bukele's speech on December 17, 2020 practically announced that he would no longer consider APDHM as an interlocutor for the El Mozote site, but rather another organization, the local Community Development Association (ADESCO), justifying the decision by saying that ADESCO is democratically elected and therefore not an 'intermediary' like APDHM. This explanation fails to take into account that APDHM is the organization that most directly represents the El Mozote massacre victims. Under Bukele's government, the closure of dialogue between the Executive and the victims' organizations has become an established fact, and today there is a sense of overwhelming stagnation in the processes of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence.

3.1 Positive or negative examples of official commemorative practices and their intended functions

While presidential speeches on the anniversary of the El Mozote massacre may at first glance seem positive in terms of recognizing conflict victims and commemorating what occurred, upon further examination it is clear that these acts of official recognition are superficial, as they are not accompanied by actions that actually support victims or hold perpetrators accountable. The State's lack of action in this regard is incongruous with recognizing the centrality of victims or with measures to respect or restore their dignity. In fact, the government's actions, from blocking judicial access to military records to implementing judicial reforms that removed the El Mozote case's longtime judge from the judiciary, leaving the trial at a standstill, have been counter to victims' rights and continued to uphold impunity.⁴⁴

4. How is the significant date or event commemorated at the local level by victim and survivor communities/ victim- or survivor-centered associations/civil society organizations?

COMMEMORATION OF EL MOZOTE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE VICTIMS: PERSISTENCE

We must start by pointing out that the acts of commemoration of the El Mozote massacre, from the beginning, have been carried out largely by the survivors and the relatives of the murdered victims. This has been a central feature in all events commemorating human rights violations committed during the armed conflict. Without the persistence of the survivors and the families of the victims, the atrocities of the civil war would be unknown to Salvadoran society and the entire world.

While there are no systematic records on the beginnings of the commemoration, it is certain that acts of commemoration began even before the end of the conflict, in an atmosphere of fear and insecurity.⁴⁵ With the process of repatriation from refugee camps in Honduras and other communities in the interior of the country, starting in 1991,⁴⁶ the community of El Mozote began to hold annual acts of remembrance.

Two facts regarding the beginning of commemoration by victims should be highlighted. First, the accompaniment of human rights organizations, such as the Office of Legal Protection of the Archbishopric of San Salvador, among other civil society organizations, was noteworthy.

Of particular importance was the role played by organizations from northern Morazán in the process of resettlement and reorganization of the communities of El Mozote.⁴⁷ Gradually, other civil society organizations, international solidarity movements and even diplomatic representatives of other nations and international organizations joined the commemoration events.⁴⁸ Thus, the war did not prevent commemorative events from taking place, even though at the beginning they did not have a great social impact.

The other fact to highlight is that while the conflict was still going on, the Armed Forces set up checkpoints on the access road to El Mozote to prevent people and organizations from coming to accompany the communities of El Mozote. On one occasion, the man in charge of a checkpoint even fired shots into the air with a long gun, forcing those on their way to El Mozote to take shelter.⁴⁹

4.1. Positive or negative examples of civil society- and community-led initiatives and interventions working to recognize the experiences and narratives of victims and survivor groups and their intended functions

With the end of the war, the number of people and organizations participating in the commemoration events gradually increased, reaching several hundred people in the events held in recent years.⁵⁰ Special mention should be made of the creation of the abovementioned Asociación Promotora de Derechos Humanos de El Mozote (Association for the Promotion of Human rights of El Mozote, APDHM). With the repopulation of the area, a Victims' Committee began to organize, accompanied by Father Rogelio Poncele, who initiated the commemoration events. The Committee was formalized in 2011 in the Association for the Promotion of Human rights of El Mozote (APDHM) and since then has been the main reference point for the victims of the Massacre.⁵¹ As an organized space for victims and survivors, the Victims' Committee, later formalized as APDHM, has been able to increase awareness and recognition of victims' experience of the massacre, as well as the ongoing struggle for justice and accountability.

Finally, it is significant that the struggle of the survivors and the relatives of the victims has changed the discourse of mainstream media in El Salvador. During the war and a good part of the post-war period, the media belonging to important business groups denied the existence of the massacre, presented it as clashes between combatants or, if anything, as collateral damage of the conflict. At present, no media source openly denies the massacre or the involvement of the Armed Forces in the commission of the massacre at El Mozote. In short, denialism of the facts can be considered defeated, thanks to the victims. It can be affirmed that fear has been lost and the communities of El Mozote, with their acts of commemoration, have put the events of the massacre and the need for reparations and justice in the public arena.

5. How is the significant date or event commemorated in at your organization?

5.1 What is the form of your organization's commemorative practice(s)?

5.2 What is the intended function(s) of your organization's commemorative practice(s)?

One of the ways that Cristosal commemorates the El Mozote massacre is through publicity campaigns, using social media, with narratives that speak to an urban public of all ages, including young people who do not have memories of the civil war. Sometimes these campaigns are the work of Cristosal on their own; other times they are in coalition with other human rights organizations, both local and international. The intended function of such commemorations is to acknowledge and remember the atrocities of the past, helping to build El Salvador's historical memory in a way that honors the conflict's victims and their right to the truth. Such strategies also help to bring attention to the continuing struggle of victims and their ongoing fight to claim their rights to truth, justice, and reparation, in the face of significant political opposition and official narratives that would sooner erase or justify the truth of the atrocities they endured.

5.3 How does your organization mitigate tensions between official narratives and the narratives of victims and survivors around specific commemorative dates?

By drawing attention to the victims' rights and accompanying them as they struggle for truth, justice and accountability, reparations, and non-recurrence measures, civil society groups like Cristosal are able to center victims' narratives and highlight the inadequacy of the government's actions towards conflict victims. Rather than mitigate tensions, civil society organizations like Cristosal highlight the government's actions, letting them speak for themselves, while protesting injustices suffered by victims and working in favor of victims' rights.

5.3.1 Does your organization's commemorative practice(s) work to either alter those dominant practices to include diverse commemorations and historically sidelined alternative narratives; prevent these practices from taking place altogether if they directly provoke violence; or establish a new memorialization practice?

No. Rather, civil society support for the victims works to show solidarity for their commemorative practices and highlight their narratives, while working to promote their rights and support the fight for truth and accountability.

6. Lessons Learned

First and foremost, the process of memorialization of El Mozote here has depended fundamentally on the victims and their families. They have been the ones who have persistently responded to the need to preserve memory as another mechanism for truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. Support for the victims by national and international human rights organizations, as well as social organizations with human development objectives,

has also been essential, not only to support the victims' struggle, but also to replicate and spread their message.

The same is true of the solidarity of the international community, represented by governments and international organizations. Their participation in commemorative acts and other acts of vindication of the victims has served, and continues to serve, to generate awareness in the world about the atrocities committed and the need to address them, fulfill victims' rights, and hold the perpetrators accountable.

The Salvadoran State, despite having taken certain steps in recognition of the facts of the massacre and in reparation measures, continues to be reluctant to take on the challenges that respecting the rights of the victims require or attempt to fulfill those rights. There is no mainstream political will behind the Salvadoran transitional justice process, or rather, there is an evident political will to turn the page and resist assuming responsibility for the past. The Salvadoran State has been forced to take some reparation actions, but this has been due to the constant fight of the victims and human rights organizations, as well as to international pressures and the resolutions and rulings of international human rights bodies.

7. Identify best practices that work to instill an inclusive memory culture and broader goals of reconciliation, recognition, truth-seeking, education for future generations and non-recurrence

The El Mozote memorialization process has demonstrated some best practices for the restoration of memory and dignity. First and foremost, the ongoing peaceful struggle of the victims and their full willingness to engage in dialogue, but with firm convictions in their demands, has been key in showing the moral necessity, rightness, and dignity of their demands.

Also important is the internal organization and the linking of victims with other national and international social actors. Achievements in historical memory do not belong to individuals or to isolated and dispersed communities, but rather to networks.

Another best practice in commemorating the atrocities committed at El Mozote is related to culture, and cultural replication/education. Culture is essential in the processes of memory as a vehicle for replicating the message. Similarly, academic research, the salvaging and preservation of the victims' histories and historical memory, and the integration of their claims in school and university classrooms promote the message of "never again" and the need to deal with the past.

On the other hand, when taking stock of the actions of the Salvadoran State, despite having carried out infrastructure works, adopted a reparations program or participated in the commemorations of El Mozote at the highest level – at least in the last three administrations – it is difficult to find good practices in the process of memorializing the events of El Mozote. It is hard to measure the impact of all these actions on national reconciliation and the construction of a culture of peace or on the social appropriation of the claims of the victims of El Mozote. What is certain, however, is that the events of El Mozote are present in the collective consciousness as an example of what should not happen again.

- 7.1 Civil society-led initiatives and interventions that contribute to facilitating wider public engagement with the struggles and human rights violations of the past and their recognition in the present, as well as in advocating for victim- and survivor-centered needs and non-recurrence?**
- 7.2 Civil society-led initiatives and interventions that contribute to a successful memory culture that not only recalls or reconstructs past events, but also is the basis for the construction of the collective memory of relevant country context – a shared narrative or understanding of a shared history, with all of its complexities, variations and perspectives.**
- 7.3 Civil society-led initiatives and interventions that encourage constructive public dialogue and debate and serve as history education for future generations while promoting civic engagement and contributing to democracy-building processes; contribute to the (re-)building of a national identity grounded in belonging for all social groups, based on respect for human rights and democracy?**

Answering 7.1-7.3: As discussed above, one way that civil society groups such as Cristosal have been able to facilitate wider public engagement with victims' struggle and the human rights abuses of the past is by developing communication materials that speak to a younger, urban audience and are aimed at reaching those who did not live through the war, using tools such as social media. At the same time, these initiatives contribute to the construction of wider historical memory, documenting the victims' experiences and sharing them widely, while also showing that El Salvador has a long way to go to be a country where all social groups have a sense of belonging and human rights and democratic values are respected.

CONCLUSION

Memory is a demand that cannot be satisfied with mere formal declarations or official parades. These kinds of acts carried out by States are meaningless if they are not accompanied by acts that are truly committed to the needs and rights of the victims and the need to build a culture of peace in countries. The centrality of the victims and the comprehensiveness of the measures must be reflected in public policies of memory. As recommended by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence,

Memorialization is a long-term process in which the state must play an active and determined role. Authorities deciding and implementing memory policies should ensure that they duly represent the views of victims and that they are established in collaboration with civil society, especially human rights organizations. The public policy for memory should be multidimensional and include measures in public spaces (memorials, parks, squares, etc.), artistic expressions (museums, plays, recitals, pictorial exhibitions, etc.), media dissemination, demonstrations and public actions by the government on significant dates, among others; at the educational level, such policies require programs for all levels of formal and informal education, and the establishment of a culture of peace.⁵²

For the construction of an integral and multidimensional policy along these lines, the State of El Salvador should begin by taking into consideration the Principles on Public Memory Policies in the Americas of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights⁵³ and consider the possibility of carrying out long-delayed actions, such as the publication of the military archives on the war, or the recovery of the archives of the Truth Commission in the hands of the United Nations. Moreover, closing the spaces for dialogue and consultation with the victims does not reflect the characteristics of a democratic state that seeks to build a new nation in peace, a process that inexorably requires confronting the current realities created by the abuses of the past, without excluding those who suffered the most.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Truth Commission for El Salvador: From Madness to Hope. The Twelve-Year War in El Salvador. United Nations. San Salvador - New York. 1992–1993. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/ElSalvador-Report.pdf>
- 2 Internal Displacement Monitoring Center and Refugee Law Initiative, School of Advanced Study at University of London, *Atomised Crisis: reframing displacement caused by crime and violence in El Salvador*, 2018, p. 13. Available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/201809-el-salvador-an-atomised-crisis-en.pdf>
- 3 Due Process of Law Foundation, *The Peace Accords in El Salvador: After Peace, Transitional Justice?* 2022. Available at: https://dplf.org/sites/default/files/report_-_peace_accords_in_el_salvador_-_
- 4 *Due Process of Law Foundation, The Peace Accords in El Salvador: After Peace, Transitional Justice?* 2022. Available at: https://dplf.org/sites/default/files/report_-_peace_accords_in_el_salvador_-_after_peace_transitional_justice.pdf
- 5 Leonor Arteaga and Amanda Eisenhour, “The Uncertain Future of Reparations in Post-Conflict El Salvador,” *Justicia en las Américas*, July 23, 2019.
- 6 In El Salvador, the victims of the El Mozote massacre are represented by the organizations Tutela Legal Doctora María Julia Hernández and Cristosal. Before the Inter-American System for Human rights Protection, they have been represented by CEJIL (the Center for Justice and International Law) and Tutela Legal Doctora María Julia Hernández.
- 7 Truth Commission for El Salvador: From Madness to Hope. The Twelve-Year War in El Salvador. United Nations. San Salvador - New York. 1992–1993, p. 18.
- 8 Truth Commission for El Salvador: From Madness to Hope. The Twelve-Year War in El Salvador. United Nations. San Salvador - New York. 1992–1993, pp. 18 - 19.
- 9 Truth Commission for El Salvador: From Madness to Hope. The Twelve-Year War in El Salvador. United Nations. San Salvador - New York. 1992–1993, pp. 18 - 19.
- 10 Truth Commission for El Salvador: From Madness to Hope. The Twelve-Year War in El Salvador. United Nations. San Salvador - New York. 1992–1993, p. 118.
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