

6-20-2003

Number of Political Violence Victims Beats Expectations

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Number of Political Violence Victims Beats Expectations." (2003). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/13157>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Number of Political Violence Victims Beats Expectations

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Peru

Published: 2003-06-20

Peru's Truth Commission (Comision de la Verdad y la Reconciliation) said at a press conference at UN headquarters in New York on June 17 that the number of victims of political violence in the country between 1980 and 2000 could have been as high as 60,000 dead or disappeared, twice the original estimate.

The 12-member commission was set up in 2001 by interim president Valentin Paniagua (2000-2001) to investigate the violations of human rights between 1980 and 2000, during the presidencies of Fernando Belaunde Terry (1980-1985), Alan Garcia (1985-1990), and Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000).

The commission was given two years to determine the causes of the violence, find ways to compensate the victims, recommend reforms to prevent future atrocities, and if possible gather information to identify human rights violators for state prosecutors.

As a result of cross-referencing data and consulting international experts, commission president Salomon Lerner Febres said, "we feel there was a minimum of 40,000 deaths and it might have been more than 60,000." This includes between 7,000 and 8,000 people who disappeared, the majority at the hands of state security forces, he said. Previous estimates were that 30,000 were killed and 6,000 disappeared between 1980 and the early 1990s, the period of heaviest violence.

Lerner said no one will ever know the exact number of people who died or were disappeared because there are "many, many variables that we're not in control of, including people who have not testified and many [still undiscovered] clandestine graves." He said half the number of dead were victims of the guerrilla group Sendero Luminoso.

Academic Carlos Ivan Degregori said the commission had been able to interview almost 18,000 people, many more than they expected when they began. They found that 75% of the victims spoke Quechua, the language of Peru's highland Indians, as their mother tongue. Peru's indigenous people represent less than 20% of the population and are concentrated in the poorest, most isolated part of the country, but they suffered the most, said Sofia Macher, another commission member.

Lerner Febres said that the recommendations that would be presented when the commission's work concludes in August would include indemnification to the families of victims and to living victims of rape, torture, and imprisonment.

The commission believes collecting the testimony of those who suffered violence and previously had been "silenced and stigmatized" is part of the reparations, Macher said. But there must be "material" reparations as well as moral and symbolic reparations.

Lerner said the final report will conclude that the subversive movements flourished in a climate where the government denied the rights of citizenship to all Peruvians and where "there has been and there still is discrimination and exclusion, together with poverty." The government must become "more democratic, more inclusive, more accessible to the demands of the population" and it must reform political parties, Lerner said. "Today political parties are precarious and so democracy is precarious."

The report will also focus on the need to strengthen "the practice of justice," he said. "We need a judicial branch that is effective, fast, independent and accessible to all." It will also call for reform of the police and armed forces so they don't "apply force indiscriminately," and education reform to ensure that every child goes to school. The commission wants its report to start "a true commitment phase by the Peruvian state and the Peruvian society for in-depth changes so that there will not be a recurrence of the tragedy that we have known," he said.

The commission has submitted six cases for possible prosecution and legal action has been initiated in three cases, Macher said.

Lerner said Fujimori had refused to meet with him in Tokyo. He said the truth commission wants to question him about human rights violations during his term, "and in particular to explain the existence of paramilitary groups and apparently everything indicates he knew about this."

-- End --