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Understanding Truth: How Commissioners Influence the Final Report of a Truth Commission

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**Research Panel:** Dynamics of Transitional Justice and Advocacy

**Presenter:** Christine Bianco, Florida International University

**Title:** Understanding Truth: How Commissioners Influence the Final Report of a Truth Commission

**Abstract:**

Ensuring a future of human rights means coming to terms with past violations of human rights. This both recognizes human rights as an important position in the policy of the state and helps to end a system of impunity against such actions, even if it is done symbolically. One of the major mechanisms that states have used to address their past has been truth commissions. The strength of truth commissions lies in their ability to bring to light the voices of the victims as well as their ability to criticize those who have committed human rights abuses.

In order to gain a better understanding of this second strength of truth commissions, this paper examines to what extent the political makeup of a commission influences the degree to which the final report of the truth commission criticizes an abusive regime.

Using Chile’s National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation (Rettig Commission) and National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture (Valech Commission) as case studies, the paper examines two nearly identically structured truth commissions to study how changing the political backgrounds of the commissioners can affect the outcome of the commission.

After exploring the backgrounds of the commissioners from both commissions, the paper analyzes the final reports of the truth commissions in order to examine the influence the commissioners had on the process.

**About the presenter:**

Christine Bianco is a combined program to earn a master’s in Latin American and Caribbean studies and a Ph.D. in international relations at the Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs at Florida International University, where she has a Presidential Fellowship. She focuses on human rights, transitional justice, and international criminal law. She has a bachelor’s in international relations and Spanish from Rollins College.