

Reconciliation after violence and marginalization

**A draft proposal by
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Introduction

“All wars are bad. But civil wars, in which there are brothers in both trenches, are unforgivable, because peace is not born when war concludes”
Charles de Gaulle, 1970.

After international war, the warring nations can settle for some form of peace and go their separate ways. After civil war, the enemies of the past must share a common geographical territory, government and national identity. Civil war leaves behind a fractured national identity and a heavy burden of distrust. Rebuilding relationships and national identity poses a greater burden than material reconstruction of the nation.

Rebuilding trust and empathy between former enemies is an extremely difficult challenge, yet, is an absolute necessity if society was to move forward towards a unified productive nation.

It is a misconception to assume the responsibility of reconciliation upon the international community. If reconciliation is to succeed, it must originate from the affected society itself. Help and support from the international community may be sought, but it remains the responsibility of civil society to initiate a reconciliation process that takes into account the local culture and resources. Reconciliation must not be used as political means to shape the outcome of war. Hence the need for a civil society lead effort supported yet not controlled by the political system. Some may view reconciliation as a continuation of civil war by means of dialogue and constructive solution finding methods. At its heart, reconciliation is long term process, sometimes spanning multiple generations, addressing the suffering of the victims, understanding the motivation of the offenders and bringing together estranged communities along a path of justice and peace.

What is reconciliation

It is a process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future characterised by:

1. its a long term process that may span for generations to come,
2. facilitates democratic change,
3. requires the involvement of all sectors of society,
4. requires significant changes in attitude, beliefs, means of self expression,
5. demands the complete eradication of all forms of intolerance including religious, racial and linguistic,
6. facilitates the application of social and judicial justice,
7. participation is voluntary, it can never be imposed on any individual,
8. universally advocated by all religions and societies,
9. operates parallel to political change yet remains independent,
10. does not result in enemies loving each, instead, build the minimum level of trust to allow cooperation and mutual reliance in societal functions,
11. while democracy produces solutions to a conflict, reconciliation establishes a cooperative relationship in society in order for those solutions to be implemented,
12. does not grant immunity to any individual,
13. does not imply blind forgiveness,
14. requires an open and truthful discussion of past events, root cause analysis and mutual agreement on plans of action for the future,
15. builds an environment where past enemies can live and thrive together,
16. requires truthful admission of past crimes by the perpetrator,
17. requires complete transparency and complete exposure of past crimes,
18. facilitates and benefits from the application of social justice and universal human rights,
10. is a prerequisite for social and political reform,
20. reconciliation compensates for political compromise on both sides of the argument,
21. is flexible and able to adapt to social, economic and political changes,
22. reconciliation establishes preventative measures against future violent disagreements
23. requires changes from within society and benefits from external assistance,
24. requires the engagement of all factions of society,
25. is not a gift of forgiveness,
26. originates from society's civil movements yet is bidirectional and requires support and engagement of policy makers and governmental organizations,
27. economic difficulties do not preclude reconciliation efforts,
28. operates independently of the political system,
29. requires financial and political support from governments.

Benefits of reconciliation

1. support political reform and democracy,
2. fight poverty,
3. resettlement of refugees,
4. break the vicious circle of disagreement and violence,
5. builds long-lasting peace and fairer society,
6. provides security,
7. reinforces the rule-of-law,
8. permits fair distribution of resources and fortune,
9. permits human development,
10. allows for rehabilitation of victims and offenders,
11. cements the concept of dialogue to settle differences,
12. learning from past mistakes is the best means to avoid them in the future.
13. establishes channels of communications between warring factions of society,

The best form of governance in a post-war society is a democratic one. A true democracy will facilitate the implementation of the principles of universal human rights:

1. equality,
2. representation,
3. participation,
4. accountability.

Democracy is a collection of tools and policies allowing for non-violent management of differences, opinion, belief, ideology, culture, within a society. What democracy, or any other governance system for that matter, can't do is eradicate such differences. Democracy cannot be established overnight in a post-conflict society. However, reconciliation may begin as soon as the conflict is over. If implemented and run properly, reconciliation may prepare and shift the previously fighting faction of society towards a path of true democracy.

Democracy can be thought of as:

1. a set of policies for managing differences in a society,
2. a working relationship between all groups of society.

Whilst democratic policies are established through negotiations/debate and set as a settlement in the shape of a new structure of governance. Implementation of such settlements is met with obstacles from the past conflict. Past conflicts foster distrust, disrespect and quite possibly hatred all of which will compromise the required working relationship. Therefore, establishing a working relationship in the whole of society is a function of a successful reconciliation process. The most successful democratic systems in the world will fail if all factions of the society in question do not trust the newly established system and each other. Reconciliation is the fuel by which democracy can flourish and succeed. Democracy and reconciliation are intertwined yet interdependent. Positive relationships create the environment for democracy to thrive. Reconciliation is not a luxury, or an extra option to democracy. Reconciliation is an absolute necessity.

Participants in the reconciliation processed

1. victims;
 - i. individual victims,
 - ii. family members,
 - iii. neighbours,
 - iv. friends and colleagues,
 - v. political and religious groups.
2. perpetrators;
 - i. individual offenders,
 - ii. armed groups,
 - iii. media outlets,
 - iv. political and religious groups.
3. refugees;
 - i. a. victims,
 - ii. b. perpetrators.
4. civil society groups;
5. intermediaries;
 - i. civil movements,
 - ii. psychologists,
 - iii. public courts and intermediaries,
 - iv. the judiciary,
 - v. religious establishments (mosques and churches),
 - vi. media outlets,
 - vii. non-governmental organisations,
 - viii. the united nations and its subsidiaries,
 - ix. the international community.
6. external stakeholders.

The process of reconciliation

stages of reconciliation:

- Stage 1. Replacing Fear with peaceful coexistence
- Stage 2. Building Confidence and Trust
- Stage 3. Empathy

The Process:

1. It is not a quick-fix. Unfortunately, it is a long-term process. Its path maybe facilitated but not dictated,

2. It is also a deep process that require changes in attitudes, aspirations, emotions and feelings, perhaps even beliefs. Such profound changes can be painful and cannot be rushed or imposed,
3. It is a very broad process that must include all factions of society not just those who suffered directly and those who inflicted the suffering, central though those two groups are to the process.

Violent conflicts foster wrong beliefs and attitudes. Such beliefs and attitudes spread on both sides of the conflict like wild fire. Therefore, it is pertinent to correct said beliefs and attitudes at the level of the individual and society as a whole through the process of reconciliation. Although conflicts are led by individual, few politicians and fighter, the brand “the enemy” tends to include all supporters and beneficiaries of the conflict on each side, e.g., “Tutsi” or “kaizan”. The latter is a name given to supporters of the Muslim brotherhood in Sudan. Said groups, though not active in the conflict, must be included and addressed by the reconciliation process. So reconciliation must be inclusive of all the various interests and experiences in society.

Many people, especially the victims, are suspicious of reconciliation and see it as a way to bury their suffering and a grant of immunity to the perpetrators. Indeed, It can be misused, e.g., Rwanda. This is a result of a misconception of reconciliation as only a goal, not an inclusive process. These people often, and rightly so, suspect that reconciliation is a move to bypass justice, truth-telling and punishment. Reconciliation is inherently a very long-term process, which must address all the important ingredients of justice, truth, and healing.

When to involve civil society?

Evidence on the timing of civil society’s involvement in the peace process is equivocal. Indeed, involvement of civil society in the peace negotiation process carries significant risk of failure of the entire peace process for the following reasons:

1. high level/unrealistic expectations of civil society members,
2. delays to the peace process,
3. unjustified assumption of unified interests.

Instead, civil groups are very effective during the peace accord implementation. This is particularly relevant to economically restrained post-war governments. In addition to the reconciliation effort, civil groups may assume the role of service providers lifting the financial burden off an already financially weak post-war government including:

1. education,
2. health services,
3. peace committees,
4. conflict management training/workshops,
5. problem-solving workshops,
6. promoting reconciliation through the media,.

Islamic charities in Somalia were left with burden of education and health delivery in the presence of a dysfunctional government. This led to the establishment of non-profit schools and universities

throughout the country between 1995 and 2006. In El Salvador, civil society groups, funded by the international community, engaged in provision of housing support and health care assistance. A similar effort was carried out by civil society groups in Bosnia following the civil war. Although such efforts by society civil groups appear less glamorous than direct reconciliation conferences and workshops, it most definitely leads to an enduring peace process.

Financial support

Most post-conflict societies fall into a state of poor economy and lack of resources. Therefore, it would be a recipe for failure to postulate an expensive state-of-the-art reconciliation process. The reconciliation process must take into account local resources and culture for it to succeed. Having said that, various external donors may be drafted for financial, political and material support.

Resources for the reconciliation process maybe divided into:

1. Internal resources;
 - a. often less expensive,
 - b. sustainable and reliable no the long term,
 - c. can be financial, material, service provision, etc.,
 - d. if local methods and resources are utilised, will be more acceptable to society.

Examples:

- i. Rwanda reparation fund.
- ii. income levy tax. proposed in South Africa but not applied,
- iii. service provision, e.g, Northern Ireland. Provision of healthcare and education, community services.

2. External resources;

- a. can be slow and linked with political gain,
- b. can not be relied upon on the long term.

Examples:

- i. Development Assistance Committee (DAC),
- ii. Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),
- iii. International Rwanda Reparation Fund (never materialised),
- iv. United Nation Compensation Commission (UNCC). Reparation following the Kuwait invasion, 1990-1991, through a tax levy on Iraqi oil exports.

Conclusion

Reconciliation is a relatively new concept, therefore, no ideal roadmap can be prescribed and a perfect model does not exist. Similarly, no single tool will solve the problems left behind by a conflict, national or international. Following every conflict, an individual multi-level process must be designed taking into account the local culture, resources and nature of conflict. This must not be viewed as a handicap. To

the contrary, this should encourage those facing the task to design an individual national process drawing on previous international experience and trust their own judgement on the matter. Utilisation of past international experiences, regular reviews, alteration, adaptation of ideas must be greatly encouraged.

Reconciliation must be viewed as a collection of processes in a path to true democracy. As such, each process must be planned, analysed and viewed separately. Success of each process facilitates the entire process. Small successes accumulate to form a larger success. Failure of one component must be replaced by a well thought out and planned replacement rather than a failure of the entire process of reconciliation.

If unaddressed, pain, hurt and anger following a conflict will continue to grow. It is wrong and counterproductive to delay the process of reconciliation for when justice or economic reforms are established. Reconciliation must be viewed as part of the democratisation process. Therefore, reconciliation must proceed parallel to constitutional reform and other vital elements of democracy. Wrong beliefs, attitudes and habits of the past must be rectified or they will give birth to another conflict in the future. The best democratic policies are destined for failure if a good sustainable working relationship between all factions of society are not established. Although no ideal path to full social reconciliation can be found, it is most certainly achievable and the rewards will include a resilient long-lasting peace and fair democratic society that will prosper and thrive.

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