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Conclusion

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The material in this Handbook represents most of the accumulated wisdom so far on reconciliation. Reconciliation is a relatively new addition to the post-conflict scene, and thus there are still large gaps in our knowledge and serious imperfections in our practice. But contained in these pages are the expertise and experience in the field as it currently stands. Much of that valuable information boils down to a few points, simply expressed but still immensely challenging to put into practice. Here, we focus on just three.

First, there is no one road to reconciliation. There is no right answer that has been worked out, no perfect model from South Africa or Peru or Rwanda or Cambodia that others can simply import and imitate. Nor will any single tool solve the whole problem: neither truth-telling alone, nor healing, nor justice, nor forgiveness. In every new context, a new and multi-stranded individual process must be designed. But this is not a handicap by any means. On the contrary, it should give those faced with the challenge of designing their own process the confidence to realize that they are the experts on their own situation, to trust their own judgement about what will work and what will not in their context, and to use, adapt, alter or replace ideas from elsewhere.

Second, it is not sensible to judge an entire reconciliation process as a success or a failure. Each process consists of many small successes and failures. The work is not easy, and the challenges of the overall process can occasionally seem overwhelming. But it is important to see the progress and successes, small and large, where and when they appear. Every step forward is a success - indeed, as one practitioner commented, "every silence that is broken is a victory for reconciliation". A reconciliation process consists of a multitude of initiatives, steps and stages, where progress is an accumulation of small steps. Success happens at the individual level, as well as the collective level. Sensitive and appropriately designed, reconciliation will bring these small successes. And the small victories accumulate to form the bigger ones.

Third, reconciliation is necessarily a long-term process. It is pointless to plan to "do" reconciliation first and then move on to justice, or economic reform, or constitutional reform. But reconciliation is also a pressing need, and one which does not ease simply with time. Quite the reverse: the collective and individual hurt, pain, frustration and anger that are the legacy of violence will only grow, not diminish, if left unaddressed. So it is equally counterproductive to leave reconciliation until after those other priorities have been achieved.

How then can these opposing pressures be resolved? Quite simply, it is necessary to view reconciliation as a part of peace-building and democratization, just as integral to the post-conflict solution as constitutional reform or any other key element. Reconciliation must be implemented in parallel with and as a constitutive part of those other activities of reform or reconstruction. This is precisely because reconciliation underpins all those other strands of rebuilding - the rebuilding of relationships underpins, and must run concurrently with, rebuilding all the other structures and processes. It must be done not before, not after, but at the same time.

This Handbook points to some methods for doing this. The crucial actors (victims and offenders) must be understood. The crucial procedures (healing, justice, truth and reparation) must be undergone. And the habits and patterns of the past must be undone. Those are the crucial patterns of

attitude and behaviour that produced and sustained the violence. If they remain unchanged, they will eventually produce the same outcome again.

As the saying goes, those who ignore their history are condemned to repeat it. We must examine our past history, not only for its own sake and that of its victims, but in order to build a strategy - a reconciliation process - that guarantees a secure future. However painful that history has been, it has vital lessons for the future, and indeed it is the starting point for our journey into the future.

This is not simply a moral argument about doing the right thing, even though reconciliation can contain strong moral elements, such as justice, respect and equality. It is much more than that. Put bluntly, good democratic politics - even the best politics - only works when relationships between the various actors are positive enough to permit basic trust, respect and cooperation. Bad relationships - those still built on distrust, suspicion, fear, accusation, even ignorance - will effectively and eventually destroy any political system based on respect for human rights and democratic structures. Reconciliation is the means to change relationships.

A democracy is built on respect for the human rights of all concerned. Unreconciled people, still driven by fear or suspicion, do not afford each other's human rights the same respect. If human rights are not upheld widely and collectively, the basis for democracy is fatally flawed.

The work of building democracy is never finished, never perfect. It has to be constantly tended and mended, refined and re-tuned. So with reconciliation - the commitment must be for the long term, for the widest and deepest possible process, and it must be seen as an integral part of, not some addition to, overall reform and reconstruction.

The good news is that it can be done. Never perfectly, perhaps, but often effectively: this is the message from many of the examples we have examined in this book. Other examples show how it can go wrong, go backwards, even fail. But - and here we end where we began - the most conspicuous examples are those where reconciliation was ignored or treated superficially: in every case, it has come back to haunt the society. Only by building reconciliation in as a vital, equally important, piece of the jigsaw, along with economics, politics, justice and the other parts of the peace-building puzzle, can a society truly move with confidence from a divided past to a shared future.

Relevant Institutions and Web Sites

Amnesty International (international NGO), <http://www.amnesty.org>

Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF) (international NGO):

— *Belgium*: <http://www.asf.be/>

— *France*: <http://asffrance.multimania.com>

— *Lawyers Without Borders*, <http://lawyerswithoutborders.gobizgo.com/>

Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), South Africa,
<http://www.wits.ac.za/csvr>

Coalition for an International Criminal Court (CICC) (international NGO),
<http://www.igc.org/icc/>

— CICC web page on the Rome Treaty Conference,

<http://www.igc.org/icc/rome/index.html>

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (international NGO),

<http://child-soldiers.org>

Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Australia (governmental),

<http://reconciliation.org.au>

Creative Associates International (CAII) (USA, private international consulting firm),

<http://www.caii-dc.com/>

— Conflict Prevention: A Guide,

<http://www.caii-dc.com/ghai/outline.htm>

— War Crimes Tribunals/Truth Commissions (Commissions of Inquiry),

<http://www.caii-dc.com/ghai/toolbox23.htm>

Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH) (international NGO),

<http://www.fidh.org/>

Human Rights Watch,

<http://www.hrw.org>

Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity (INCORE), University of Ulster and United Nations University (academic),

<http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/>

— Guide to Internet sources on Truth and Reconciliation,

<http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/cds/themes/truth.html>

— Dealing with the Past, Conference Papers, 8–9 June 1998,

<http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/home/publication/conference/thepast/index.html>

International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), USA (NGO),

<http://www.ictj.org>

International Commission of Jurists (international NGO),

<http://www.icj.org/>

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (UN-mandated),
<http://www.icrc.org/>

International Court of Justice (ICJ) (United Nations),
<http://www.icj-cij.org/>

International Criminal Court,
<http://www.un.org/law/icc/index.html>

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (United Nations),
<http://www.un.org/icty/>

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) (United Nations),
<http://www.icttr.org/>

International Crisis Group (ICG), (international NGO),
<http://www.intl-crisis-group.org/>

International Internet Bibliography on Transitional Justice (Gunnar Theissen,
Free University, Berlin) (academic),
<http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~theissen/biblio/index.html>

No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ) International Committee of Parliamentarians,
Mayors and Citizens,
<http://www.agora.stm.it/npwj/frame.html>

Penal Reform International (PRI) (international NGO), <http://penalreform.org>

Project on Justice in Times of Transition, Harvard University (academic),
<http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/justiceproject/>

Redress. Seeking Reparation for Torture Survivors (international NGO),
<http://redress.org>

Transitional Justice Project, University of the Western Cape and the Humboldt University of Berlin
(academic),
<http://www.uwc.ac.za/law/tjp/>

Truth Commissions Project, Harvard Law School – Search for Common Ground (academic-NGO),
<http://www.truthcommission.org>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), South Africa (governmental),
<http://www.truth.org.za/>
—— Report of the South African TRC,
<http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/commissions/1998/trc/index.htm>

United States Institute of Peace (USIP) (independent federal institution), <http://www.usip.org/>
—— Truth Commissions and Commissions of Inquiry,
<http://www.usip.org/library/truth.html>

Carter Center (associated with Emory University),
<http://www.cartercenter.org/hr.html>

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The International IDEA Handbook on Reconciliation After Violent Conflict presents a range of tools that can be, and have been, employed in the design and implementation of reconciliation processes. Most of them draw on the experience of people grappling with the problems of past violence and injustice. There is no 'right answer' to the challenge of reconciliation, and so the Handbook prescribes no single approach. Instead, it presents the options and methods, with their strengths and weaknesses evaluated, so that practitioners and policy-makers can adopt or adapt them, as best suits each specific context.

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SERGIO VIEIRA DE MELLO,
High Commissioner for Human Rights

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