



**REGIONAL SEMINAR ON THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN THE
NATIONAL RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN AFRICA
Session IX: International initiatives to support reconciliation**

**Intervention by
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Mr. President,
Honourable Parliamentarians,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been asked today to speak on the **role of the international community in national reconciliation processes**. I shall do so gladly though I think that in doing so I shall be, in a way, contradicting myself and transgressing one of the main points I want to make, i.e. that the **role of the international community is to be assessed and determined primarily by the people directly concerned with the reconciliation processes in their countries**. Hence, I consider that your voices, honourable Parliamentarians from Africa, are much more important than mine as far as this issue is concerned. Therefore, I shall keep my presentation short and I hope it will be followed by a rich debate.

When we consider what can be the role of the international community in national reconciliation processes, we should first ask ourselves three questions:

- What is the **need** for an international engagement?
- What are the **benefits** and are there potential dangers?
- **Are there some rules** for the engagement of the international community and what are they?

Most societies emerging from violent conflict are totally impoverished. They lack the material and technical resources to set up healing projects, truth and reconciliation commissions and reparation programmes. They are often societies in a state of shock. They have suffered terrible blows and they have not had the opportunity to look at how other societies emerging from similar experiences have coped with and how they managed overcome the heavy burden of the past.

Hence, **outside support is needed and it may be extremely useful.** It can take many forms, some of them more general, others very specific.

- First of all, the **international community is often engaged in the process that leads to the end of a civil war and the consolidation of peace** in the immediate aftermath of a conflict. Through the United Nations, regional organisations or international NGOs it can exercise its influence so as to **support the inclusion of appropriate reconciliation programmes in the peace process.** It can put pressure on those groups in a post-conflict society that are ready to renew the conflict or disrupt the still fragile peace process – those we usually call the “spoilers”.
- Second, many conflicts today have a regional dimension so that regional actors may have to be a part of the reconciliation process (which is very much the case in this part of the world, for example). The international community can help bringing together legislators and policy practitioners from the broader region to jointly exchange experiences and discuss reconciliation issues that have a broader regional significance. And that is precisely what we are doing here today in this Workshop on National Reconciliation Processes in Africa. Likewise, the African Union (AU) is engaged in supporting some peace processes in Africa, the European Union (EU) is active in supporting the peace process in the area we now call the Western Balkans or the former Yugoslavia, and the Organisation of American States (OAS) is supporting some peace processes in the Western Hemisphere (as, for example, in Haiti).
- Third, the international community is also a potential source of finance and expertise. Increasingly, bilateral and multilateral donors as well as regional

actors are beginning to realise the importance of reconciliation as an ingredient of conflict prevention, human development, human security, the elimination of poverty and peace-building.

- Fourth, Justice is a specific area where the international community has been involved in processes that have a reconciliation potential. It has set **international tribunals** such as the ICTY in The Hague and the ICTR in Arusha. It has sponsored the setting up of **truth and reconciliation commissions** such as those in El Salvador, in Guatemala and in East Timor and many others.

- Fifth, international NGOs such as the International Centre for Transitional Justice in New York (ICTJ), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town, or intergovernmental organisations such as International IDEA in Stockholm have gathered documentation and comparative knowledge and have developed professional expertise on reconciliation and transitional justice issues. They can organize workshops where national and regional stakeholders and decision-makers can exchange information and advice.

- Finally, there are very specific initiatives by which the international community can support various instruments of reconciliation and transitional justice. For example, it can assist truth commissions with forensic experts to identify victims in mass-graves or support the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation commission's report; it can finance reparation funds or help in the organisation of witness protection schemes; it can support the inclusion of reconciliation programmes in educational curricula, it can help in the design of reconciliation training programmes etc.

Therefore, we see that the **international community can have an important, sometimes indispensable role** and that the benefits from international support to a national reconciliation process can be very substantive. Yet, it is important to be aware that engaging foreign actors is not totally without dangers and that it might be useful to consider some rules and principles for their intervention.

Furthermore, it is important for national decision-makers to be aware of something that was already underlined the first day of our seminar, if my memory is correct, by Mr. Lous-Marie Nindorera, i.e. that the international community (very much like civil society) is not a monolithic bloc, a single entity that comes to you with ideas and proposals that are always coherent and compatible with each other.

In proposing some reconciliation tools instead of others, in proposing to accelerate or to delay the process, different segments of the international community can have different opinions – not necessarily because they have some hidden agendas of their own, but simply because they may have different perceptions of the country's priorities.

For example, some transitional justice and reconciliation tools, such as truth commissions have become increasingly popular with international donors and NGOs. International initiatives to set up such bodies may be well intentioned, but they should always be discussed and assessed by the people directly affected by the conflict and the representatives of the people affected, such as parliamentarians.

The international community can even be advising you opposite things at the same time. For example, the views of a UN peace-building mission are not necessarily the same of those of some international NGOs.

I know from personal experience, a country (I wish to point out that it is not an African country) in which some international NGOs were pressing for the immediate establishment of a transitional justice mechanism, while the UN mission was much more cautious considering that peace was still extremely fragile and that pointing the fingers at some still powerful perpetrators of abuses could incite them to opt out of the peace process and to renew the conflict. I don't wish to say who was right and who was wrong. What was most important in my view was that the issue generated a serious debate within the country, between the government and civil society.

Which is the proper moment in the peace process to set up a transitional justice mechanism? Too soon may endanger peace, too late may sanction impunity and

compromise the quality of the new democracy which is being built. The international community can help by making available experiences from other countries, by offering comparative knowledge, but it cannot decide on behalf of those directly involved. It cannot say when the right moment has come and which will be the most appropriate mechanisms.

There is a popular slogan today which says “There is no Peace without Justice”. This is a nice slogan. I can subscribe to it. Almost. But, what do we do when peace and justice are not on the same side? Sometimes the dilemmas are really tough: you may have a better peace and a better society if it is free from warlords and perpetrators of human rights violations. You may also end up delaying peace indefinitely, which will involve many more killings and abuses. We heard an excellent presentation yesterday pointing precisely to that dilemma.

There have always been and there will always be courageous people ready to take big risks in order to advance the cause of truth and justice. But only those who have suffered injustice and oppression can decide whether they want to assume such a risk. My point is that no international actor has the right to incite them to do something that endangers their security and delays the achievement of peace.

This is all to say that a durable reconciliation process needs to be home-grown, that in all of its stages the will of those who are directly concerned is absolutely essential.

This is so not only because it is the only way to avoid serious and dangerous mistakes that could subsequently undermine both the peace process and the reconciliation. The reason is also a political and a moral one. Pain, misery, oppression, discrimination, humiliation can only be told and acknowledged by those who suffered it and those who caused it. Only the victims and the perpetrators can reconcile themselves with one another. The international community can help them to do so but it cannot do it instead of them.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you, honourable parliamentarians, for your attention!