

A Working Definition of Reconciliation

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September 2004

Our working hypothesis is that reconciliation is a necessary process following conflict. However, we believe it is a **voluntary act** and **cannot be imposed** (IDEA, 2003). It involves five interwoven and related strands:

Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society

The articulation of a common vision of an interdependent, just, equitable, open and diverse society. The development of a vision of a shared future requiring the involvement of the whole society, at all levels.

Acknowledging and dealing with the past

Acknowledging the hurt, losses, truths and suffering of the past. Providing the mechanisms for justice, healing, restitution or reparation, and restoration (including apologies if necessary and steps aimed at redress). Individuals and institutions acknowledge their own role in the conflicts of the past, accepting and learning from it in a constructive way so as to guarantee non-repetition.

Building positive relationships

Relationship building or renewal following violent conflict addressing issues of trust, prejudice, intolerance in this process resulting in accepting commonalities and differences, and embracing and engaging with those who are different to us.

Significant cultural and attitudinal change

Changes in how people relate to, and their attitudes towards, one another. The culture of suspicion, fear, mistrust and violence is broken down and opportunities and space opened up in which people can hear and be heard. A culture of respect for human rights and human difference is developed creating a context where each citizen becomes an active participant in society and feels a sense of belonging.

Substantial social, economic and political change

The social, economic and political structures which gave rise to the conflict and estrangement are identified, reconstructed or addressed, and transformed.



Two other factors are critically important, namely:



There are tensions, contradictions and paradoxes between the strands, e.g. reconciliation promotes an encounter between the open expression of the painful past but at the same time seeks a long-term, interdependent future (see Lederach, 1997). Reconciliation is therefore the process of how we deal with these tensions. Furthermore, reconciliation as a concept is always influenced by an individual's underlying assumptions. There are different **IDEOLOGIES** of reconciliation, e.g. a religious ideology often emphasises the re-discovering of a new conscience through moral reflection, repentance, confession and rebirth; a human rights approach might see it as achieved by regulating social interaction through the rule of law (see Hamber and van der Merwe, 1998; van der Merwe, 1999; Hamber, 2002).

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Working definition developed and adapted from: IDEA, 2003; Lederach, 1997; Porter, 2003; ADM/CPA, 2000; Rigby, 2001; Hamber, 2002; Hamber and van der Merwe, 1998; van der Merwe, 1999; Assefa 2001