

Sustainable Peace through Reconciliation

The proclamation of 2009 as International Reconciliation Year is historical. In the first place, it marks the beginning of a new diplomatic direction upon which concerted global peace-keeping efforts shall be pursued. Secondly, it draws our attention to indigenous cultural reconciliation rites that have effectively been used throughout the Ages in overcoming conflicts in various parts of the world .

Current reconciliation efforts are observed and applied in post-conflict societies. This understanding was clearly addressed by the proclaimed Resolution for the Reconciliation Year. The importance of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as of justice, the rule of law and compensation have been acknowledged as extremely valuable for post conflict societies..

As Her Excellency, the Ambassador of Nicaragua, has already highlighted, the perspective of post conflict societies and the other esteemed panellists will give you deep insights, I would have a look on Reconciliation in a more general sense.

In my speech I will focus on three items:

- the meaning of Reconciliation in different languages and the inherent cultural rituals
- the importance of reconciliation to mobilize democratic processes
- and the concrete implementation of the Reconciliation Year as well as the urgency for a Reconciliation Decade

When we look at the denotation of **reconciliation**, it has the **meaning** of : to settle or to resolve, to get two things correspond again, to re-establish cordial relations and

as synonyms : balance, rapprochement . By that reconciliation denominates the target itself as well as the process leading towards the target.

The corresponding word for reconciliation in other languages and cultures such as Arabic, Sanskrit, Hawai'i and African often reflect their coherent old rituals:

Due to time limitations, I will introduce the Hawaiian understanding of Reconciliation.

The **Hawaiian** word **Ho'oponopono** literally means "setting things right".

In Ho'oponopono the subject of conflict is taken before **a respected community leader** with broad authority and wisdom, the "haku". He will ask for absolute truth and humility, before the process starts. The meeting of both parties in conflict starts with a **prayer** for understanding, guidance and wisdom, **leading** the parties **into higher stats of consciousness**. It is followed by a **unravelling phase**, called "mahiki".

Here all who wish to speak have a platform to share the circumstances of the conflict from their point of view. When emotional outbursts or unsolicited comments become frequent, the haku can declare a "ho'omalū", a period of silence to reduce tensions.

In the resolution sequence, parties are invited to make a sincere **confession of their wrongdoings** ("mihi"), including wrong actions, words and thoughts. In the next step the parties may release the wrongdoing through an **offer of forgiveness** ("kala"). When the stage of forgiveness and complete **severage (release)** is accomplished, the haku can bind the parties to behaviour modification or, depending on the infringement, reparations or restitution. The ritual is closed by **a prayer** that **leads** the participants **out** of the sacred space and, finally, by **sharing food** as a symbol of restored harmony.

Different from customary paths to peace through adjudication, arbitration and mediation, which are mainly based on an intellectual process of weighing "facts" or

interests of involved parties, a closer view on different rites in different cultures reveals that **reconciliation addresses, to a high degree, qualities that lie beyond rationality**. Reconciliation as a thorough, sustainable transformation of a situation in the introduced rituals necessarily comprises a voluntary decision for reconciliation, in the process of itself stepping out of every day thoughts and reactions, pursuing absolute truth and authenticity, transition to another state of understanding and of consciousness. Thus, it reconnects the qualities of our left, rational part of our brain to those of our right, creative, compassionate and intuitive part, through wisdom-conducted forms of dialogue.

That broader approach of reconciliation is anticipated by the remark of former S. G. Kofi Annan, who stated “**reconciliation is the highest form of dialogue**”.

With this broad understanding, reconciliation is a tool of high relevance in order to **mobilize democratic processes**. Democracy is characterized by high principles such as human dignity, equity, freedom of speech, right to a fair hearing etc and characterized by providing **structures** that facilitate participation.

Yet, this framework of principles and structures is void, when it is known to people rationally, but not experienced subjectively.

Traditions of reconciliation, however, may facilitate a subjective experience of dignity, equity, fairness of listening. The very essence of reconciliation and of traditional rituals lies in the renewal and rebuilding of relations between people.

The renewal of relations is not only relevant for post conflict societies as a prerequisite for democratic participation, but equally relevant to other imbalances, for instance those observed right now globally in economics or those observed on the issue of migration, climate or environment.

Reconciliation has the power of renewal for all stakeholders in society : diplomacy, government, societies and families as well as for all issues of a society by starting new ways of dialogue, inspired by depth in traditional knowledge, that is adjusted to the implementation of Human Rights and to changed conditions of life.

Obviously, such a rebuilding of societies from within - in order to face present and future challenges – is a long-term process.

Starting with an impulse already known to people, the S.E.R. Foundation in its Action Plan for the International Reconciliation Year 2009 proposes to foster **a balancing encounter of people through creative arts**. A prominent example for what is meant has been shown for years by Daniel Barenboim and his West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, consisting of musicians from Israel and Arab countries.

Since many of you have initiated and projects on Reconciliation and carry them through during this Reconciliation Year, we invite you to register your projects on www.global-balance.de , so that all of the projects can be compiled and presented to the UN.

Furthermore, the **S.E.R. Foundation calls upon a Reconciliation Decade 2010 – 2020** to mobilize for reconciliation as an intensive and inclusive process, integrating all stakeholders such as former enemies, oppressors and victims, minorities, new and old political stakeholders, civil society and the media. It would stretch to all relevant issues of a society including politics, economy, environment/clima (nature), science, religion, ethnics. In a Decade of Reconciliation, **existing knowledge on reconciliatory traditions must become generally known**, accompanied by testing its application in suitable situations of - at first- diverse interests of minor quality. Thus the experience in each country may develop, (first) the conditions or tools to achieve genuineness in the process as well as compassion, (second) what enlarges

understanding beyond a existing situation, (third) what form of dialogue is most appropriate in its prospective area of conflict or opposing interests.

A decade for Reconciliation may be implemented by an UN Action Plan, by National Plans including, for instance, the Ministry of Culture and Religion / Faith in each country. Research on new approaches for high minded dialogues should be inserted, including new perspectives for diplomacy. Societies could acknowledge their responsibilities by initiating groups seeking broad participation on issues of diverse interest.

In order to attaining sustainable peace, reconciliation must to become a global movement.

o o o