

The Fourth Conference on National Dialogues, 11—12 June 2019
The House of the Estates, Helsinki

Reconciliation, Psychosocial Support and Dialogue

Objective of the session

This session aims to bring thematically together reconciliation, psychosocial support (PSS) and dialogue efforts to explore transformative capacities of their synergy through interventions from ‘insider reconcilers’, peace actors, or, community activists, facilitators and researchers. The session will address conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) as a cross-cutting theme in statements and discussion throughout the session.

Background

Reconciliation can broadly be conceived as the goal of peaceful co-existence towards which societies or groups divided by conflict aspire to move. Hamber and Kelly suggest that it may require action on five parallel strands: developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society; acknowledging and dealing with the past; building positive relationships; significant cultural and attitudinal change; and substantial social, economic and political change.¹

Lasting resolution of intrastate conflict requires more than agreements negotiated by political and military leaders: neighbours must learn to live together.² According to Nadler, reconciliation can be viewed through structural, relational and socio-emotional perspectives.³ These perspectives shed light to different dimensions of reconciliation: some of them can better be addressed through national dialogues while others cannot. As processes, reconciliation and national dialogues are not always overlapping although they have potential synergy.

Psychosocial⁴ peacebuilding refers to a holistic approach that integrates the theories and practices of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and peacebuilding (PB). The underlying assumptions behind the efforts of bringing PSS to peacebuilding field is that societies can change, and psychosocial

¹ Challenging the Conventional: Making Post-Violence Reconciliation Succeed, first published by Hamber, B., & Kelly, G. (2005). A Place for Reconciliation? Conflict and Locality in Northern Ireland (Report No. 18). Belfast, Northern Ireland: Democratic Dialogue.

² Jeff Seoul, *Reconciliation as Part of National Dialogue Processes: Background material for the Second Conference on Non-Formal Dialogue Processes and National Processes: Experiences from Countries in Transition* (2015).

³ Arie Nadler, *Reconciliation: Definitions and Processes*, Presentation at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (2000), available at

<https://www.umass.edu/peacepsychology/sites/default/files/Nadler@2010%20conference.pdf>

⁴ Psychosocial refers to the close relationship between the individual and the collective aspects of any social entity. Psychosocial support helps individuals and communities to heal the psychological wounds and rebuild social structures after an emergency or a critical event.

support may have transformative capacity when combined to community-based frameworks.⁵ According to Bubenzer et al. (2018), research evidence suggests that one approach of integrating MHPSS and PB is in restoring trust and rebuilding intercommunal relationships, which makes it meaningful to bring together reconciliation, PSS and dialogue in the 4th NDC conference.

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is used frequently and systematically by warring parties including non-state armed actors to target social cohesion of communities through women, girls, men and boys⁶. No longer seen as an inevitable by-product of war, it constitutes a crime that is preventable and punishable under International Human Rights Law, International Humanitarian Law and International Criminal Law. The UN also recognizes the need of PSS in dealing with the consequences of CRSV⁷, albeit on an individual survivor level.

Despite legal and normative acknowledgment of the need to address CRSV as part of peace building and post-conflict processes, shame and stigma surrounding sexual violence still prevent and hinder it from being sufficiently addressed in reconciliation related dialogues. Sexual violence as a weapon targets several levels simultaneously: individuals who suffer physical, mental – including severe traumatization – and social consequences (sometimes including unwanted pregnancies resulting from wartime rapes), families, as well as communities. How can CRSV be included in reconciliation in ways including PSS, that would best contribute to societal transformation toward healing?

Key questions

- What are the experiences of connecting reconciliation, psychosocial support and dialogue efforts, for example, for the inclusion, sustainability, and timeline of the peace processes?
- What are the relative advantages of different stakeholders in leading or facilitating the coordination of reconciliation, PSS and dialogue efforts?
- What kind of experiences are there on the affect for reconciliation of connecting- or, not connecting - local dialogue efforts with political processes?
- Research and experiences of incorporating PSS to reconciliation and/or dialogue, are still relatively scarce. Are there known disadvantages of not incorporating PSS to reconciliation and/or dialogue efforts? Are there disadvantages of incorporating PSS to these processes?

⁵ Friederike Bubenzer, Yvonne Sliep, Marian Tankink, *Nexus Between Mental Health & PSS and Peacebuilding: A Presentation of Research Findings, Opportunities and Dilemmas*, September 2018, Helsinki Peace Talks.

⁶ Although evidence and research suggest that sexual violence as an extreme form of patriarchal violence is more usual and wide-spread against women and girls, there is growing international attention to and recognition of CRSV against men and boys. See, for example, UNSR 2467 and the Annual Report 2018 of the UN Secretary General António Guterres on CRSV.

⁷ *Recognizing the importance of providing timely assistance to survivors of sexual violence, urges United Nations entities and donors to provide non-discriminatory and comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial, legal, and livelihood support and other multi-sectoral services for survivors of sexual violence* [S/RES/2106, 2013, para. 19](#).

- How can conflict-related sexual violence be addressed in reconciliation and dialogue processes directly and through PSS? Are there community-based frameworks that would be best suited to include the consequences of sexual violence in social healing of communities?
- How can intergenerationally transmitted experiences of injustices and violence (including gendered experiences such as sexual violence) best be addressed in reconciliation? What roles can different forms of PSS play?

Composition of the session

- Dr Abiye Iruayenama, Head of Psychology Department / Training Centre, Neem Foundation
- Ms Anne Nuorgam, Chair, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Finland
- Ms Rowda Olad, Clinical Director, Maandeq Mental Health WB, Somalia
- Mr Zedoun al Zoubi, Common Space Initiative

- *Facilitator: Mr Antti Pentikäinen, Research Professor, Director, Mary Koch Center for Reconciliation, George Mason University*

The session will take the form of a workshop that is focused on dialogue with the audience. The speakers are invited to share experiences from their own context relating to reconciliation (experiences, hopes, best practices), PSS (practice and needs incl. among sexual violence survivors) and dialogue(s) while time will also be allocated for reflections from the audience.

