

Dialogue Report:

**Measuring Reconciliation in South Africa:
Identifying and Interpreting Indicators of Change**

12 August, 2010, Cape Town

On 12th August, the SA Reconciliation Barometer project of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) hosted a one-day public dialogue in Cape Town, on the topic of *Measuring Reconciliation in South Africa: Identifying and Interpreting Indicators of Change*.

Since 2003, the IJR has sought to measure progress in reconciliation through the SA Reconciliation Barometer survey: a nationally-representative public opinion poll testing citizen attitudes on reconciliation across a range of key indicators. With the tenth survey round completed this year, the Institute brought together researchers, academics, students and practitioners at the dialogue with the following aims: (1) to reflect on and assess efforts to measure progress in reconciliation to date; (2) to explore and debate the current state of reconciliation in South Africa in 2010; and, to identify and interrogate indicators of reconciliation, their relevance and longevity.

Opening

The dialogue was opened by Dr. Fanie du Toit, Executive Director of the IJR, who emphasised the importance of revisiting the concept of reconciliation after sixteen years of democracy in South Africa. He asked whether or not the meaning of reconciliation today has changed since 1994, and if the country has overcome the divisions of the past. Dr. du Toit discussed each of the six indicators used in the SA Reconciliation Barometer survey, and encouraged participants to debate and discuss their continued meaning and relevance. These indicators are: political culture; human security; cross-cutting political relationships; dialogue; historical confrontation; and race relations.

Session One: The practice of measuring reconciliation

With the apologies of Dr. Tim Murithi, manager of the Transitional Justice in Africa programme at the IJR, the first session was chaired by Kate Lefko-Everett, project leader of the SA Reconciliation Barometer.

Jan Hofmeyr, manager of the IJR's Political Analysis programme, began the session with an overview of the ten rounds of the SA Reconciliation Barometer survey conducted between 2003 and 2010. His presentation included a detailed examination of the survey's research methodology and sampling strategy.

Mr. Hofmeyr then outlined the trends in each of the six indicators over time. He noted the high degree of correlation between measures of economic and physical security, as well as the overall decline in confidence in governance institutions and the implications of these findings for political stability in the country. Religious institutions continue to attract high levels of trust and confidence from citizens. Survey findings suggest that South Africans feel it is desirable to create one united country; however, economic inequality – as well as race, though to a lesser extent – is consistently viewed as the biggest source of division in the country. He also noted the positive relationship between levels of optimism and the economic cycles experienced within South Africa.

Mr. Hofmeyr's presentation also identified a number of shortfalls in the SA Reconciliation Barometer's methodology and approach, the first being a lack of in-depth or qualitative data that could potentially provide greater insight into complex views on reconciliation. Public opinion surveys of this kind also elicit some challenges related to accurate translation, and the extent to which respondents answer honestly. Nonetheless, the survey's strengths include its national reach and its value as a longitudinal resource for law and policy-making. The challenge for the project going forward is ensuring that the survey continues to effectively measure national reconciliation, and ascertaining whether or not the meaning of this concept has changed over time.

Ms. Lefko-Everett then presented the interim findings of an in-depth expert study exploring the meaning of reconciliation in South Africa in 2010. The study posed a range of questions, including whether reconciliation is a finite process, what a reconciled South Africa should 'look like', and whether or not the measurement of reconciliation remains important and relevant.

The study elicited a wide range of responses from South Africa and abroad. In terms of past views and expectations, immediately following the democratic transition respondents viewed reconciliation as primarily taking place at a political level. Some described this as an elite process that was expected to 'filter down' to ordinary citizens. At the time, the meanings and tasks attached to reconciliation included the identification of human rights abuses that took place, racial integration, encouraging national unity and bringing about the redistribution of resources.

Many respondents felt that the reconciliation process is still ongoing today. While there have been some successes and achievements, the issues of equality and socioeconomic rights have assumed increasing precedence. New considerations have also emerged, such as xenophobia and structural violence, indicating that the reconciliatory project may be

broader and more complex than initially envisaged. Respondents also emphasised the need for more social integration.

Professor Charles Villa-Vicencio, founding director of the IJR and current research associate, then discussed the climate in which the Institute was established, during a period in which reconciliation was 'in vogue.' At the time, reconciliation was conceived as beyond merely peaceful coexistence, but not quite as entailing complete forgiveness. This environment gave rise to the notion of political reconciliation, which referred to the processes of developing civic trust, entrenching mutual respect, and endeavouring to sit with adversaries and work on political answers to problems. Political reconciliation as such was a 'modest concept', in that it did not require embracing enemies but did involve finding ways to live together. Professor Villa-Vicencio described the SA Reconciliation Barometer project as an attempt to contribute to debate on reconciliation, and to generate strong social scientific data that was widely accessible.

Professor Villa-Vicencio also observed that there have been shifts in conversations around reconciliation. People have begun to publicly state those things they used to only say in private and have become more outspoken. While there may not be reconciliation yet, the silence has been broken. He proposed that there should be consideration of how the SA Reconciliation Barometer fits into this, and how it can reflect the new dimensions of the debate. In closing, he commented that the Barometer should also become more vociferous in its expression of both anger and 'feel-good moments' such as the unifying national response to the 2010 World Cup, and should tackle important issues such as poverty.

In the discussion that followed, dialogue participants raised a range of questions and comments, including: the inclusion of issues of gender and sexual orientation in the Barometer survey; the use of accountability of an indicator; the need for a broad consensus on the racialisation; and potential consequences of a 'moderate' understanding of reconciliation. Participants also asked about reconciliation within IJR, and more broadly, who in South Africa is engaged in the reconciliation process.

Session Two: The state of reconciliation in South Africa today

The second session of the dialogue was chaired by Dr. du Toit, and included inputs from Ms Raenette Taljaard of the University of Cape Town, Mr. Kenneth Lukuko of the IJR, and Reverend Courtney Sampson of the Western Cape Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

To begin, Ms. Taljaard shared her perspective on reconciliation, and encouraged the SA Reconciliation Barometer project to include what she termed 'inequality plus plus', in recognition of a new phase in South African history in which difficult questions about the transition to democracy and the development of the constitution are beginning to emerge.

Ms. Taljaard read an excerpt from *Tales of Freedom* by Ben Okri, "The Mysterious Anxiety of Them and Us", which she used to discuss her own conflicted feelings about South Africa's

apartheid past. She emphasised the importance of recognising and confronting the challenges that poverty and inequality pose to the country's political and social stability, which to some extent has been masked by vigorous economic growth in the recent past. Class has increasingly displaced race as the dominant cleavage in South African society, and creative policy is required in order to normalise social relations. Ms. Taljaard observed that pre-1994 socialisation patterns continue to be replicated because of the unresolved legacy of the past. She proposed that the SA Reconciliation Barometer should do more to address the issue of socioeconomic inequality, and harness complementarities with other civil society organisations, in order to expand the reach of the project and measure social marginalisation and exclusion.

Mr. Lukuko, project leader of Community Healing at the IJR, presented a range of lessons learned through his experiences in the field. He referred to Dr. du Toit's statement that the reconciliation debate is conducted primarily among elites, but noted that current research is moving closer towards communities, and with a new emphasis on the quality of interactions between South Africans. With the aim of avoiding a new pessimism around an issue in which expectations greatly exceed capabilities, the Community Healing project addresses both personal and collective reconciliation, reflecting some of these changes in research. While the project originally was based on a geographic focus, this has been re-framed to include more diverse participants, and expanded in 2007 through partnership with provincial government in the Social Transformation programme.

Mr. Lukuko also discussed how work in other post-conflict societies has led to new insights about reconciliation in South Africa, particularly in terms of changing perceptions of perpetrators and victims. He added that it is important to move from acknowledging and celebrating diverse narratives, for example through the IJR's oral history programmes, to forming an inclusive narrative about the future for South African society as a whole. He also referred to the role of the media as important, particularly in a context in which access to information is uneven.

Reverend Courtney Sampson then discussed both the realities and distortions of the reconciliation debate in South Africa. He identified three generations of South Africans shaped by their experience – or lack thereof – of apartheid injustice. He suggested that this debate is often driven by a disproportionately vocal minority claiming to speak for a silent majority, but who in fact unaware of the concerns and preferences of this larger group.

Reverend Sampson addressed distortions in the current debates around race, inequality, identity, apartheid, national icons and leadership, and stressed the importance of distinguishing between 'race thinking', 'race consciousness' and racism in understanding the past. He suggested that progress in reconciliation may be threatened by those who imply that apartheid is wrongly blamed for South Africa's current problems. He concluded with comments on the state of political leadership today, which has shifted from an orientation of sacrifice to one of comfort.

An extensive and enthusiastic discussion followed these presentations, which broadly focused on: prospects for nation-building; the main drivers of reconciliation today; the concept of 'inequality plus plus' introduced by Ms Taljaard; and the scope of the SA Reconciliation Barometer. Panellists were asked to share their perspectives on the relationship between reconciliation and nation-building: it was agreed that this was an important link, but that nation-building remains elusive today for the majority of South Africans. Reverend Sampson suggested that progress could be made through, as in the USA, creating a 'state-nation' in which citizenship is fundamentally tied to constitutional allegiance.

In response to the question of who should drive reconciliation, Ms. Taljaard suggested that society cannot necessarily rely on political leadership to take full responsibility for this project, and Reverend Sampson cautioned against comparing the contributions of current political leaders to those of the past. Participants expressed concern over the resilience of pockets of political extremism and the threat this poses to reconciliation; others highlighted the role of the middle class in driving this process. The discussion also focused on 'inequality plus plus', and the challenge of restoring human dignity to apartheid's victims in the current economy.

Session Three: Identifying indicators of reconciliation

The third, and final session of the dialogue was chaired by Mr. Hofmeyr, and included presentations by Ms. Helen Macdonald of Ipsos-Markinor, Professor Robert Mattes of the University of Cape Town, and Mr Irénée Bugingo and Mr. Révérien Interayamahanga of the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP), Kigali.

Ms Macdonald began with a discussion focused on operationalising reconciliation theory as an abstract concept. Based on her previous work at the IJR and the current partnership between Ipsos-Markinor and the SA Reconciliation Barometer project, she described how – at the outset of the survey – the concept of reconciliation was unpacked into separate attributes and indicators, leading to scientific generalisations. Conceptually, reconciliation consists of a set of attitudes, values and behaviours, and as such is very difficult to measure. It is also a complex and changing concept, and Ms Macdonald underscored the importance of periodically reviewing reconciliation measures. She also suggested that the project should consider: further statistical interrogation of current indicators; expanding measures related to behaviours; and qualitative research or focus groups, which would complement the survey and potentially generate new information on attitudes and indicators.

Mr. Bugingo introduced the IRDP, which was founded in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, and is currently collaborating with the IJR on conducting a Reconciliation Barometer survey in that country. The survey was conducted across Rwanda, and focused on identifying current challenges to reconciliation. Interim findings underscored challenges related to political conflict and power-sharing, as well as to identity. Many of these

challenges can be traced to before the 1959 independence movement and violent conflict during the 1990s prior to the genocide. The issue of reconciliation also featured in the Arusha talks. In Rwanda, there are still issues related to who should reconcile with whom, and how this should take place.

Mr. Interayamahanga then discussed the process of developing reconciliation indicators for Rwanda, which included an in-depth review of literature and previous research, as well as consultations with a range of stakeholder institutions. The indicators developed together with IJR aimed to measure both 'horizontal' and 'vertical' aspects of reconciliation, including levels of trust in government and institutions, and between Rwandans themselves. However, encouraging citizens to give open and honest responses proved difficult during the fieldwork, and presents a significant methodological challenge. Many citizens expressed concern over government response to the research, and this was heightened during the lead-up to August elections.

In the final input of the session, Professor Mattes made two broad recommendations regarding the operationalisation of measures of reconciliation through the Barometer survey. First, he cautioned against incorporating both the causes and outcomes of reconciliation into the operational concept, suggesting that some variables are analytically distinct – such as those designed to measure legitimacy – and therefore do not effectively measure reconciliation in and of itself. He also observed that because the Reconciliation Barometer focuses primarily on horizontal reconciliation between groups of citizens, measures could be introduced to assess the more vertical aspects of reconciliation: for example, attitudes toward progressive taxation, property redistribution and the national anthem.

The discussion that followed focused on the broad concept of reconciliation, as well as on the framing of appropriate indicators for both South Africa and Rwanda. In Rwanda, research on reconciliation is complicated by strong sanctions around the discourse of ethnic identity, and in fact many citizens believe that talking about ethnicity is against the law altogether. Ms. Macdonald addressed questions on the beneficiaries of reconciliation in South Africa, emphasising that there is no clear end-point to the process: while it first began through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), further work now continues primarily within civil society. Professor Mattes added that reconciliatory efforts were motivated in part by the need to prevent retribution; in some respects, those who benefitted through the TRC continue to benefit today.

Dialogue participants also asked panellists to discuss the role of South Africa's current socioeconomic challenges in relation to reconciliation indicators. Professor Mattes noted that issues related to economic redress and the redistributive impact of social grants could be explored further, and also suggested the inclusion of markers indicating citizens who are more, or less reconciled. Ms Macdonald also commented that reconciliation occurs on different levels within South Africa. Also, it is not necessarily at the forefront of ordinary

citizens' agendas any longer, and the IJR needs to work to include multiple and accurate readings through its various projects. Panellists agreed that more needs to be done in terms of measures related to poverty, inequality and socioeconomic issues, underscoring the continued relevance of measuring reconciliation through the Reconciliation Barometer survey and other mechanisms.

Close

The dialogue was closed by Ms. Lefko-Everett, who thanked panellists and participants for their valuable contributions. Participants were encouraged to continue to provide feedback to the SA Reconciliation Barometer project and to the IJR, and Ms. Lefko-Everett noted the availability of survey data for academics, researchers, civil society organisations, students and other interested parties.

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