

# PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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## Elements in the Process of Reconciliation

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Former enemies frequently find themselves neighbors again, needing to accommodate to a shared future. Although different societies take different paths towards reconciliation, certain common elements seem necessary to complete this journey successfully. The following list summarizes several components of reconciliation that should be considered by local or outside facilitators of peacebuilding when working with recovering communities.

- **Safety and security:** Those who have been harmed by violence, often by the security services supposedly responsible for their protection, need reassurance of their complete safety.
- **Acknowledgment:** Without admission of guilt and responsibility for the destruction that has been wrought, it is almost impossible for those injured to move forward. Denial by perpetrating groups leaves victim groups feeling unseen, unsafe, untrusting and re-wounded. Profound losses must be recognized; truth must be told; dehumanized groups must be reunited into the community or nation.
- **Genuine Apology:** Following acknowledgment, victim groups long for both official and private apologies, through which they experience the contrition of perpetrators and a sense that those who committed crimes do indeed feel remorse.
- **Reparations:** Those who have been harmed look to the state and/or the perpetrators for compensation, either material or symbolic, to help them rebuild their lives and manage their losses. While ultimate compensation for grief, suffering and irreparable damage can never be achieved, reparations do offer care and connection.
- **Commitment:** Victim groups need reassurance that the atrocities are over, the state and/or international community will protect them, coexistence is the new norm, and such violence will not recur.
- **Justice and institutional change:** Reconciliation requires that unjust and discriminatory political, economic and social structures, practices, and relations be redressed so that the benefits of society are shared by all and power and privilege are more equally distributed.
- **Binding forces:** Community should be nurtured through development and educational programs, perpetrators punished, history of the violence written from multi-perspectives, memorials to the atrocities planned and a joint future envisioned by all sectors of society.

*PsySR's Program on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation focuses on the many key issues highlighted in this brief overview. For more information, please contact coordinators Jancis Long ([jancislong2004@yahoo.com](mailto:jancislong2004@yahoo.com)) and Paula Green ([paula@karunacenter.org](mailto:paula@karunacenter.org)). We encourage new PsySR members to join us in these efforts. Media inquiries are also welcome.*

*PsySR member Paula Green is Director of the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding. She has led experiential social healing and reconciliation seminars worldwide and has consulted to governmental and NGO representatives on establishing national social healing programs following mass violence.*