



Reconciliation- a chance for sustainable peace, progress and economic growth

The devastating effects of almost three decades of the violent conflict in Sri Lanka are still being felt by the society. Since the causes are well-known, the focus should be shifted to find remedies for the current post-conflict situation, the most important being reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a vital issue after an intrastate ethnic conflict due to the fact that all conflict parties have to continue living side-by-side even after the end of a violent ethnic conflict. As the declaration of peace doesn't automatically lead to a paradigm shift, proactively driven reconciliation programs are inevitable. An effective reconciliation program should involve

- 1) necessary constitutional amendments,
- 2) promoting education and religious studies,
- 3) methods to ensure the proper administration of justice, finding appropriate methods of communication to achieve a gradual change in attitudes and emotions of the conflict effected parties and
- 4) targeting adequate economic growth with an equitable distribution of resources, to make the process a success.

The international community can contribute to the reconciliation process by helping to establish cooperative and friendly relationships between the past adversaries and potentially by providing economic assistance to the conflict hit country. Additionally, observing examples of countries which have gone through a process of reconciliation and achieved peaceful relationships of all ethnic groups leading to tangible benefits for all members of the society since then, could also be helpful. Nevertheless, the reconciliation process should be determined by our own experience and using locally-based solutions, rather than seeking solutions adopted from elsewhere, as well as seeking to resolve problems as determined by foreign powers. There should be no accusations of concerned parties, either by locals or the international community, as this can hinder the process of reconciliation and hence long lasting peace. All parties should accept their responsibility both in the conflict as well as in the task of reconciliation.



1) Constitutional reforms

In general constitutional reform precedes reconciliation to reframe and reset the relationship of a nation and to establish a new level of confidence that opens the hearts and minds of the people, to bring harmony and equity to the society. Reconciliation is the process of repairing a relationship so that re-engagement, trust, and cooperation become possible after a violent conflict. Hence necessary constitutional reforms should be seen as package of reforms targeted to prevent destructive cycles of human interactions occurred in the past, taking place again.

In a secular state with the constitution enjoying canonical status, it is of utmost importance to follow the doctrine of the sovereignty of the State and equal rights of the people including administrative litigation as well as separation of powers including independence of the judiciary. This concept is important for everyone to understand and respect the architecture of power and to create an environment in which a person enjoys his or her rights as an individual, as a community and as the collective of the people in a country.

2) Education and Religion

Education constitutes one of the most important methods for promoting reconciliation. The school system can provide students with knowledge that is consistent with the principles of reconciliation. People-to-people interaction, by means of local tourism and exchange programs of students and workers among ethnic groups, is another method for facilitating cultural understanding and furthering reconciliation. Promoting bilateral exchanges significantly contributes to remove psychological barriers in social relations between the once hostile fractions. Second, tourism and exchange programs provide an opportunity to learn about the former rival's readiness to form peaceful relations and to learn about the others culture, history, economy, etc. Eventually, it is hoped that in time, there will not

be a reference to one another as a "former rival", but as another member of the same society, irrespective of culture and ethnicity.

Genuine religious education across all sectors is a unique leverage for promoting reconciliation among conflict parties. Religious understanding helps to change the collective emotional orientations of fear, anger and hatred, which often dominate societies in intractable conflict, and create an emotional orientation of hope, which reflects the



desire for positive goals of maintaining peaceful and cooperative relations with each other. The commendable role of all religious leaders should be prominently utilized in the reconciliation process as an asset in peacemaking. Religious leaders from all religious communities can present a particularly effective example of reconciliation by working together for peace.

3) Administering Justice and communicating the message of reconciliation

Key prerequisites for a successful reconciliation process are administering justice and maintaining law and order as well an appropriate degree of security to prevent any backlashes or new violence particularly created by opponents of the reconciliation process. As a reconciliation process should be lived by the people, it is of significant importance to communicate the long term importance of peaceful coexistence to all segments in the society. Even the pessimists should be convinced of the benefits of a successful reconciliation process for the entire population of the country. This process of building confidence and changing behavior should be targeted at all levels, from top levels to grassroots including political parties and the political elite.

Justice during a reconciliation process includes transitional justice (fair civil or criminal trials for accused individuals and institutions, fact finding bodies that include the truth commission, office for reparations and adequate support to all people hardly hit by the conflict especially families of missing people) as well as social justice and economical justice. The aim of transitional justice is to recognize the policy that seeks measures to achieve accountability for past crimes and the prevention of new crimes. Hence the trials will adjudicate its duty and recognize that the action and measures deemed to be taken should balance to the need of peace, democracy, equitable developments, and rule of law.

Social justice and economical justice, closely interlinked, can only be achieved with sustainable growth rates and an equitable distribution of the acquired national wealth. To achieve these goals especially in a transitional period with an ongoing reconciliation process it is vital to prevent any eruptions of extremist nationalism and to detect the advantages of a pluralistic society, especially the benefits of diversity as a chance for a great economic development.



4) Economic growth with an equitable distribution of resources

Economic development is one of the most important tools in the "reconciliation toolkit". In this final section of the paper, the focus will be on diversity as a catalyst for economic development and nationalism as an obstacle of economic and social progress.

a) Diversity

It is undisputed that an organization's success and competitiveness also depends upon its ability to embrace diversity and realize the benefits. Worldwide leading companies which have actively incorporated diversity to staff structures by incorporating different ethnic and geographical origins, different religions, all genders, all ages etc. are obtaining multiple benefits including solid and sustainable growth rates with respectable dividends as well as social stability.

In the same manner national economies can benefit from advantages of diversity when managed by a government accepting plurality as a chance of integral development. Respecting diversity is inevitably the best contribution to long lasting peace besides economic prosperity and social progress. Some of the world's richest and most peaceful countries are historically multi-ethnic, such as Switzerland, Canada and Belgium. And some other richest countries of the world have been destinations of immigrants from around the world, making America, Australia and Britain wealthy nations with a significant grade of diversity.

The best possible allocation of human resources in a society for the most effective progress of the country should be the leitmotif of every development oriented government. Positive consequences of diversity will occur when full participation across all levels of society for members of diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural groups are granted and when a common cause across these levels is created.

The royal road to success is to find an appropriate balance between maintaining the distinct identity of all ethnic and religious groups and binding all groups to the central state with a guiding culture not dominated by any ethnic group. Such a mode of governance lends an overlapping identity leading to social stability in a diverse country. This theory of course presupposes that there are no resentments of the majority and that the majority respects religious and cultural liberty of all ethnic groups sharing the national territories of the country. It at least assumes a balanced position of the majority, willing to compromise on distinctive stances and historical grudges for the long term benefit of the country.



b) Nationalism and national identity

Multiethnic countries which have successfully undergone a (re)conciliation process in the past and achieved a widely accepted national identity overcoming scattered identities have reached higher levels of economic growth and per capita income than countries in which two or more ethnic identities are prevailing.

To understand this phenomenon, causes of ethnic nationalist politics should be analyzed. Ethnic politics are often promoted by political elites from top to bottom, to mobilize the population for their own political and personal gains. This elite-initiated nationalism must also be matched by a simultaneous bottom-up movement. The population can only be mobilized for nationalist extremism if a sense of insecurity, poverty and low education standards are prevailing in the society. This is the main reason that nationalist oriented regimes take less efforts to increase overall economical and social standards and spend national wealth instead on prestigious mega-projects with no benefits to the generality, to enhance nationalism and boost own popularity.

Consequently on the other side when a country's economy grows and the standard of living increases for wide sections of the population ethnicity loses its character as the predominant political agenda. When there is an absence of extreme inequality between competing ethnic groups in terms of economic resources and political power, it is much harder for the elites to capitalize on the nationalist feeling of the people. When the population achieves a relatively high living standard, they have a much higher threshold to get engaged in ethnic conflicts.

Politics dominated by ethnic topics and poor economic development as a result, build a vicious circle as the one is essential for the other. Hence it is of paramount importance to implement, enforce and conclude a successful process of reconciliation as a unitary society tends towards political stability while the society dominated by ethnic differences is very sensitive for conflicts.

The ongoing reconciliation process in Sri Lanka is a complex undertaking that seeks to publicly restore social ties and economic livelihoods through a homegrown top-down approach. To ensure long term peace a simultaneous bottom-up process involving all parts of the society should be actively initiated and promoted, transporting the message "never again violence" to hearts and minds of all Sri Lankans. Only through such an approach the society can be moved from a divided past to shared future for the benefit of all.