

What can you do?

- Visit our web site:
www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international and send your questions, comments and reflections;
- Write to us to the address written below asking for more information, resources and activities to be held in your region;
- Join the Decade to Overcome Violence's efforts to build a 'peace with justice' society;
- Share your experience on traditional ways of reconciliation, restorative justice procedures and Truth Commissions;
- Send us your own experiences on ways of dealing with impunity and building reconciliation

Our logo: Something more than a legend

The famous Bocca della Verità or "Mouth of the Truth" is a gnarled weather-beaten stone face used by the ancient Romans as a drain cover. The legend says that if you place your hand in the Bocca and if you lie the mouth will suddenly shut.



La Bocca della Verità – Church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, Rome

From a theological perspective, truth is a central part of Jesus' message, and is also Jesus himself: "I am the way and the truth and the life (John 14,6). Jesus related truth to authentic freedom: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8,32). In the Old Testament, truth is directly related to justice (Psalms 85, 10-11): "Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven." Used by Charles Harper for the edition of his book on Impunity, it has been adopted by the programme as its logo.

Some WCC Publications on these issues

- BAUM, Gregory & WELLS, Harold, *The reconciliation of peoples: challenges to the Churches*, Geneva, WCC/Orbis Books 1997
- HARPER, Charles (editor), *Impunity. An Ethical perspective. Six case studies from Latin America*. Geneva, 1996 (English and Spanish editions available)
- JACQUES, Geneviève, *Beyond Impunity*, Geneva., WCC 2000 (English, French and Spanish editions available).
- KERBER, Guillermo, *Overcoming violence and Pursuing Justice in The Ecumenical Review*, WCC, Geneva, April 2003, p. 151 – 157.
- MÜLLER-FAHRENHOLZ, Geiko, *The art of forgiveness. Theological reflections on healing and reconciliation.*, Geneva, WCC 1997.



World Council of Churches

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The World Council of Churches (WCC), formally inaugurated in 1948 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, is a fellowship of churches, now 342, in more than 100 countries. These churches represent around 400 million Christians in all continents.

Impunity, Truth, Justice and Reconciliation



A programme
of the
International Affairs, Peace and
Human Security Team
of the

World Council of Churches

Presentation

The proliferation of new, complex conflicts since the end of the Cold War has posed new, urgent challenges to the churches. Not only have these conflicts claimed an unprecedented toll of civilian lives, but in many of them the religious factor has moved to the center. Many of these conflicts have not fit into the traditional model of inter-state wars for territory or domination, but rather have been intra-state battles between ethnic, national and racial groups. They have thus taken the international community by surprise and have defied traditional approaches to settlement. Studies undertaken by specialists in conflict resolution have shown that a dominant cause of such conflicts are histories of unresolved tensions arising from past offenses of one party against another.

The granting of impunity, *de jure* or *de facto*, to those who have committed grave crimes against humanity in the past; the failure of societies or of the international community to seek and admit the truth about these crimes; and the smoldering resentment of offended parties are often at the root of conflict. Churches around the world have increasingly seen the need to understand these dynamics better in order that they may become true agents of reconciliation.

Since 1993, the World Council of Churches has been engaged in a programme on Impunity, Truth and Reconciliation to study and help the churches act upon these trends. As part of the International Affairs, Peace and Human Security Team, the programme has close links to issues such as Human Rights, Peacebuilding strategies, UN relations, as well as peaceful responses to conflicts in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Pacific. And since the beginning of 2001, the Programme on Impunity, Truth, Justice and Reconciliation has been closely linked to the *Decade to Overcome Violence: churches seeking reconciliation and peace*, as one of the WCC's contributions to this effort.

Goals

- to provide member churches, ecumenical organizations and Christians advice and support on overcoming impunity, on Truth commissions and on peace and reconciliation processes;
- to develop a wider network of legal specialists, sociologists, theologians and ethicists working on these issues;
- to strengthen links with sectors of the international community involved in these issues;
- to reflect on Impunity, Truth, Justice and Reconciliation and related issues, from a theological and ethical perspective, as a contribution to the *Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches seeking reconciliation and peace*



Restorative Justice, the International Criminal Court and Peace and Reconciliation processes

Special attention has been put to deepen the reflection on **Restorative Justice**. Methods related to this concept have been applied in a broad variety of situations, from victim-offender programmes in the context of youth criminal justice procedures to the Truth & Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. From the programme's perspective, restorative justice includes all those methodologies that try to restore broken and wounded communities and societies through procedures where a victim-centered process, community and dialogue are central elements. A booklet (*Restorative Justice. Selected Readings*) has been published in 2001 as an introduction to the various experiences of Restorative Justice procedures.

Different steps have been taken to support the establishment of the **International Criminal Court**, as an adequate means to overcome impunity. Since then, the programme has specially highlighted the reconciliatory role it should play and joined other civil society and religious organizations' initiatives to shape the work of the ICC.

Some experiences of **Peace and Reconciliation Processes**, showed that these processes, related many times to Truth Commissions, filled a space left vacant in the process of restoring relationships within societies. The participation of churches and Christians and the role of theological reflection have been crucial in these experiences, demonstrating the spiritual role of Truth Commissions. The programme tries to encourage churches, church leaders and individual Christians to engage in national and international processes that seek reconciliation and peace.

Other WCC International Affairs, Peace and Human Security Programmes

- Human Rights and Religious Freedom
- Disarmament and arms control
- Peace and conflict resolution
- Global governance including UN relations

