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The Truth Will Set You Free

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Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC), which have emerged as an international norm during the last quarter of a century, have been established in nearly forty countries and have become an important element for national reconciliation and post conflict peace-building. Some of them have been ill-born, while others have been successful, providing a model for future truth-seeking processes.

TRCs have been established in countries emerging out of conflict or political turmoil in all parts of the globe, primarily in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia. They are official, temporary bodies set up in a conflict-torn country to investigate a past history of widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian law over a specific period of time. Their purpose is to clarify what actually happened during the conflict, to establish a common truth and history about the human rights violations. Such uncovering of the truth and the resulting common historical narrative helps to bring a divided country and people together, heal the wounds, restore justice and lead to a process of reconciliation.

In general, TRCs offer to the victims and the perpetrators alike a unique setting to tell their stories and in this way contribute towards creating a sound record of the human rights violations committed by all participants to the conflict, thereby unifying the separate narratives into a common narrative. This in turn helps the healing process by acknowledging the pain, suffering and loss of the other and by building a consensus as to the origins of the conflict and the factors that allowed abuses to take place.

In order for a TRC to be vested with the necessary authority and legitimacy, it should be established by an executive order or by an act of Parliament. Nevertheless, civil society should be fully involved in order to provide the much needed support

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throughout the process and render the TRC's findings acceptable to the broader public.

In Cyprus if a TRC is established before a settlement, it could follow an agreement of the two leaders and be placed under the auspices of the UN. If its establishment will follow a settlement, it should be the result of an action of the Federal Executive or Federal Parliament.

The mandate of the TRC is extremely important because it can define its powers, limit or strengthen its investigative role, outline the nature of the abuses and relevant perpetrators it will be allowed to investigate, set the conditions under which a process for granting amnesty will be included and whether a report will be completed, including recommendations, which will be published and widely disseminated. The most successful TRCs have had a broad and comprehensive mandate covering all types of abuses, such as killings, abductions and enforced disappearances, forced exile, illegal detention, torture, cruel and degrading treatment, sexual violence etc. In order to carry out their mandate, TRCs should be able to have full access to all relevant files and sources of information, including interviews from victims and perpetrators alike.

The composition of the TRC has to be broad and diverse to allow representation of all relevant groups, based on ethnic background, religion, political affiliation, age and gender that will render it more easily acceptable to the general public.

There is no specific model that can be copy-pasted. Each TRC must reflect the realities and the characteristics of the particular environment and conflict. Above all, in order to be successful it should reflect a national commitment to fully reveal the truth, open the festering wounds and start a national healing and reconciliation process, thus ensuring that the awful experiences of the past will not be repeated.
