

Mr. Baja (Philippines): I would like to congratulate your delegation, Madam President, for organizing this debate on a very timely topic and for organizing an Arria formula debate on the same topic last week. We are again honoured by your presence and by your presiding over this meeting on the eve of your much-awaited visit to my country. We are also grateful for the very informative briefings given by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The issue of national reconciliation has touched every nation in one form or another, some in the distant past while others more recently, if not even at the present time. No country has ever been homogenous in all respects. All are liable to be challenged by fissures in the fabric of their societies, some more acutely than others.

There are diverse sources of the division of societies and communities, and experience has shown that they run the gamut of racial, ethnic, political, ideological and religious factors. Unfortunately, such conflict sometimes leads to violent confrontation and the breakdown of the body politic. If this happens, the easier task is to stop the violence. The harder challenge is to begin the process of reconciliation and reverse the dynamics of conflict that ruptured the society. Winning the war is easier than winning the peace.

My delegation would like to add further emphasis to some general propositions referred to previously by members of the Council that have enriched our discussion of the topic at hand.

First, there are no quick fixes to achieve reconciliation in post-conflict societies. National reconciliation generally takes place through a long-term process, aided by policies and actions that confront the conflict head-on. It requires serious efforts to take stock of, assess and analyse the conditions under which reconciliation can take place. While there are no easy solutions, the process of reconciliation is indispensable to ensure the long-lasting stability of post-conflict societies.

Secondly, national reconciliation is essentially an internal process and cannot be imposed externally on communities in conflict. I think the delegations of Brazil and the United Kingdom have eloquently observed that. The context of each post-conflict society is unique. The parameters of the process of reconciliation must grow out of the specific experiences of the society concerned. No external body or organ can decree reconciliation from the outside. That would invite disaster. Stakeholders in post-conflict societies must have the sense of having ownership of the process if it is to bring about the emergence of institutions and practices capable of creatively resolving the kind of social and political tensions that led to past violent conflict.

This is not to say, however, that the expertise and the guidance that could be provided by outside groups such as the United Nations have no place in national reconciliation processes. In many instances, the traumas of violent conflicts are so deep that conflicting groups require the even-handedness of objective outsiders to overcome emotional, cultural, political and other hurdles to mount a successful reconciliation process. But such an intervention, while desirable in certain instances, must be pursued carefully to maintain the integrity of the reconciliation process. One danger that could undermine such integrity would be for the interveners to yield, wittingly or unwittingly, to the temptation of supplanting the goals and values of the stakeholders with their own.

Thirdly, reconciliation should delve into a conflict's dynamics, which span the entire political, physical, cultural and psycho-social dimensions of the society concerned. The physical and political ravages of war and violence are clearly felt and observed and, more often than not, become the focus of attention in the reconstruction of societies in transition. While this is an important consideration, those ravages do not represent the totality of the negative impact of conflict. Healing the hearts and minds of victims in post-conflict societies is sometimes more critical than the reconstruction of burned villages or the salving of maimed bodies. The violent rupturing of a society sometimes necessitates the search for new social identity, meaning and values, which cannot be downplayed or smoothed over with political niceties and rhetoric.

Post-conflict societies face a multitude of challenges. Let me at this time discuss one of the shared, perennial dilemmas in transitional societies that weigh heavily on the issue of reconciliation: how to balance the legitimate demands for justice against the perpetrators of heinous crimes with the vital need for peace and stability. It is difficult to measure the legitimate interest in punishing perpetrators against the imperative for national reconciliation in a society recently torn by conflict. Should post-conflict societies pursue truth and justice above all else, or should they focus on the attainment of political stability and not put in jeopardy their fragile new democracies under the pressure of truth commissions and prosecutions?

In our view, the correct approach would be somewhere in between those two positions. While justice should figure out in the process of national reconciliation, it must be recognized that in many instances the attainment of retributive justice is not feasible at the onset of the reconciliation process because of the inability of transitional institutions to provide justice through conventional means. This is why one of the most important needs in post-conflict societies is the strengthening of the rule of law and its institutions.

This does not mean, however, that contrition and restitution by wrongdoers are not possible during the reconciliation process. Those goals could be pursued through truth-telling alternatives such as truth commissions, which have been tried in various post-conflict societies over the last few decades. Reconciliation, in this case, can lay the path from a past where justice was denied, to a present where it is not yet fully attainable and to a future where it will be an integral part of the social order.

Finally, let us not lose sight of one of the most important functions of national reconciliation: to lay the foundation for preventing future conflicts and atrocities. This is one of the dimensions of the process that must be carefully considered by the parties to the conflict. National reconciliation should not focus narrowly on reacting to overt violence associated with the widespread abuse of human rights. It must include proactive social and political strategies for the removal of political and social conditions that made discrimination and abuse acceptable in the society. This is not a simple task, as it could require the transformation of post-conflict societies from the culture of violence to the culture of peace.

In the end, the goal of national reconciliation is to enhance justice based on recognizing and completely accepting the supreme value of the human person, as guaranteed by institutions providing its fullest expression. It creates a society that would have a capacity to deal creatively and equitably with the threat or eruption of conflict based on the values of truth, justice, mercy and dignity.

With those considerations in mind, the United Nations has a key role in achieving national reconciliation in post-conflict situations. In playing such a role, security and development offices within the United Nations system should maintain their core roles as they work for greater synergy, which will integrate political strategies with development policies. As the delegation of Germany has observed, the real challenge for the United Nations will be its ability to deliver its expertise and its assistance in a coherent, coordinated and effective manner. Here, the Security Council should have a leading role in generating the political will among the parties in conflict areas, the countries in the region and the subregion and the international community to adopt strategies and frameworks that will heal the wounds of conflict and promote the reconciliation process.