Intersections

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Reparation and reconciliation

Reconciliation is a central objective of all peacebuilding efforts and the only path to lasting peace. It touches on intertwined issues of justice, forgiveness and rehabilitation. As such, work for reconciliation raises theological, historical, social and psychological questions. It is a complex and interdisciplinary field of study, yet it rests on basic, often volatile, daily human interactions, and carries the heavy baggage of conflict from a not-so-distant past.

In his second letter to the Corinthians (5:19), Paul provides a vision of peace and truth submitted to and empowered by Christ's radical, definitive and universal victory over evil, hatred and resentment through his death on the cross and through his resurrection. In *Anabaptist Essentials*, Palmer Becker situates reconciliation and conflict resolution as the third core value for Anabaptist believers, one that is at the center of their work. Reconciliation goes beyond a passive understanding of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; it is rooted in the Christian commitment of loving even those who do evil and in a firm renunciation of violence. As an Anabaptist organization that emphasizes discipleship, witness and courageous vulnerability, MCC strives to see and dismantle legacies of exploitation and injustice as God's instrument of mutual transformation (see Alain Epp Weaver's discussion in *Service and the Ministry of Reconciliation*, 55–65). Rather than imposing its way, MCC listens and supports local initiatives for peace and trusts in God's ultimate guidance and way of transforming all human affairs and relationships (Romans, chapters 12 and 14).

Explorative rather that authoritative, this *Intersections* issue takes us on a trip around the world, visiting some of the most fascinating yet sensitive contexts in which MCC works. Diverse contributors expose how efforts to foster reconciliation play out in their respective contexts, and how reconciliation requires changes to organizational governance and practice, grappling with history, truth telling, equity and forgiveness.

MCC Saskatchewan Indigenous Neighbors program coordinator Randy Klassen takes us to the Canadian prairies, where ordinary folks, white settlers and Indigenous people alike are confronting colonial legacies of land dispossession by being willing to have difficult conversations in peace and by listening to each other. Klassen argues that rather than just hearing stories, listening involves actively acknowledging reality and responding to it. Yet what are the limits of these expressions of good will among individuals? Reconciliation

Learn more

Becker, Palmer. *Anabaptist Essentials: Ten Signs of a Unique Christian Faith*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2017.

Weaver, Alain Epp. *Service and the Ministry of Reconciliation: A Missiological History of Mennonite Central Committee*. North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2020.

can (and should) start from the bottom up, emanating from a society which understands its pain and need for healing. But can reconciliation happen without the participation of government and political leaders?

In Guatemala and El Salvador, MCC representative Chris Alvarez (with his spouse Rebecca) is a passionate participant in and coordinator of grassroots reconciliation projects. His article points to the importance of addressing "entrenched systems of impunity" to repair harm and bring about healing and reconciliation. Alavarez argues that breaking down unjust systems does not magically restore relationships. The Q'eqchi' Mennonite Church, a partner of MCC in Guatemala, believes in the holistic renewal of all people through faith in Christ. Faithful witness of Christ's peace by churches can overcome the depth of pain and inequity.

As our tour in Latin America continues, MCC social change and communications networker for Latin America and the Caribbean Rebekah York takes us to Colombia and explores the aftermath of the 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). Drawing from interviews of MCC partners in Colombia, she points to the pitfalls of government-led processes of reconciliation and compensation if they are not carried out in a victim-centered way. Another risk is that these processes become instrumentalized by political parties, politicized and eventually perceived as expressions of empty idealism.

"Reconciliation is a central objective of all peacebuilding efforts and the only path to lasting peace."

In Burundi, reconciliation can take surprising shapes. MCC regional peacebuilding and advocacy coordinator for southern, central Africa and Nigeria, Mulanda Jimmy Juma, draws our attention to how local customs contribute to shifting attitudes between ethnic groups and ultimately build trust between them. Among other things, humour can help de-escalate tensions and attenuate the memory of past intertribal violence. Even more surprising is the fluidity of reparation as an idea within the work of reconciliation in the African context. In countries such as Burundi where governments, though committed to reconciliation, do not necessarily have all the tools to lead national processes, the idea of repairing collective harms or making amends is often reduced to or normalized as mere expressions of social solidarity. This suggests that in very volatile contexts, it might be more practicable to let more natural practices take the place of formal government-led reconciliation processes.

In the United States, history professor Tobin Miller Shearer challenges the prevailing white Mennonite (as well as evangelical and mainline Protestant) understanding of racial reconciliation as centered on interpersonal relationships and kindness, contending that a deeper understanding of reconciliation is required to address living legacies of slavery and institutional racism. Drawing from numerous biblical examples, Shearer departs from a purportedly colour-blind mentality, tackles the difficult question of reparations in the U.S. and, building on the work of John Powell, puts forth guiding principles which stand as responses to common objections against reparations. Shearer also discusses Mennonite attempts to participate in reparations and make amends for incomplete past efforts. Christians, he argues, must take bold action where they can in order to repair systemic, cross-generational harm.

"Reconciliation requires changes to organizational governance and practice, grappling with history, truth telling, equity and forgiveness."

Surveying the ruins of Gaza from Jerusalem, Palestinian theologian and peacebuilder Salim Munayer sheds light on the ongoing shortcomings of international justice and on the inconsistencies of the Western powers' traditional accommodation policy towards the Israeli occupation. This *conflict manage-*

ment approach, Munayer argues, overlooks the enormous power imbalance between Palestinians and Israel, which has prevented the establishment of a Palestinian state and failed to hold Israel accountable, perpetuating the injustices of military occupation and a cycle of violence that has now reached an unprecedented and horrifying level in Gaza.

Ezra Brownstein and Dana Sharon of Rabbis for Human Rights in Israel complete our international tour by calling for religious leaders on all sides of the political, physical and social divides in Palestine and Israel to work for peace and against injustice in the name of common religious values. In the Palestine and Israel context, where faith is so central to all communities, providing emergency help, countering the harm of Israeli illegal settlement policy, and advocating for peace for everyone between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea might be the only hope in reversing the devastating consequences of oppressive Israeli policies and actions. Without ignoring the imbalance of power between Palestinians and Israelis highlighted by Munayer, Brownstein and Sharon describe Rabbis for Human Rights as mobilizing Palestinians and Israelis around common efforts for peace. There is something immensely heartening in witnessing leaders from all three main religious groups in Palestine and Isreal walking together in defiance of political narratives spreading binary and demonizing views of people.

What stands out from this overview of reconciliation work in these seven specific settings around the world is the interdependence of three essential ingredients: community-based reparation actions, genuine victim-oriented political initiatives and the global need for accountability and human rights-focused diplomacy to be taken more seriously. In a world in which the two latter are often lacking, supporting grass-roots reparation and reconciliation initiatives in a way that speaks to local culture has the potential to re-shape perspectives in favour of systemic change and to induce public pressure which can ultimately hold local and global decision-makers responsible.

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Reconciliation on the prairies?

“Reconciliation on the Prairies” is the subtitle of a 2016 documentary film which portrays the encounter between an Indigenous group, the Young Chippewayan band, with settlers living on land once promised to that band, known as “Reserve 107.” This story is central to MCC Saskatchewan’s Indigenous Neighbours program. I place a question mark behind the title because, after almost a decade of presenting this story of Reserve 107, it is useful and necessary to ask about what we as MCC Saskatchewan are learning in these encounters and the relationships they hold. I ask these questions as a relative newcomer to the story in a formal sense as an MCC staff person, but also as someone with a personal connection to the broader story of Mennonite immigrants who were encouraged to settle western Canada on Indigenous land as part of the Canadian government’s colonial project.

Reserve 107 outlines an historic injustice: land promised by treaty to the Young Chippewayan band (part of the *nêhiyawak* / Cree nation) was illegally reappropriated by the Canadian government while the band was dispersed for various reasons, including direct government oppression. The stolen land was then sold to Mennonite settlers in the 1890s; Lutheran settlers joined them a few decades later, establishing a church and cemetery on the hill called “Stoney Knoll” that

“What is needed, and what was apparently offered in the series of encounters between the Young Chippewayan leaders and the Mennonite and Lutheran settlers, is non-defensive listening that is open to self-correction and personal transformation.”

Learn more

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"As a grateful descendant of *Russländer* Mennonite immigrants, whose humanitarian crisis precipitated the formation of MCC in 1920, I wonder whether the time has come to re-examine the 'miraculous exodus' narrative of the 1920s Canadian immigration."

lies at the centre of the original reserve. This unjust loss of land was brought to the attention of local farmers by Young Chippewayan descendants in the 1970s. Anger, fear and misunderstanding surfaced, but over the ensuing five decades, the positive impacts of careful listening, non-defensive conversations and regular gatherings have given participants a taste of the renewed, respectful relationships envisioned by the use of the term *reconciliation,* years before the term was publicized by the work of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The focal point of this growth in relationship between Indigenous people and Mennonite and Lutheran settlers was marked in 2006 by a joint commitment in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding.

Truth, or perhaps better put, *truth-telling*, must precede reconciliation. In the case of Reserve 107, the necessary truths include historical realities that might have seemed ancient and irrelevant history to local settlers when members of the Young Chippewayan band brought to their attention how their band had been dispossessed. Other necessary truths that must be acknowledged for reconciliation to proceed include the nature of treaty as a sacred covenant for the *nêhiyawak* and the illegal activities undertaken by the federal government. An essential prerequisite for truth-telling is that *there is someone who listens*—not just polite (or even supportive, non-judgemental) listening, but listening to *learn and respond*. What is needed, and what was apparently offered in the series of encounters between the Young Chippewayan leaders and the Mennonite and Lutheran settlers, was non-defensive listening open to self-correction and personal transformation.

This non-defensive stance can be nurtured in different ways. I was struck by the following statement made by the *nêhiyawak* elder A.J. Felix at a Stoney Knoll gathering in 2016: "We're thankful that the people who settled here were *praying* people." In these words, I hear the elder affirm that making oneself vulnerable in spiritual practices such as prayer is a significant asset for the work of truth and reconciliation. Prayer, as Jesus taught and practiced, is founded on personal vulnerability and openness to transformation. This stance shows how Canadian churches can and must find a measure of redemption in their long history of harm and abuse towards Indigenous peoples.

There are two key aspects to the Reserve 107 story, as Gary LaPlante, a Stoney Knoll band councillor, likes to remind us. One is the actual land claim, i.e., the call for restitution for the illegally appropriated reserve. But beside this, and just as important, LaPlante maintains, is the *relational* aspect of the encounter. The years of discussion and gatherings have nurtured solid relationships and friendships between members of the settler and Young Chippewayan communities. As far as LaPlante is concerned, this journey has embodied reconciliation long before that concept was named in larger Canadian discourse.

But there has been a painful side to this relationship as well. Like most communities, there are political divides. There are rifts among some families of the current Young Chippewayan descendants. This rift is not evident in the 2016 documentary about Reserve 107, but in the years since, these tensions have surfaced more clearly, including at some public gatherings. MCC's mandate is to walk alongside this community, while allowing them the dignity of dealing with their own internal dynamics. Peacebuilders seek to maintain trust and authentic relationship with parties who are in conflict with each other. This has been part of my experience over the past few years. It can leave me (and

some of the involved parties) feeling low on hope. I fear a scenario of being called out, being asked to declare an allegiance to one side or the other. It is hard to face such tensions. But it also brings me to wonder if there is something essential in this stance, something spiritually necessary in taking the cruciform posture of holding hands on each side with people who are themselves unreconciled. Perhaps this stance captures the essence of being peacebuilders "in the name of Christ."

The land claim process of seeking redress for the original injustice goes back to the 1950s. It is recent (and good!) news that the Canadian government has finally accepted the legitimacy of the Young Chippewayan land claim. Now begins a new chapter, with negotiations that will take more years.

The many decades of justice delayed draw our attention to the larger and more fundamental injustice of colonial settlement itself and raise the question of *reparations*. Ray Funk, one of the Mennonite land-title holders around Stoney Knoll, continues to promote the idea of some sort of land trust for the Young Chippewayan band. [The term *land-title holder* is legally more precise than *landowner* and is better suited to opening up conversation about the Doctrine of Discovery, which grounds the assertion of Crown rights to land title.] This could be a vehicle by which settlers contribute in a material way to support the Young Chippewayan as a (potentially reconstituted) community in Reserve 107, above and beyond the government paying back what was owed on the historic claim of the stolen reserve. Such a land trust might be seen as a way of responding to wider calls for Land Back as part of Canada-wide efforts to decolonize the Canadian landscape. Young Chippewayan leadership has not asked for such a response; neither has the land trust concept caught on yet, in any serious sense.

There has been a slow but steady growth in goodwill towards *reconciliation* work in the Saskatchewan context. The Reserve 107 story is an important narrative in which the land is bringing people together. Nevertheless, the concrete, costly work of exploring *reparations* in a collective fashion is still in its infancy in Saskatchewan.

As a grateful descendant of *Russländer* Mennonite immigrants, whose humanitarian crisis precipitated the formation of MCC in 1920, I wonder whether the time has come to re-examine the "miraculous exodus" narrative of the 1920s Canadian immigration, an effort led by Mennonites headquartered in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was viewed as a saviour for many thousands of these immigrants, to be sure. But the railway facilitated immigration as the chief tool of Canada's colonial interests. The CPR's generous offer of credit to Mennonite immigrants was backed by coffers strengthened by the acquisition and sale of Indigenous land, declared "ceded" by the English-language versions of Canada's historic treaties. These are deep and troubling tensions, but perhaps, a century after arrival, it is time to ask some new questions about the privileges we were afforded. How might we respond with integrity and generosity to the Indigenous communities who bore, and continue to bear, the brunt of that colonial harm?

Randy Klassen is Indigenous Neighbours coordinator with MCC Saskatchewan, based in Saskatoon.

Learn more

Reporting Centre of Specific Claims. Website facilitates searches of the status of Indigenous land claims. Available at: https://services.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/SCBRI_E/Main/ReportingCentre/External/externalreporting.aspx.

Reserve 107: Reconciliation on the Prairies (2016) and *Reserve 107: A Path Forward*. Film. Produced by Brad [Leitch] Langendoen. Rebel Sky Media. Available at www.reserve107thefilm.com/.

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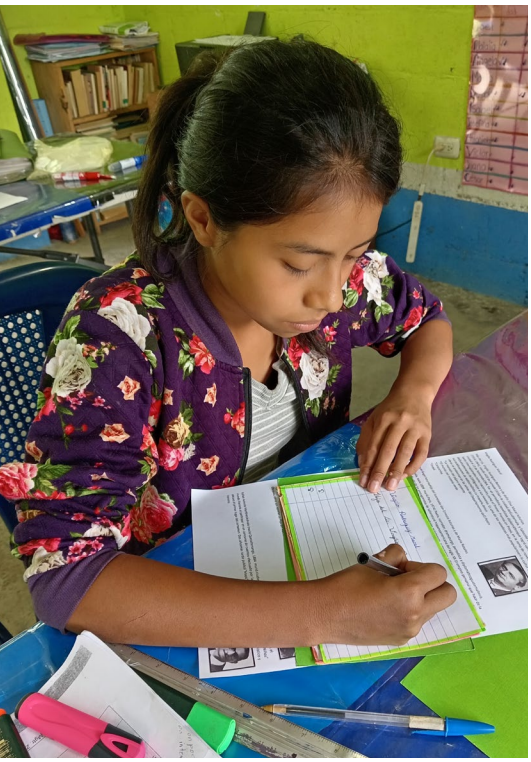
Portal of the Reserve 107 commemorative path. (MCC photo/Zacharie Leclair)



MCC partner Asociación Nuevo Amanecer de Santiago Atitlán (ANADESA) supports educational reinforcement programming for Indigenous Tz'utujil children and youth in rural Guatemala. In this 2024 photo, student Juana Leydi Coquiz Caniz studies at the ANADESA education center in Panabaj, Santiago, Atitlán, Guatemala. (ANADESA/ Concepción Mesía Petzey)

Reparation and reconciliation in Guatemala and El Salvador: a path toward lasting peace

The civil wars that tore through Guatemala (1960–1996) and El Salvador (1980-1992) left profound and enduring scars. These conflicts, rooted in deep socio-economic inequalities and political repression, saw marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous groups in Guatemala and the rural poor in El Salvador, subjected to brutal military force. The violence, much of it externally fueled, has left a legacy that continues to shape the lives of survivors today. In Guatemala, military campaigns against Indigenous Maya communities resulted in genocide, with entire villages destroyed. In El Salvador, the violence manifested through forced disappearances, massacres and widespread displacement. Reparation and reconciliation amidst this historical backdrop represent more than legal or political processes—they are the heartbeat of ongoing struggles for justice, dignity and wholeness.

Reparation as restoring dignity and balance: The meaning of reparation in Guatemala and El Salvador extends beyond financial compensation or legal resolutions. For many, especially among the Indigenous populations, reparation involves the restoration of balance—culturally, spiritually and materially. In communities like the Q'eqchi', for instance, the idea of reparation is intertwined with the notion of harmony. It calls for restoring not just the land, but the very fabric of life that was torn apart by decades of conflict.

National reparation programs have made strides in addressing material needs, yet they often struggle to fully grasp the cultural and spiritual aspects that must also be healed. The partner organizations MCC works with have long recognized that true reparation must be holistic. Their efforts not only to restore land and livelihoods but also to support cultural revitalization and communal healing reflect a broader and deeper understanding of what it means to repair. This holistic approach invites us to reflect on how reparation can address the whole person and the whole community. Reparation is not just about restoring what was lost but about reestablishing a way of life that was disrupted—bringing healing to both the physical and spiritual wounds that continue to linger.

Reconciliation as a process of truth and justice: Reconciliation, too, is lived out in ways that reflect the region's unique struggles. Reconciliation is not just about forgiving the past—it involves confronting the truth of what happened, ensuring that justice is done and creating the space for a future where trust can be rebuilt. In societies where those responsible for violence remain in positions of power, reconciliation requires tremendous courage.

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In Guatemala, the Catholic Church has played a vital role in promoting this type of reconciliation. Bishop Juan José Gerardi's work on the Recovery of Historical Memory Project, which meticulously documented the atrocities of the conflict, was an act of profound faith and justice. His assassination in 1998, shortly after releasing the report, is a stark reminder of the risks involved in challenging entrenched systems of impunity, yet his legacy continues to inspire.

El Salvador's truth commission provided a critical acknowledgment of the suffering inflicted during the war, but the subsequent amnesty law, which

effectively blocked prosecutions, left many Salvadorans feeling that true justice has yet to be realized. Reconciliation here remains an incomplete journey for many, where the truth has been spoken, but accountability is still out of reach. How can reconciliation fully take root when those responsible for such devastation have not been held accountable? These experiences with thwarted reconciliation processes remind us that reconciliation is more than symbolic gestures of forgiveness. It requires a deep engagement with justice, an acknowledgment of the pain inflicted and a commitment to restoring relationships that have been shattered.

The role of faith in reparation and reconciliation: At the heart of these processes is faith. For many of the communities in Guatemala and El Salvador, faith is not separate from the work of reparation and reconciliation—faith is central to that work. For those of us in the Anabaptist tradition, peace is understood as more than the absence of violence; peace is about building justice, restoring relationships and creating spaces where true healing can happen. This vision of peace as wholeness deeply informs how we engage in our work.

Faith gives shape to how MCC's partners engage with the ongoing work of reparation and reconciliation. They do not see reconciliation as a passive call to move forward, but as an active, ongoing journey—one that involves truth, accountability and restoration. Reconciliation is a reflection of the love and justice of Christ, who calls us to forgive but also to seek justice for the oppressed.

One example of this reconciling work is the Holistic Family Ministry project in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, led by the Q'eqchi' Mennonite Church in partnership with MCC. This initiative addresses the deep fractures within families and communities caused by years of societal change and conflict. Through this project, church leaders—including pastors, youth leaders and women's leaders—are equipped with tools rooted in biblical and Anabaptist teachings to support families in their journey toward reconciliation.

The project recognizes that family-level conflicts often reflect broader societal wounds—accordingly, the reconciliation sought through this initiative is holistic. By working to restore relationships within families, church leaders are helping to rebuild the social fabric of the community, addressing both the immediate needs and the deeper emotional and spiritual harm. In this way, the work of reconciliation within the family mirrors the broader reparation processes needed at the societal level, as they seek not just to resolve conflicts but to restore relationships that have been broken.

For those of us who work alongside these communities, faith plays a central role in how we understand the call to repair what has been broken. It compels us to walk in solidarity with those who have been marginalized, to seek restoration in ways that reflect Christ's teachings and to pursue peace that is rooted in justice and love. Reconciliation, in this sense, is not merely about forgiving; it is about creating a future where justice and dignity are fully restored.

This work, while deeply challenging, is an expression of what it means to live out our faith in the face of injustice. The journey of reparation and reconciliation in Central America is not just a legal or political process—it is an expression of faith in action, driven by the belief that healing is possible, even in the aftermath of great violence.

Learn more

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"Helping others in a way that they can in turn give is vital, restoring dignity through projects shaped by love and justice."

“The journey of reparation and reconciliation in Central America is not just a legal or political process—it is an expression of faith in action, driven by the belief that healing is possible, even in the aftermath of great violence.”

Lessons from Central America for global peacebuilding: The experiences of Guatemala and El Salvador offer important lessons for those committed to the work of peacebuilding. Here, reparation and reconciliation are not abstract ideas but lived realities. They are processes that involve grappling with the past in all its complexity, seeking justice where it has long been denied and restoring what was broken.

In accompanying these communities, we are reminded that peacebuilding is not a quick or simple process—it is a long and often difficult path that requires deep commitment. It involves addressing not only the material needs of those affected by conflict but also the relational and spiritual dimensions of their lives. Reparation and reconciliation are about more than closing a chapter; they are about building a future where trust, justice and peace can flourish.

As we reflect on these efforts at reconciliations, we are called to think deeply about how we support the work of reparation and reconciliation in other contexts, learning from the ways these processes unfold in Central America. This work requires patience, humility and a willingness to engage with the full complexity of healing after conflict.

Chris Alvarez is MCC representative in Guatemala and El Salvador, with his wife Rebecca. They live in Guatemala City with their two daughters, Arcelia and Marisol.

Towards an imperfect peace: a Colombian case study

The signing of the 2016 Peace Accords between the Fuerza Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces in Colombia, FARC-EP) and the Colombian government under former president Juan Manuel Santos and the subsequent development of the Truth, Reconciliation, Reparations and Non-Repetition Commission symbolized a flicker of hope for many around the Colombian territory: the possibility of healing the wounds of an armed conflict that lasted decades and scarred generations seemed to be imminent. However, eight years after the referendum signing and two years after the Commission published its final report, the reality on the ground reveals harshly different realities. In Córdoba, while some celebrate the accomplishments of a peace accord, other victims remain trapped in poverty and fear, with their territory now under the control of different armed groups like the Autodefensas Gaitanistas of Colombia (also known as the Clan del Golfo, Autodefensas Gaitanistas of Colombia, or the Gaitanist Auto-Defense Forces of Colombia). In Montes de Maria, a demobilized guerilla member, now a lawyer, proudly hands out his card, while the very people he harmed, still suffering and wondering if they will ever receive the reparations due to them, watch in disbelief as he prospers. These stories, just two examples among many, are visceral reminders that reconciliation and justice are not measured by signed documents or good intentions, but by real change in the lives of those who suffer. In the case of Colombia, the road to peace faces not only loud echoes of the past, but also the deep and persistent ruptures in the social fabric where some have found stability and peace while others continue waiting.

Colombia has endured the longest armed conflicts in the Western Hemisphere, which can be summarized as long-standing confrontations around the control of territory, resources and political power between guerrilla groups, government forces, and paramilitary movements. The current iteration of

these clashes, which started in early 1960s, has been the cause of immeasurable loss of human life and weakened rule of law in general. Murders, internal forced displacement, the weaponization of women's bodies, extortion, disappearances and kidnappings defined much of the internal armed conflict and are still part of the social fabric today, even after the signing of the Accord.

The signing of this agreement shifted the decades-long conflict, while also instigating push-back from various non-state actors who were not at the negotiating table. The growing power structures of non-state armed actors rushed in after the former FARC-EP laid down their arms in 2016 and took over their lucrative trafficking routes and other illicit businesses. As always happens with peace accords, some FARC-EP members did not lay down their arms or joined different groups. So, the armed struggle for control of Colombian territories continues.

Soon after the signing of the 2016 Accords, a new government was voted into power, one that campaigned on "ripping up the peace accords." The lack of implementation further enabled the resurgence of armed conflict. Not until 2022 did Colombia inaugurate the first government from outside traditional political powerholders. The Gustavo Petro and Francia Marquez administration was voted in under the ambitious platform of *Paz Total* (or Total Peace), in which the national agenda presented was to transform Colombia from pervasive armed conflict to one of peace and prosperity.

Yet, after a little over two years of this administration, the reality is that illegal recruitment of minors to participate in armed groups, land grabbing, displacements or confinements, political scandals and threats against social leaders continue at alarming rates. This multi-faceted cycle of violence is in fact a struggle between various actors, both state and non-state, which can be identified in at least six distinct armed conflicts within the country.

Amidst these realities, the Colombian Truth Commission has been both crucial and essential to Colombia's peace, reconciliation and transitional justice process following the signing of the Accord. Its very creation was "special" because it aimed to bring an end to the conflict and move towards the construction of a society at peace. To begin a national reconciliation process and

"While the methodology of the Truth Commission aimed to put the diversity of victims at the center as well as work within the framework of a restorative justice approach for those who did the harm, in many ways the process has fallen short."

A visual lament: this graffiti art captures the anguish and uncertainty felt by many victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, specifically those who have had family members and loved ones disappeared. Juxtaposed with the flora and fauna found around Colombia, this image serves as a bridge between past and present, demanding a reckoning with history and a commitment to not repeat the past. (Bekah York)

Learn more

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commit to non-repetition, those affected most directly by the armed conflict needed to know what happened—they needed the truth. By setting up 25 "Truth Houses" around the Colombian Territory, the arduous, painful and sometimes unimaginable truths about what happened were narrated, which culminated in the creation of a final document of almost 1,000 pages. "The truths of what happened are key to reconciliation . . . because it is important for the victims to know . . . who gave the orders . . . and why certain things happened" (interview with Etel Salas). This truth-telling can be seen as an initial step in bringing about transformation and inviting reconciliation to occur.

However, even as having the long-sought answers to their questions as well as being able to tell the world what happened represented an important initial step, reconciliation was not then automatically achieved by the publication of a final report, neither on an individual level nor on a national level. While the methodology of the Truth Commission aimed to put the diversity of victims at the center as well as work within the framework of a restorative justice approach for those who did the harm, in many ways the process has fallen short. This leaves many to wonder what will happen to them now that the country knows the truths of what happened and wondering about the hope they had that something better was waiting for them on the other side.

For those located in rural regions, where the armed conflict historically caused the most harm, "reconciliation means reparation [or compensation]" (interview with Ricard Esquivia), a kind of economic payment as a symbolic recognition of the harm done. A small percentage of the victims have been part of "land restitution [and rehabilitation processes], [providing them with] housing, as well as guaranteeing access to health, education and decent work." And while this has been "an important step coming from the national government, showing political will of wanting to contribute to change" (interview with Damaris Guaza), as well as helping the communities "get out of [the cycles of] historical abandonment of the . . . needs [of the communities left in the aftermath of the violence]" (interview with Esquivia), the larger portion of the more than 7,000,000 people who suffered during the war and have applied to be recognized officially as a victim have not received any economic acknowledgement. This is largely due to the lack of "the institutional and political capacity in Colombia . . . to attend to this number of victims" (interview with Salas).

Another stark reality specifically within Colombia's truth process is that the notions of reconciliation and reparations have become "very political and politicized" concepts (interview with Santiago Espitia).Especially with the inauguration of the first ever leftist government in Colombia in 2022, peace and reconciliation have become political buzzwords, often creating more harm during processes meant to restore and bring about reconciliation. For example, the creation of the Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz (JEP, or Special Jurisdiction for Peace) had the goal of using a restorative justice framework to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. Instead of sentencing them to life in jail or some other punitive justice measure, many were given the option to lay down their arms, be involved in land restoration processes and some even given local political positions in the very communities they formerly controlled. Today, under Gustavo Petro's government, former guerilla combatants are being named as local leaders, or "jueces de paz" (peace judges) in various territories across Colombia. Those who are still living in these territories are condemning these acts, asserting that the victims are not being considered. This "politicization of peace," in Santiago Espitia's words, seems to be gaining traction in Colombian society as well as in the government. According to Santiago, "[A previous] government also tried to do the same by appointing

some of these ex-paramilitary leaders as peace judges [or representatives of victims] . . . . [And during this time, under a conservative government] . . . the leftist ideology was upset [and was opposed to any such action], criticizing it. But now that a leftist government is doing it, those on the left are not criticizing it." This reality also complexifies a process of reconciliation.

Processes of truth, reconciliation and reparations as well as the signing of accords that are meant to put an end to protracted armed conflict are incomplete at best. As this short article has tried to show, the documents signed and institutions set up in Colombia to usher in the "dawn of peace . . . and life" (from Juan Manuel Santos' speech after the signing of the Referendum in 2016) have attended to some while leaving others waiting. However, "there is not a perfect peace nor is there a perfect reconciliation [process]. But it no less crucial to try and to make concrete steps so that [the peace and reconciliation] are permanent [and non-repetition is committed to]" (Guaza interview). In the words of Ricard Esquivia, amid the paradox, hope is [there] and does bloom—and intentional effort must be made so that "hope is not shipwrecked. Hope is alive because with all the difficulties [in this context] . . . , hope is there and [it must be kept] alive [and made] concrete."

"Another stark reality specifically within Colombia's truth process is that the notions of reconciliation and reparations have become 'very political and politicized' concepts."

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Reparations in flow: the subtleties of reconciliation in Burundi

Burundi is a post-war country at the heart of Africa. Since its independence in 1962, Burundi has experienced multiple national conflicts. The most significant crisis was in 1993 following the killing of Melchior Ndadaye, the first democratically elected president who served only 100 days in office. The violent aftermath included the death of over 300,000 people from both Hutu and Tutsi ethnic backgrounds. The subsequent conflict in 2015 involved misinterpretations of Burundi's constitution when the popular president Pierre Nkurunziza announced his candidacy for a third term. This crisis led to the flight of many party leaders, journalists and activists and had devastating consequences including loss of human life. Ethnic divides between the majority Hutu population and the minority Tutsi population were factors in both these conflicts. However, the political crisis of 2015 involved greater concerns over struggles of power and poverty in addition to ethnic divides.

As a response to decades of violence, many civil society actors—churches, including organizations such as the Mission for Peace and Reconciliation Under the Cross, and international NGOs like MCC—and the government of Burundi have been working to promote peace and to rebuild the nation. In this process, efforts towards reparation and reconciliation have been building blocks for peacebuilding.

The Burundian government established a National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation to promote peace processes and address the country's violent past following independence. Though the commission has not started

“This expression has been reclaimed as a joke by those who have been reconciled, and in doing so has had its former power taken away. This is an example of how the power of words can undermine reasons to take up arms and help to reduce violence.”

implementing an action plan, the government has been conducting research on violent massacres post-independence in 1972 and 1993. As a result, signs and other symbols are now placed in areas where massacres took place with messages such as *Never Again*. The aim of the commission is to reveal the truth of what happened and to support healing and reconciliation among the population.

Efforts towards reparation and reconciliation contribute to peacebuilding in many ways in Burundi. Though it takes time to build trust and only one incident to lose it, trust is still the backbone of Burundi’s social fabric (as in all other societies). Various episodes of war have eroded trust among neighbors and ethnic groups, especially those involving killings and retaliations. Communities have been using different trust building mechanisms in the aftermath of violent conflicts in the form of reparation. For example, offenders have helped victims to rebuild their houses that had been destroyed or in tilling the soil and growing different types of crops.

Armed conflict occurs when reasons to fight are stronger than any opposition to violence. There are numerous factors that play a key role in fueling conflict in Burundi, including even traditional expressions. A past expression used to promote killings in war was “you did not tell me that you hate me, I also did not tell you that I know it.” This expression has been reclaimed as a joke by those who have been reconciled—in doing, the expression has had its former violence-inducing power taken away. The power of words not only can provoke violence but also undermine reasons to take up arms and help to reduce violence.

Violent conflict in Burundi has many causes, such as ethnic identity divisions between Hutus and Tutsis. In the search for solutions to the conflict, other causes such as poverty were found to have been ignored for a long time. The benefit of reconciliation efforts in the Burundian context has been to open people’s eyes to overlooked causes to conflict. For example, people are more easily convinced to take up arms in exchange for promises such as money and jobs. There has accordingly been greater recognition that poverty should be tackled as one of the major factors pushing people towards violence.

Among Burundians, reconciliation as a concept is more well-known than reparation but reparation is seen as a part of the reconciliation process as well as acts of African social solidarity. Reconciliation efforts are essential for healing wounds, allowing local communities to live side by side without hatred and violence and fostering lasting peace not only for current generations but for future ones as well. There is the sense in Burundi that reconciliation can be the legacy left behind by those who were previously involved in conflict.

Mulanda Jimmy Juma is MCC’s peacebuilding and advocacy coordinator for southern, central Africa and Nigeria.

Learn more

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Biblical principles for reparations for U.S. slavery and institutional racism

In August of 1969 at a gathering of Mennonites in Turner, Oregon, African-American Mennonite pastor and activist John Powell called for reparations. He read a statement from the church’s Urban-Racial Council (URC) in response to the Black Manifesto. The latter document had been drafted by Black Power activist James Forman and released earlier that year to demand

reparations for slavery and the ongoing practice of racism. Both Forman's Black Manifesto and Powell's URC statement were directed at the church, but only the Manifesto included a threat to take over worship services if its $500 million demand remained unmet.

Powell's statement also differed from Forman's in that it asked for much more than financial payment alone. The URC statement did ask white Mennonites to contribute $500,000 to what would become the Compassion Fund. Powell and his colleagues—having replaced the URC label with the Minority Ministries Council (MMC)—would convene as an executive committee to determine when and in which manner the funds would be used. Yet, this financial request was only one of seventeen recommendations included in the original statement, all but three of them focusing on their White Mennonite co-religionists' conduct. Rather than just give money, Mennonites were asked to make changes in hiring practices, housing programs, voluntary service ventures, educational patterns, leadership choices and daily relationships with people of color. The URC also asked "that the Mennonite Church confess in word and action to the sins committed against black people and that we understand why some black people have felt it necessary to bring to the Christians of America the document known as the Black Manifesto."

In short, Powell and his colleagues requested that the response to the Black Manifesto's demand for reparations begin with confession and lead to concrete personal and financial action.

Powell's 1969 statement thus closely followed biblical precedent. Some of the Christian community's most formative narrative texts model financial reparations in action. As the Israelites left Egypt, their former enslavers offered them gold, silver and clothing. These highly valuable gifts were collected by Egyptian women as they led their community in just repair past any hesitancy or resistance (with thanks to Dr. Regina Shands Stoltzfus for drawing my attention to this detail). They offered the collected financial and tangible resources to those originally freed from slavery as well as their descendants (Exodus 3:22). The book of Genesis also shows, among many other instances, the example of Jacob offering Esau a wealth of gifts to repay for past wrongs (Gen. 32:3-21, 33:17—articles included in the Learn More sidebar build and expand upon these and many other biblical examples).

Just as importantly, the URC statement sought to disrupt the interpersonal-focused, friendship-dependent reconciliation paradigm prevalent in the Mennonite community. As Jennifer Harvey points out, this paradigm remains prominent in many evangelical and mainline Protestant and Catholic communities. Building friendships across racial lines and refraining from racial epithets thus become the only solutions. Powell's reference to financial re-investment, changes in institutional practices and challenges to the status quo confronted white Mennonites with a new approach. Even though core Anabaptist principles like discipleship, community and active peacemaking would seem to have suggested a ready audience for Powell's more institutionally focused statement, he was instead confronted with suspicion, antagonistic queries and overt racial epithets. Six months after his presentation, only $38,000 of the half million requested had come in; by 1971, the number had risen to only $125,000.

The story of the MMC's Compassion Fund offers a biblically grounded framework for reparations. The Old Testament models referenced here are particularly helpful in conceiving of how best to pay reparations for the enslavement

Learn more

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"The URC statement sought to disrupt the interpersonal-focused, friendship-dependent reconciliation paradigm prevalent in the Mennonite community."

Learn more

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of Africans in the United States and the ongoing practice of institutional racism that is its legacy. The principles for doing so are as follows:

- *Reparations should be focused on human repair*. As in the case of the children of Israel, the Egyptians' payment was not what we would now consider to be *legal* in nature but rather about *repairing harm* from past wrongs.
- As such, *reparations need to involve financial remuneration but should not be limited to it*. With a goal of repair and restoration, reparations should be expansive and consider the collective relationships, the communities impacted and the hoped for outcomes. Powell's programmatic vision of seventeen points of action demonstrate how such a wholistic approach could be enacted.
- Reparations require that those who have implemented the harm *let go of the need to control how the funds are used and distributed.* Again, in the biblical models referenced here, the perpetrators placed no demands on how provided funds were to be used. In the case of the Compassion Fund, this principle was foundational. Only MMC members got to decide how the funds would be disbursed.
- The need to pay reparations *does not disappear simply because the perpetrators—in this instance, the perpetrators and beneficiaries of slavery and institutional racism—chose to ignore and resist reckoning with past wrongs and the payment for those wrongs.* The responsibility for that payment, likewise, does not go away as generations pass. In the case of the account in the book of Ezra where King Darius pays reparations to the Jewish community upon their return from exile, he makes that payment even though he did not force them into exile in the first place (Ezra 6:1-12—thanks to Michael Woolf and Michael C. R. Nabors for making this point; see recommended reading sidebar).
- Finally, reparations for system-wide harms are best instituted *through a collective rather than an individual process.* The Egyptians as a group paid the Israelites. On behalf of his entire nation, King Darius used the royal treasury to pay the Jews returned from exile. These instances suggest that reparations for a national practice like slavery—which was supported and sustained throughout the U.S., not just in the South—require national-level appropriations. Even as *the gains* from the historical reality of unjust enrichment from the labor stolen from enslaved Africans are expansive and measured in the trillions, so, too, should *the payments* equal that scale and scope.

These principles emerge from the history of U.S. practices of slavery and ongoing racism. Reparations in response to colonialism, genocide and the stealing of land from Indigenous communities require other approaches.

In 2021, members of Shalom Community Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan, established the "Reparative Act" fund. They did so in recognition of the Mennonite Church's failure to honor their commitment to raise $500,000 in response to the 1969 call from the Urban Racial Council. Rather than any sort of full reparations process, their stated purpose was for "for white people to give up control of some of their money" (https://shalomcc.org/repair/). The funds collected were turned over to a committee of people of color, chaired by John Powell, who then disbursed the funds.

"Rather than just give money, Mennonites were asked to make changes in hiring practices, housing programs, voluntary service ventures, educational patterns, leadership choices and daily relationships with people of color."

Although the current political conditions in the United States seem diametrically opposed to the payment or discussion of reparations at a national level, the whole point of articulating biblical and theological principles for their payment is that Christian faith and practice should lead to action, rather than Christian faith and practice being dictated by political exigency.

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From conflict management to genocide: the case of Palestine-Israel

In this article, I argue that the West's adoption of a *conflict management* approach in response to the Palestinian quest for independence has ultimately contributed to the Israeli state's sustained military assault on the Gaza Strip, an assault that the International Court of Justice determined could plausibly meet the criteria for genocide, a determination substantiated by multiple human rights organizations and historians of genocide (see, for example, Amnesty International 2024 and Feroz 2024). In line with the Palestinian scholar Nadeem Rouhana, I contend that the failed conflict management approach must be replaced by a quest for reconciliation that begins from a recognition of Israel's settler-colonial policies and practices.

“The conflict management approach has allowed Israel to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, maintain power imbalances and perpetuate the status quo.”

Understanding the context: The devastation in Palestine-Israel of the events of October 7, 2023, cannot be fully understood without examining Israel's long-standing policies toward the Palestinians. These policies have aimed to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank while continuing to expand illegal Israeli settlements—effectively obstructing any possibility of a two-state solution consisting of a Palestinian and Israeli state living side-by-side.

A central strategy in achieving these goals has been a “divide and control” policy. Israel facilitated the transfer of funds from Qatar to Hamas in Gaza, which remained under a severe blockade, while allowing Fatah in the West Bank to police the Palestinian population in coordination with the Israeli military. This arrangement enabled Israel to argue that Palestinians were unprepared for self-governance due to their internal divisions.

Additionally, Israel sought to marginalize the Palestinian cause through the Abraham Accords, which allowed Arab states to normalize relations with Israel without requiring Palestinian statehood—a condition that had previously been a prerequisite for normalization. However, this policy ultimately failed, as the Palestinian quest for self-determination became a global concern.

The role of the West and conflict management: Western states, international organizations and religious institutions have continued to promote the two-state solution, despite its increasing unlikelihood due to Israeli settlement policies that have increasingly carved up the Occupied Palestinian Territories with the aim of integrating illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank into Israel and dividing Palestinian cities and villages from one another. This clinging to the two-state solution has accompanied a conflict management approach that, in a paternalistic and colonial fashion, argues that the timing is not right for Palestinian statehood. This approach has misled the public, violated international law and United Nations resolutions and enabled the continued oppression of the Palestinian people.

Learn more

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Texts listed above provided by the author.

The events of October 7, 2023, and Israel's response underscore that addressing the Palestinian quest for justice and independence is a global concern. However, the reaction of Western states and the silence of Western churches in the face of genocide reveal an unwillingness to contribute to a positive resolution. Instead, they continue to propagate the illusion of conflict management and the viability of a two-state solution while supporting Israel's settler-colonial policies.

Weaknesses of the conflict management approach: Several fundamental weaknesses in the conflict management approach help explain the catastrophic events and the West's continued endorsement of this strategy:

- **Resistance to change**: For the past 50 years, this approach has resisted meaningful change, preventing compromises and enabling Israel's settler-colonial policies.
- **Power imbalance**: Israel, with Western backing, holds significantly more power than the Palestinians, resulting in one-sided negotiations, as seen in the Oslo Accords and subsequent agreements.
- **Temporary solutions**: The approach has favored short-term ceasefires rather than addressing fundamental grievances, leading to cycles of violence.
- **Escalation through mismanagement**: The worsening conditions of Palestinian life and the lack of political resolution have exacerbated tensions and fueled further violence.
- **Dehumanization and demonization**: The failure to address the roots of the conflict has led to the dehumanization of Palestinians, justifying oppressive policies and violent actions.

The weaknesses of the conflict management approach explain why Israel and its Western allies have relied on it rather than seeking a true resolution. The conflict management approach has allowed Israel to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, maintain power imbalances and perpetuate the status quo.

The settler-colonial framework: Israel's policies align with the broader framework of settler colonialism, which differs from traditional colonialism. While traditional colonialism focused on resource extraction, settler colonialism prioritizes land acquisition and permanent settlement. The goal in settler-colonialism is not merely to exploit the native population but to eliminate Indigenous peoples physically or politically.

This logic of elimination has manifested in various ways throughout history, from outright genocide to legal and bureaucratic measures stripping Indigenous populations of their land and identity. As historian Patrick Wolfe has described, settler colonialism operates through the systematic exclusion and marginalization of native populations, whether through direct violence or subtler forms of dispossession (Wolfe 2017). Israel has clearly carried out settler-colonial policies throughout its 58-year military occupation the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem (see Munayer 2024).

Moving beyond conflict management toward reconciliation: The Western conflict management approach has not only failed to resolve the Palestinian issue but has also contributed to the conditions that led to the ongoing genocide in Gaza. The insistence on a two-state solution, despite its impracti-

cality, has allowed Israel to continue its settler-colonial policies while avoiding accountability. If a just and lasting resolution is to be achieved, the world must move beyond the failed framework of conflict management and address the root causes of the crisis—including settler colonialism, power imbalances and the denial of Palestinian self-determination.

Nadeem Rouhana (2018) advocates for reconciliation as a process that seeks a genuine, just and enduring resolution to the conflict. He defines reconciliation as a profound transformation of relationships between societies through political and social changes. Reconciliation must address political structural issues, such as the imbalances in the distribution of power, as well as intangible concerns regarding historical truth and responsibility.

Rouhana identifies four key issues that must be addressed for reconciliation to succeed in Palestine and Israel:

- **Justice**: Addressing past and present injustices through restorative justice.
- **Truth**: Establishing an agreed-upon historical narrative.
- **Historical responsibility**: Acknowledging and reckoning with past violations of human rights.
- **Restructuring relationships**: Ensuring democratic governance, constitutional rights and equality for all groups and individuals.

The failure of the conflict management approach has perpetuated injustice and suffering in Gaza and the West Bank. Moving forward requires a fundamental shift toward reconciliation, as defined by Rouhana, to address historical grievances and establish a framework based on justice, truth and equality. Only through this process can a lasting and just peace be achieved.

Salim J. Munayer is a Palestinian Christian and Israeli citizen who has worked in reconciliation for over thirty years. He is the founder of Musalaha, coordinator of the Middle East North Africa Peace and Reconciliation Network of the World Evangelical Alliance, former academic dean of Bethlehem Bible College and an adjunct professor at Hebrew University and Pepperdine University. The views of the author do not necessarily represent the views of Mennonite Central Committee.

Learn more

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Reparation, reconciliation and Rabbis for Human Rights

As we write this article in the late days of September 2024, the Holy Land approaches one year of war. As people in Israel, Palestine and Lebanon continue to suffer and die senselessly, the massacre of October 7th hangs over us like a deadly fog and threatens to obstruct our way forward. It is in these darkest of times that our Jewish faith compels us to "turn from evil and do good / seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14). In order to reach the future to which we aspire—reparation and reconciliation, justice and equity—we must act now, in spite of an unclear present dense with doubt. We do not have the privilege to wait for the "day after" not amidst ongoing destruction of life and limb and pain of body and mind.

"In the face of rising religious extremism, violence and communal distrust, interfaith activism serves as our spiritual anchor."

The chief executive officer of Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR), Rabbi Avi Dabush, is a survivor of Hamas's attacks inside Israel on October 7th. From the very next day after the attacks, Rabbi Dabush was sounding a call for

human rights, hope for the future and action towards peace for everyone between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Embodying the commandment, "You shall not stand over the blood of your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:16), Avi has led our organization and community to "pray with our feet"—to quote the late, great Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel—in pursuit of peace. Since October 2023, RHR has regularly taken to the streets in its demands for a ceasefire, a return of the hostages and respect for international law and human rights. RHR's network of over 160 Israeli Rabbis has grappled with these issues from the outset through weekly scriptural discussion surrounding the sanctity of human life. RHR's actions since October 2023 build on its long experience for over 30 years in pressing for a just peace.

"In order to have truly shared conversation and activism, we need to amplify and make space for excluded and underrepresented voices in our society."

In the face of rising religious extremism, violence and communal distrust, interfaith activism serves as our spiritual anchor. By leveraging the shared values present in all major faiths in Israel and Palestine, we are mobilizing people to take an active part in the pursuit of human rights, justice and reconciliation while nurturing our solidarity. In the past year, RHR created an Interfaith Forum for Human Rights, which includes faith leaders and representatives of over 20 international and local organizations. The Forum took an active part in planning a significant Interfaith March for Human Rights in Jerusalem. Just days before the ultra-nationalist Jerusalem Day Flag Parade in early June 2024, hundreds of Israeli, Palestinian and international faith leaders and community members marched through the city center in a powerful display of solidarity and shared values. As we continue together, we look forward to deepening these partnerships and grounding ourselves in the shared obligation to uphold the sanctity of life.

Our commitment to reparation and reconciliation rests not only on moral and political grounds, but is also demanded by our Jewish faith as a prerequisite for inhabiting the Holy Land—"Justice, justice, shall you pursue, that you may dwell and thrive in the land that God is giving you" (Deuteronomy 16:20). This commitment extends to our neighbors in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). As it stands, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have not received salaries in months because of Israeli entry restrictions and PA insolvency. Throughout the OPT, freedom of movement for Palestinians is tightly restricted, even as the Israeli army and extremist settlers carry out

Rabbis for Human Rights helped to organize the Jerusalem Interfaith March for Human Rights and Peace in June 2024. (Rabbis for Human Rights)

unprecedented violence against Palestinians and their property, violence so bad that many Palestinians are scared to even leave their homes.

In late October 2023, together with more than a dozen partners, RHR launched an emergency humanitarian aid operation focusing on the most vulnerable Palestinian communities in the occupied West Bank. Together, we delivered over 80 metric tons of food packages containing basic supplies to feed a family for a week. All the while, we have brought Israeli activists to farming and shepherding communities in the northern and southern West Bank each week to accompany Palestinians as they carry out their day-to-day tasks. In the context of a two-tiered legal system in the OPT, the physical presence of Israelis and internationals sometimes deters settler and army violence and turns the law on itself in pursuit of a more equitable reality.

As the annual Palestinian olive harvest approaches, we are reminded of the difficulties of the previous year, in which settlers torched some 10,000 olive trees and carried out vengeful attacks across the West Bank while Israeli access restrictions left over 96,000 dunams unharvested and caused millions of dollars in lost revenue (one dunam equals 1,000 square meters). For over 20 years, RHR has assisted Palestinian communities in harvesting their olives—the situation this year demands we increase our efforts. We have already coordinated with 14 Palestinian communities in need and are expecting to bring hundreds of volunteers to the ground to work shoulder-to-shoulder with our Palestinian partners as part of a joint effort with over 15 Israeli organizations.

Amidst all of our actions, Christians in the Holy Land are some of our closest partners. This includes both Palestinian Christians as well as international Christians. Recognizing the linkages between anti-Christian and anti-Jewish prejudice, we strive to ally ourselves to the struggle of Palestinian Christians against Israel's military occupation and encourage our Rabbinical network to seek out opportunities to this effect. In recent months, for example, we have stood in solidarity with the Palestinian Christian Kisiyeh family, who have been displaced from their lands of Al-Makhrour, Beit Jala, by settlers backed by the Israeli state. Our commitment to this partnership must not be power-blind. In order to have truly shared conversation and activism, we need to amplify and make space for excluded and underrepresented voices in our society.

Mending the world—*tikkun olam*—is a core value of Judaism, connected to our knowledge of the broken, imperfect world in which we live. The rabbinic text tells us, in the name of the Creator: "Make certain that you do not ruin and destroy My world, as if you destroy it, there will be no one to mend it after you"(Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah). We are morally, politically and spiritually obligated to mend what has been broken, and we will persist no matter the circumstances.

Rabbi Dana Sharon was ordained by the Israeli Rabbinic Program of the Hebrew Union College (HUC). A prominent religious and feminist activist, she has served as the chairperson of the Jerusalem House for Pride and Tolerance and has volunteered for the Jerusalem Rape Crisis Center. Rabbis Sharon works for Rabbis for Human Rights and teaches in the Israeli Rabbinic Program at HUC. Ezra Brownstein is an American-Israeli budding activist. He currently works as a grant writer for Rabbis for Human Rights. The views of the authors do not necessarily represent the views of Mennonite Central Committee.

Learn more

Rabbis for Human Rights. Website. https://www.rhr.org.il/eng.

In this photo a staff person* with Al-Najd Developmental Forum, an MCC partner, distributes MCC-supplied relief items to displaced families in Gaza in February 2025. *Name withheld for security reasons. (Al-Najd Developmental Forum)

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