



Agenda for  
Reconciliation

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Conference report:  
**Witnessing to Hope**  
13–20th August 2000  
Caux, Switzerland



# Healing the wounds of history

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How do we heal the wounds of history?

How can we restore the dignity of victims and victimisers?

Some choose to put a lid on the sufferings of the past. Others use them to inflame hatred for a political or religious cause. Both approaches compromise the future.

As one participant expressed it: “The past will stand there in our memories with all its scars and wounds. Reconciliation, however, can take away the contaminating power of the past, its haunting presence, the devastating restlessness of people that have not found peace.”

For many individuals and nations, however, injustice and oppression are not matters of the past. They continue to degrade their dignity today.

How can justice be achieved? Is a process of forgiveness possible? It requires a willingness to enter areas of great pain in our own and other people’s lives.

This conference which gathered more than 500 people from 68 different nations made this evident. Participants came from countries such as Rwanda, Lebanon, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and Bosnia, which have recently emerged from traumatic civil wars. Others came from countries and regions still locked in conflict, like the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Israel and Palestine.

This report looks at some examples given at the conference of trust being built between adversaries, and the meaning of forgiveness and its relationship to justice. It discusses the role of religion, and witnesses to hope without denying the brutal reality in which far too many people and countries continue to live.

*Editor*

***“Even if different cultures express pain differently, suffering is universal and is caused everywhere by the same ills. The struggle for respect of human rights is also universal and cultural differences should not be a decisive factor in that struggle.”***

Dr Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the Swiss Foundation of Moral Re-Armament and former President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, at the opening plenary.

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***“Pain has no creed or citizenship. No matter how deep the wound is, there is always a remedy, if we hear with our hearts.”***

Samer Abu Ghazaleh, Gaza, Palestine

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***“Forgiving is not forgetting. It is not excusing or diminishing a wrong that has been committed. It does not absolve people from the consequences of their actions. It is not surrendering the right to justice.”***

Journalist Michael Henderson, UK, author of the book *Forgiveness, Breaking the Chain of Hate*

**“Forgiveness is the power to break the chains that bind us to past actions.”**

Author and sociologist Hannah Arendt

# Lebanese renounce violence

**A**ssaad Chaftari, an engineer, held senior rank in one of the Christian militias during the civil war in Lebanon. "I was brought up in a Christian belief and environment. What I knew about politics was enough for me: the Christians made Lebanon. They had to protect their prerogatives. The Muslims were a danger. When in 1975 the first bullets were fired, it was natural for me to enrol in the Christian militias. I was motivated by prejudice, then by fear. Hatred came later during the war. It came with the destruction around me and death of fellow fighters and friends."



Assaad Chaftari

Through becoming involved in a dialogue between Christians and Muslims eleven years ago, his views gradually changed. "I discovered the other Lebanese, our partners, the way they really are. I learnt that we are all equals: Christians, Muslims, Arabs, black and white. I know now the importance of a human life. Nothing political is important enough to kill a human being or cause him harm."

In February this year he concluded that the time had come to make a public apology through the press for what he had done in the name of 'country' or 'Christianity'. "I asked the Lebanese to forgive me. Confessing to God or a priest is good. But confessing my own faults to the harmed persons may help them. Today I am ashamed of my past. I cannot change it."

**"I know that feeling sorry will not be enough! I should show to others where I went wrong and be part of the campaign to build the post-war, new Lebanon."**

But I can be responsible for my future and the future of my country. I know that feeling sorry will not be enough! I should show to others where I went wrong and be part of the campaign to build the post-war, new Lebanon, where all may be reconciled and live as one."



Hisham Shihab

**Hisham Shihab**, a Lebanese journalist, spontaneously responded to these words of a former militiaman from the other side: "When Assaad Chaftari presented his moving apology, I had to salute him, hug him, ask for forgiveness. I come from a Muslim background. As a teenager I joined a militant group and participated in shelling Christian neighbourhoods with mortars. Later I was given a long range rifle with a powerful telescope, and was ordered to snipe at people belonging to the other side. It was a moment of truth when, through my telescope, I once saw three people running for cover: an old woman and

two boys. One of them looked like a cousin of mine. The old woman reminded me of my grandmother. My conscience told me that they are people like us. No political causes were worth the bloodshed. I refused to follow orders and decided to quit. I pledge to walk hand in hand with Assaad Chaftari, and with all the people who denounce violence and seek a better future for our children."

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## Apology of Lebanese figure breaks silence on civil war

By Charles M. Sennott  
GLOBE STAFF

BEIRUT—In the decade since Lebanon's civil war ended, this country has tried to rebuild from the ruins by for he

In a letter addressed to his victims "both living and dead" he became the first high-level militia leader to apologise for the thousands that he and his Christian militia contributed

Press cuttings from the Lebanese paper *An-Nahar*, and the *Boston Globe*

# Politicians' Round Table

A "Politicians' Round Table" took place 14th–16th August within the Agenda for Reconciliation conference. Participating were present and past parliamentarians and public officials from 22 countries.

Their discussions focused on three main issues: the situation in North-East Asia, particularly the possibility and implications of Korean re-unification; justice in international economic relations; and the prospects of reconciliation work in the Balkans.

Among the participants were three members of the Japanese Diet (Parliament), including the General-Secretary of the Democratic Party; a former Korean ambassador to Japan; a council member of the Chinese Association for International Understanding (CAFIU); a director of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington DC; the Assistant Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO) for Europe and Central Asia; the Governor-General of Jamaica; the Emir of Kano, Nigeria, and delegates coming directly from the Somali peace talks in Djibouti.

Although representing a wide variety of political views and differing concerns, they were united in their conviction that political measures need a moral and spiritual basis. Trust between the nations of North-East Asia or the Balkans cannot be built without repentance and restitution. Justice in economic relations cannot be realised unless globalisation is subjected to moral correctives and concern for the weak.



## Hiroshima:



Kazuo Tanikawa, MP, veteran parliamentarian from Hiroshima who has held two cabinet posts, the ministries of Justice and Defence, gave a seminar commemorating the 55th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on his city. He quoted the inscription on the cenotaph erected on the bomb-site in Hiroshima: "Rest in peace. We will not repeat the same mistake." This text was written after the Mayor of Hiroshima had visited Caux in 1950.



Asian participants in Politicians' Round Table, right to left: Yukihisa Fujita, Policy Assistant to leader of Democratic Party, Japan; Junfa Zhu, Chinese Association For International Understanding (CAFIU), China; Horiyuki Moriyama, Sakai City Councillor, Japan; Kim Tae-Zhee, Korea, former Ambassador to Japan and Germany; Dr Shalkhan Murmoo, MP, India; Kazuo Tanikawa, MP, Japan; Chea Vannath, President, Centre for Social Development, Cambodia; Zhu Lingling, Deputy Director, CAFIU Research centre, China; Yukika Sohma, Chairperson, Japan-Korea Women's Friendship Association, Japan; and Takako Sakaki, Chief Director, Saitama International Friendship and Information Cooperative, Japan.