

**International Conference on
HEALING THE WOUNDS OF HISTORY: ADDRESSING THE ROOTS OF VOILENCE
Concept Paper**

This conference is proposed jointly by the **Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP)** and the **National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC)**, in close collaboration with the **Mizero Foundation** and **Rwandan Professional Dreamers**, and with support from the **National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide** and the **National University of Rwanda**. It will be held at Umubano Hotel in Kigali on **June 12-14 2012**. The main aim of the conference is to explore the psychological roots of violence in recent Rwanda, and to identify new modalities of healing, reconciliation and forgiveness, between both individuals and groups.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

In recent years Rwanda has become like a brand new country, with a renewed infrastructure and few physical reminders of the genocide. Nevertheless, Rwandan society is still trying to come to terms with its past, and find novel ways to move forward towards a unified and peaceful future. There is an uneasy relationship with its history that had led to the past conflicts and the divisions in the country which highlights the importance to heal “an unrelenting memory of anguish.”

In short, despite the huge efforts made by the Government and many national and grassroots organisations, there is continued need for deeper healing with regard to the profound psychological effects of genocide, as well as for addressing the underlying causes and roots of violence.

This need for healing includes:

- a. The strong historical identities that made the killings psychologically possible are still present albeit in a more private and less overt ways;
- b. The major barrier to constructive human relations in Rwanda is that the recovery from genocide is a long and difficult process and the psychological damages are very deep. For this reason it is not easy to identify and heal these wounds which are being left open and continue to hurt especially during special events such as national commemoration week each year;
- c. Solidarity amongst its people is required in order for Rwanda to build peace. Yet peaceful coexistence is challenged by the fact that victims and perpetrators live together which, without healing, is a perpetual source of pain and trauma;
- d. Psychological therapies related to compassion, acceptance and forgiveness often have the power to heal some of the wounds of history. However, forgiveness is seen by some as a value that can end the cycles of hatred and pain, but by others as an act of betrayal of justice.

Thus we are proposing the conference to address the need to deal with the deeper causes of violence, to heal the wounds of history and to explore forgiveness as a key in the healing process. The conference will survey theoretically the need for healing in the Rwandan context and propose a framework for psychological and trauma healing as a response to such needs. It will further construct a safe space for the participants to experience the proposed approaches in an open, non-judgmental and empathetic culture of sharing and listening.

AIMS AND PROCESSES

This conference will gather persons from diverse groups already working in the fields of reconciliation, community building and peace education in Rwanda and beyond. It aims to explore the need for innovative psychological and therapeutic approaches to healing, developing solidarity and community building. More specifically:

The conference will first convey the theoretical understandings of conflicts and their historical perpetuation. In this manner, the participants may identify historical narratives that dehumanise the other and make peaceful reconciliation impossible. The objective is to understand and explore the roots that shape our identities and our relationship to the “other”. We hope to do this through the sharing of international and Rwandan experiences.

Second, the conference will demonstrate that psychological and therapeutic approaches are necessary. It will provide an opportunity for participants to attend experiential workshops of therapeutic and personal dynamics that aim at freeing us from such dehumanising narratives and the cycles of fear and blame they bring. The objective is that the individual can experience some of the liberating and healing potential of these approaches.

Third, there will be a collective sharing and reflection on our experience during these workshops. This will be followed by an exploration of how such approaches might help consolidate the psychological and social rebuilding of Rwanda within existing reconciliation institutions at both national and grass-root level. The objectives are to catalyse processes that can provide a platform for developing strategies and actions necessary for healing in Rwanda; and to help initiate transformative processes that work towards healing and building peaceful human relationships through compassion and forgiveness.

The conference will do this by engaging in the following:

- A. Keynote speeches and dialogue interaction in which national and international presenters and participants discuss the need for and the contribution of psycho-therapeutic approaches towards the processes of healing and peacebuilding in Rwanda; and in which both local and international practitioners map out some of the effective approaches to healing the wounds of history;
- B. Experiential workshops where participants share narratives to reveal key elements of individual and collective identities, including memories of trauma and violence, concepts of power and victimhood. These professionally facilitated workshops are intended to enable the participants to reflect on the psychological causes of their individual and groups’ grievances and fears through compassionate listening.
- C. Discussions and forums that draw on the understanding emerging from the previous processes in order to identify key capacities required to promote psycho-therapeutic approaches in Rwanda.

SPEAKERS

The keynote speakers for this conference are Bishop Dr John Rucyahana, President, Rwanda National Unity & Reconciliation Commission and Hon. Aloisea Inyumba, Rwandan Minister of Gender and family Promotion. Other speakers include both international and Rwandan scholars and practitioners who have extended experience in addressing the deeper roots of violence, healing wounds of atrocities and building solidarity in post-conflict communities.

PARTICIPANTS

We envisage 80-100 participants at the conference, including:

- international and local experts and practitioners;
- Rwandan regional leaders in the field;
- church leaders from different denominations;
- NGO workers in the fields of community renewal, conflict transformation and prevention, and peacebuilding;
- counsellors and facilitators who are working in trauma healing;
- youth leaders; and
- other agents of change in Rwanda.

OUTLINE OF PROGRAMME

The duration of the conference to be three days structured as follows:

Keynote Speeches – given by inspirational speaker(s) to outline the existing theoretical frameworks and setting the scene for the day.

Panel Presentations – offered by Rwandan and international scholars, experts and practitioners. The discussions will be led by experienced chair-persons who can invoke and sustain vigorous and open dialogue within a constructive atmosphere.

Inspiring narratives and testimonies – provided by Rwandan and international witnesses who have embarked on personal journeys of healing, forgiveness and transformation.

Experiential Workshops – led by professional facilitators who are skilled in constructing an open space for group interaction and deeper personal experiences. The numbers of people for each group would be around 10-15, carefully chosen to ensure a good mix in terms of individuals' backgrounds.

Plenary Dialogue and Discussions – attended by all participants to share insights and learnings emerged.

THEMES

The broad focus for each day and the progression of the programme is as follows:

Day 1: The need for psycho-social approaches to healing the wounds of history with an overview of different effective approaches - both local and international;

Day 2: Exploring myths and narratives and how they relate to our multiple identities and identifying our gifts and potential for building trust and solidarity

Day 3: Taking responsibility and developing our capacity for healing and peace

We envisage a follow-up project with nation-wide programmes in order to make the psychological and therapeutic approaches available to wider communities in Rwanda for healing and constructive relationship building across sectors.