

Truth Recovery

Proposal: Develop a comprehensive framework for truth recovery which can uncover as much information as possible to support people who have been most impacted by the past.

Guiding principles & values

- Truth recovery should prioritise the needs of victims/survivors.
- The aim of recovery of truth is to uncover as complete a view as possible about the past in order to ensure that such conflict does not re-emerge, and to encourage, as much as is practical, social and political reconciliation.
- The aim is not to allow one dominant narrative of the conflict; rather it is provide a context wherein competing narratives about the past can be examined, in order that that we learn from what occurred.
- Any truth recovery process will be consistent with international and domestic law.
- Any truth recovery process needs to be independent from the British and Irish Governments, combatant groups, political parties and economic interests.
- Truth recovery should be accompanied by appropriate reparations for those directly affected by the conflict.

Benefits & Challenges

Benefits

- Can improve on existing 'patchwork' of truth recovery mechanisms and create a coherent comprehensive structure to address truth recovery related issues.
- Can provide those involved in the conflict with the opportunity to make or renew a commitment to healing and reconciliation.
- Can open up space for reflection, and create opportunities with other mechanisms for dealing with the past.
- Can limit misconceptions and mitigate disagreements about what actually happened.
- Can attempt to prevent future cycles of violence based on grudges and manipulation.
- Can be part of a wider set of processes which assist a society in dealing with the legacy of the past.

Challenges

- Risk of 're-opening wounds'.
- Potential negative impact on the already fragile political and peace process.
- How to avoid further undermining of trust.
- Risk of reinforcing competing versions of history - criminalising individuals who were actively involved in violence - without tackling the systems and structures which gave rise to and exacerbated the conflict.

Rationale

International experience suggests that truth recovery is a key element for individual victims and societies to know about and coming to terms with the legacy of past violence and human rights abuses. While there exists currently a range of mechanisms doing aspects of this work in a patchwork way (e.g. Police Ombudsman, Historical Enquiries Team, Inquests and Public Inquiries), these are widely accepted as expensive, piecemeal, and broadly inadequate to the task of a holistic approach the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. It would be more effective to create a unified framework to deal with these outstanding issues. This would also provide a practical and symbolic expression of the willingness of society to deal with its violent past as part of the transition to becoming a more inclusive and peaceful society.

What is needed?

- Agreement on the process and format of the framework that will be constructed, including key role players and parties.
- Agreement to participate by as many as possible of the significant state, non-state, political and civil society actors.
- Draw on the wealth of knowledge and information provided by Healing Through Remembering in terms of options, as well as the work of the Consultative Group on the Past and Panel of the Parties Proposals (as of 30.12.13).
- A cost-effective, pragmatic solution that takes a victim/survivor-centred approach while also keeping in mind clear societal outcomes and domestic and international law.

This is one of a set of HTR proposals on dealing with the past relating to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. HTR believes these proposals would be best implemented as a comprehensive response to ensure that a range of complex but interrelated needs are met.



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