
Experts Discuss Truth Commissions Emerging from Peace Agreements, at Symposium Organized by the Kofi Annan Foundation and ICTJ



New York, November 15, 2013 — More truth commissions are being created now through peace agreements than at any other time in history. But are they living up to high expectations for truth, accountability, and reconciliation in societies emerging from violent conflict? This week, the [Kofi Annan Foundation](#) and the [International Center for Transitional Justice](#) (ICTJ) held a three-day, high-level symposium to explore the challenges and benefits of truth commissions emerging from peace processes.

The symposium, titled “Challenging the Conventional: Can Truth Commissions Effectively Strengthen Peace Processes?”, was held at Greentree, in Manhasset, New York, from November 12-14, 2013, with the participation of experienced peace mediators and transitional justice experts. It examined how truth commissions can achieve their goals in the aftermath of conflict.

“Truth-seeking can give a voice to victims and their families and perhaps help them to find closure. Truth-seeking can help determine the accountability of individuals. However, truth-seeking is not only about individual responsibility; it’s also about society, about the state and its institutions,” said [Kofi Annan](#), former Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his opening remarks.

The participants identified several challenges, including powerful perpetrators that may attempt to prevent any accountability and [truth-seeking](#) from being introduced in the peace framework; unrealistic expectations as to what truth commissions can achieve; and the role and legitimacy of the individuals who serve on commissions.

Creativity is essential. One-size-fits-all templates do not help, and they may even complicate the scenario, mismanaging the expectations of society. “Expectations must be realistic for these commissions,” explained [David Tolbert](#), President of ICTJ. “They are not panaceas or final chapters of a troubled story: they are often the beginning of a long process to rebuild the rule of law and confidence in state institutions.”

[Pablo de Greiff](#), the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, warned that the over-expansion of truth commissions’ mandates presents practical problems in truth commission processes. “Truth commissions’ mandates, both in terms of the violations they examine and especially the functions we are expecting them to perform, are constantly growing. There is disconnect between what we expect truth commissions to do and their capacity and power to meet those expectations,” said de Greiff.

Participants in the symposium included: senior practitioners and experts from the fields of transitional justice and peace mediation, representatives of regional bodies, and key players in the diplomatic community and the United Nations. The outcomes of the symposium will be published offering critical analysis of past experiences and concrete recommendations for future truth commissions.

Photo Caption: Peace mediators and transitional justice experts discuss truth commissions emerging from peace agreements, at Greentree, in Manhasset, NY (Rayne Holm/ICTJ)

About ICTJ

The International Center for Transitional Justice works to redress and prevent the most severe violations of human rights by confronting legacies of mass abuse. ICTJ seeks holistic solutions to promote accountability and create just and peaceful societies. For more information, visit www.ictj.org

About the Kofi Annan Foundation

The Kofi Annan Foundation aims to promote better global governance and strengthen the capacities of people and countries to achieve a fairer, more secure world. To advance this mission the Kofi Annan Foundation has developed programs and partnerships in Sustainable Development and Peace and Security. For more information, visit www.kofiannanfoundation.org

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