

CHAPTER SEVEN

Reconciliation

Introduction

1. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (“TRC” or “the Commission”) was guided by various provisions of the Truth and Reconciliation Act 2000 (“the TRC Act”) in addressing the question of reconciliation.
2. Section 6 (1) of the TRC Act states that the Commission should strive, among its functions, “to respond to the needs of the victims... [and] to promote healing and reconciliation.”
3. Section 6 (2) of the TRC Act further states that the TRC must “work to help to restore the human dignity of victims and promote reconciliation by providing an opportunity for victims to give an account of the violations and abuses suffered”. The TRC should equally provide an opportunity “for perpetrators to relate their experiences”. In the same vein, it should try to create “a climate which fosters constructive interchange between victims and perpetrators, giving special attention to the subject of sexual abuses and to the experiences of children within the armed conflict”.
4. Section 7 (2) of the TRC Act provides that “the Commission may seek assistance from traditional and religious leaders to facilitate its public sessions and in resolving local conflicts arising from past violations or abuses, in support of healing and reconciliation”.
5. This chapter will focus on the Commission’s activities to promote reconciliation and to create a space for dialogue between communities divided by the experiences of the war. The narrative will draw upon excerpts from hearings to illustrate how the different parties were encouraged to reconcile with one another in the course of the Commission’s work. These excerpts reflect the themes that underpin the TRC’s approach to reconciliation, which includes the acknowledgment of past wrongdoings and a programme of reparations.

Concepts

Reconciliation

6. The Commission began its work on the premise that there is no universal model of reconciliation that can apply to all countries. Reconciliation is not a concept that can be imported to a country from abroad. It has to emerge from within the society and be owned by that society. Bearing this in mind, the Commission recognises that the term “reconciliation” is a fluid concept which is not easily defined. In the paragraphs that follow, the Commission offers a conceptual framework of how it understood reconciliation and endeavoured to foster it through the processes it facilitated.

7. The Commission recognises that the notion of restorative justice offers the potential for reconciliation. Restorative justice is different from retributive justice in that a retributive system of justice seeks to punish perpetrators for the crimes they have committed, while it is accepted that restorative justice focuses on restoring relations, as far as possible, between victims and perpetrators and between perpetrators and the community to which they belong.¹
8. A restorative system of justice includes accountability, truth telling, acknowledgement, and reparations. Accountability requires that the perpetrator acknowledge the harm done to the victims and takes action to repair that harm.² Acknowledging harm may lead to an apology offered by the perpetrator. Apologies may be offered not only by the perpetrator, but by all those who bear command responsibility for such actions. Included in this category are those who pursued policies or actions that eventually led to a violation, those who failed to prevent the commission of a violation and those who knew about a violation and failed to take action against it. While the victim may voluntarily choose to forgive, the Commission is of the opinion that forgiveness by a victim is not a necessary element in this process and cannot be forced. The Commission also notes that an admission of remorse by the perpetrator cannot be forced. Remorse, while desirable, is not necessary for reconciliation to obtain.
9. The Commission focused on reparations as another element of restorative justice, which can be provided either in material or symbolic forms to redress the harm suffered by victims as a consequence of the violation and abuses they endured. The Commission took the view that the implementation of a reparations programme in Sierra Leone would be vital to the reconciliation process because it has the potential to assist those victims whose lives have been most devastated. The implementation of a reparations programme also helps to facilitate relations between victims and perpetrators.
10. Scores of victims voiced their concerns to the TRC at the fact that many perpetrators have been beneficiaries of government initiatives such as the Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programme, whereas there have been fewer programmes available to assist victims. A reparations programme has the potential to reduce the perception that the state has taken better care of perpetrators than of victims, which is important if victims and perpetrators are to reconcile with each other. The Commission feels strongly that a commitment by the government to the reparations programme will help to restore relations between the government and the victims of the conflict.
11. The fundamental aims of all of these measures must be, minimally: to give recognition to victims; to help create a culture of co-existence where victims and perpetrators reach a shared understanding of the future; and to promote relationships of civic trust between citizens themselves and between citizens and their institutions. Reconciliation furthers social solidarity and is essentially about finding the mechanisms and the space to live together peacefully and with tolerance of diversity.

¹ See Galaway, B. and Hudson, J.; "Restorative Justice: International Perspectives," at pages 2 - 3. See also Eisnaugle, C. J. N.; "*An International 'Truth Commission': Utilising Restorative Justice as an Alternative to Retribution*", in *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, January 2003 (hereinafter "Eisnaugle, *Restorative Justice as an Alternative to Retribution*"), at page 2.

² See Eisnaugle, *Restorative Justice as an Alternative to Retribution*, at page 3.

12. The manner in which reconciliation should be facilitated has been the subject of much discourse throughout the TRC process. The Commission took the view that reconciliation has many components: national reconciliation; community reconciliation; and reconciliation between individuals, such as between victims and perpetrators at an inter-personal level. The Commission felt strongly that national reconciliation is a political process that begins with the negotiation of a cessation of hostilities and then leads to a peace process. A decisive move away from war is an important first step in the reconciliation process. Instituting measures that lead to democracy, establishing democratic institutions, building a culture of human rights and re-establishing the rule of law constitute steps that facilitate and deepen reconciliation at a political and national level. National reconciliation creates a context within which community reconciliation and individual reconciliation flourish.
13. The Commission felt strongly that it should support and pursue efforts to foster a climate of national reconciliation, as it creates potential conditions in which local actors can pursue reconciliation.³ At the same time, the Commission is of the opinion that, while the process should be launched at the national level, implementation needs to occur at the local level. Local actors should eventually take control of the process.⁴ If victims do not have any sense of what they can expect from the process or if they feel marginalised from the process, reconciliation will be difficult to foster.⁵ The Commission's mandate also required the assistance of local leaders to support the process of reconciliation. The Commission endorsed the view that national reconciliation must also be pursued in a complementary fashion at local level.
14. The Commission did not subscribe to any formula as to which level of reconciliation should first be pursued. The Commission believed strongly that for reconciliation to succeed at the national level, it is essential that the government and the President of the country own the process of reconciliation and create the structural conditions in which reconciliation is to occur. The government must play a key role in fostering and promoting dialogue among the various actors involved in the conflict as well as promoting a culture of tolerance. Efforts should be made for reconciliation processes to be inclusive of both victims and perpetrators, as both groups are integral parts of any long-term solution.

³ See the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), "Reconciliation After Violent Conflict – A Hand Book", at page 25.

⁴ See Van der Merwe, H.; *"The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Community Reconciliation: An Analysis of Competing Strategies and Conceptualisations"*, published by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, South Africa (hereinafter "Van der Merwe, *Competing Strategies and Conceptualisations*"), at page 9.

⁵ See Van der Merwe, *Competing Strategies and Conceptualisations*, at page 8.

National reconciliation

15. The cessation of hostilities and the return of the country to peace is the first step in the process of reconciliation. National reconciliation must be explored in this context. Truth Commissions in the last ten years have had to grapple with reconciliation in the context of negotiated transitions. In the past, there has usually been a victor who has been able to impose victor's justice. In recent conflicts, particularly those in modern times, there are no victors, as the case of Sierra Leone illustrates. Parties negotiate the end of a conflict, which usually involves a negotiated transfer of power, a government of national unity, and often an amnesty deal. Once the fighting stops, reconciliation entails a political compromise between former enemies who have to find ways of governing the country together and building a stable economy, which in turn facilitates political and socio-economic development.
16. Reconciliation in this national context must be translated meaningfully for the population. It requires that the leaders of the nation develop a common understanding of the diverse reasons for the conflict recognising that there is no single truth, but a many-sided truth. In most instances, particularly in recent times, truth commissions have been established to construct a historical truth of the conflict that all sides can live with.
17. National reconciliation also requires that the state and other stakeholders work towards ensuring the prevention of new conflict. Ensuring non-repetition of conflict requires eliminating those issues that have the potential to lead to conflict. It requires the restoration of the rule of law and democracy, the establishment of an independent judiciary, good governance, institutional reform and the opportunity to pursue the means to a decent livelihood. Political tolerance by the major political actors in Sierra Leone is another necessary ingredient. Political actors must learn to be aggressive about social and political change rather than towards each other. By doing so, they will help the country move one step forward along the path of national reconciliation.
18. National reconciliation is a long-term nation-building project, which the Commission facilitates but which ultimately must be owned by the nation. The TRC in Sierra Leone has acted as a catalyst in the process of national reconciliation by organising thematic hearings during which national stakeholders were invited to come to discuss the causes of the war and their particular roles. The Commission also organised workshops on national reconciliation and offered the opportunity to civil society, political parties, the legal sector and individuals to make recommendations that informed the content of the Commission's final report. The Commission is fully aware of fact that it may take many years to achieve fulfilment of all of its recommendations.
19. The Commission regrets that the leadership of Sierra Leone has not taken the opportunity to do more to promote reconciliation at the national level. Once the Commission completes its work, it dissolves and the baton passes on to the President who, as the leader of the nation, must take responsibility for this national project. It would be helpful if the President were to make a symbolic acknowledgement of the wrongs done to all the people of Sierra Leone and then commit himself as the father of the nation to ensuring the success of the reconciliation project. It is the Commission's view that the government will make a significant contribution towards fostering reconciliation at the national level as well as setting the stage for reconciliation to be carried out at community level if it ensures that the recommendations made by the Commission are carried out speedily and with integrity.

Community reconciliation

20. At the community level, reconciliation is fostered or facilitated by understanding and sharing experiences and by creating the conditions for community acceptance of wrongdoing. Return to the community by perpetrators involves accountability on the part of those perpetrators. The community, represented by the elders, religious leaders and Chiefs, acknowledge the wrongdoing symbolically on behalf of all in the community, thus allowing for the entry of the perpetrator back into the community. It is important to note that the community cannot forgive in the name of the individual wronged; it can only acknowledge the harm done to the community. The acknowledgement of wrongdoing helps pave the way for the victim and perpetrator to live together. The approval and support of the community in such a reconciliation process is necessary in order to make reconciliation sustainable.
21. Community reconciliation can occur on many levels, including individual-group level, intra-group level and inter-group level. At the individual-group level, individuals need to reconcile with the group they belong to or used to belong to or wish to belong to after the war. Reconciliation at this level can go beyond the immediate community to include family, the home community, the community where the individual has settled down after the conflict, the church community or peer groups. The Commission has actively encouraged this level of reconciliation, more specifically during the reconciliation ceremonies at the end of each of its district hearings. Many of these ceremonies focused on reconciliation between ex-combatants and the communities they currently live in. Others focussed on the reunification of abducted children with their families and communities, or on the reunification of a "bush wife" with her family, or that of a chief with the community that he or she had abandoned during the war. While reconciliation is about relationships between individuals, it must be emphasised that, in most instances, relationships are also defined and influenced by the communities to which individuals belong.
22. At the intra-group level, reconciliation is within a group and amongst the members of a group. While members of different fighting factions may try to reconcile with one another, there is also a need for combatants to reconcile with members of the same faction. For example, some members of a faction may feel betrayed by their commanders. Other examples of groups in which this level of reconciliation can take place are political parties, the military, the police, the judiciary and even ethnic groups.
23. Such intra-group reconciliation may also need to take place within groups where there are strong views that one or the other may have contributed indirectly to the war, or that not enough was done to prevent or stop the conflict. Different views on these roles may exist within the same group and need to be sorted out before reconciliation can take place. If reconciliation at this level fails, groups may split and even become sources of new conflict or a threat to the peace process. The Commission heard examples, both past and present, of such intra-group conflict during its thematic hearings. It is apparent that many groups, such as ex-combatants, have not dealt with their internal conflicts and have not begun to work on reconciliation. In this regard, a lot of important work remains to be done.

24. At the inter-group level, reconciliation is essentially between different, often opposing groups. An example is the integration of members of each of the various former armed factions into the reformed Sierra Leone Army. It may also involve reconciliation between specific groups of ex-combatants and victims, for instance, between amputees and the fighting faction that committed most of the amputations, or between the Army and civilians. It may also entail reconciliation between two neighbouring communities that collaborated with different factions during the war. This Commission has not completed its work in this area.
25. Community reconciliation, like national reconciliation, is a long-term nation-building project. The Commission was surprised by the number of complaints about the violations committed by many of the Chiefs during the conflict, for which they neither as a group nor individually expressed remorse or offered any explanation to their communities. In reality, while the Commission had to rely on the Chiefs as leaders of their communities and had to work closely with them, the Commission was cognisant of the fact that many chiefs have been discredited by their failure to explain the roles they played during the war. It is for this reason that the Commission has not felt entirely comfortable relying on traditional structures to help foster reconciliation. The reconciliation process must continue and traditional leadership will play an important role in this process. However, the Commission has recommended that the role of Chiefs and the manner in which they have been manipulated by successive governments must be placed on the national agenda for discussion, as it has huge potential for further conflict in the future.

Individual reconciliation

26. At the inter-personal level, reconciliation is between two individuals. The most obvious example is reconciliation between a victim and a perpetrator. The Commission has encouraged reconciliation efforts between victims and perpetrators both during and since its hearings. While war was fought between the various armed factions, civilians became the main casualties of the conflict. Many civilians were also compelled to turn perpetrators, unwillingly at first but later becoming complicit in the violence. The Commission also heard testimony that many civilians used the war to settle old conflicts with neighbours, business colleagues or other rivals.
27. At an individual level, victim and perpetrator meet. While some forgive, others don't. It is important to note that forgiveness cannot be forced upon anyone and that only the individual can forgive. No government or chief can forgive on behalf of the individual. Individual reconciliation is reflected on the inter-personal and intra-personal levels.
28. At the intra-personal level, reconciliation is deeply personal and involves coming to terms with the past and the consequences of the conflict. Reconciliation at this level is closely related to trauma healing. The Commission has defined trauma healing as a process that improves the psychological health of the individual following extensive violent conflict. The Commission is of the opinion that reconciling with oneself may help a victim or a perpetrator regain confidence and trust in other people again.

29. All of these levels of reconciliation are equally important and inter-related. Reconciliation at one level can facilitate reconciliation at another level. Conversely, the lack of reconciliation at one level can hamper reconciliation at another. The need for multi-layered reconciliation is a reality in Sierra Leone. In many instances, members of an armed faction do not agree amongst each other about acknowledgment of responsibility for violations and abuses committed by some of them. Such disagreement hampers reconciliation between the perpetrators of these violations and their victims. Many so-called “victim-perpetrators”, such as the children abducted to become child soldiers, block out the violations committed by them during the conflict period because they cannot deal with the trauma. Many remain in denial unless assisted by trained practitioners to deal with it. Inability to reconcile with oneself can make reconciliation with victims very difficult and, in some cases, almost impossible.
30. A huge problem for many victims is that their perpetrators remain nameless and faceless. Equally, many perpetrators do not know who their victims are. The mass-based nature of the conflict has the consequence that many violations remain “anonymous”. These situations make inter-personal healing very difficult and make the reconciliation processes that take place at the community level even more important. While many organisations and groups within Sierra Leone civil society have contributed to this process and continue to do so, achieving reconciliation will require a concerted effort from all.

TRC Policy on reconciliation

31. The Commission's policy on reconciliation is based on two central principles: first, the process of reconciliation should be based on the country's own culture, traditions and value system, which requires that traditional and religious leaders play a role in the process; second, existing structures need to be utilised as much as possible so as not to “reinvent the wheel”.

Traditional values and methods informing reconciliation

32. During the Interim phase of the Commission, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) contracted a local organisation, Manifesto 99, to conduct research on traditional methods of conflict resolution and reconciliation in Sierra Leone. While the report did not address all the issues the TRC had to deal with, it nonetheless provided a basis for the Commission's reconciliation policy. It covered the views of four ethnic groups on traditional practices on how to deal with conflict and reconciliation in relation to murder, burglary, arson, land, marital conflict, assault and injury.
33. The report confirmed that most Sierra Leoneans, irrespective of whether they follow the Muslim or Christian faith, still cling to traditional animist beliefs. It also confirmed that most of the ethnic groups have belief systems that promote truth telling and reconciliation. Truth telling, swearing or curse casting (or the threat of it) are essential elements of spiritual justice to encourage voluntary confession. The perpetrator can undergo cleansing or purification, or benefit directly from a pardon by society and thus be in peace with himself and with the community.
34. All of the various ethnic groups have their own traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution, which can be used to deal with many of the violations committed during the conflict. Of course, amputations and abductions were rarely heard of before the war. The nature and gravity of the conflict and the particular violations usually dictates the chosen method of conflict resolution.

However, in some instances, the mechanisms in place are in conflict with a culture of human rights and perpetuate a culture of violence. For instance, in the case of robbery, groups like the Mende, Kono, and Sherbro will dress the perpetrator in rags, molest him or her and compel the person to dance around the village. The perpetrator is often beaten up. However respectful of tradition the TRC wishes to be, the use of violence cannot be condoned or encouraged.

35. Where children are concerned, traditional mechanisms such as national cleansing ceremonies can be applied. Some traditions, however, are applied with less rigour.⁶ An example of how traditional methods could be used on the children was exhibited during the district workshop in Kabala. It was explained that children's bodies were covered with mud and ashes, after which they were taken to the river to be symbolically washed from their past.
36. Many aspects of traditional conflict resolution, such as mediation, purification, token appeasement and the willingness to show remorse, are in harmony with the objectives of the TRC policy and have been sustained by the Commission during its hearings and beyond.
37. Other violations, such as abductions, amputations, murder and arson, which are rare in the traditional context, are normally referred to the police, through the Paramount Chief or District Office. However, given the amnesty established by the Lomé Agreement, traditional methods can be adjusted and applied to those violations too, as a condition for the reintegration of ex-combatants.⁷ Reunification ceremonies all over the country testify that such methods are already being widely applied. Caritas Makeni used such methods during reunification ceremonies for abducted children, as recounted below:

“When Caritas Makeni reunified child ex-combatants with their families, the latter sought to “change the hearts” of their children through a combination of care, support and ritual action. Usually, the eldest member of the family prayed over a cup of water and rubbed it over the child's body (especially the head, feet, and chest), asking God and the ancestors to give the child a “cool heart,” a state of reconciliation and stability in which the child is settled in the home, has a proper relationship with family and community and is not troubled by nightmares and bad memories... Some parents then drank the consecrated water that had washed their child. The consecrated water now becomes the new physical bond between parent and child... some parents also offered kola nuts... Some parents, in addition, followed this up with liquid Quranic slate water... Others again made a “fol sara” to thank the ancestors and God, either dedicating a chicken and caring for it thereafter, or slaughtering and cooking it with rice as an offering to poor people, or to a Muslim ritual specialist to eat.”⁸

⁶ See Manifesto '99, *Traditional Methods of Conflict Management and Resolution*, study report submitted to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in support of the preparatory phase of the TRC, July 2002 (hereinafter “Manifesto '99, *Traditional Methods of Conflict Management and Resolution*”), at page 66. The research quoted here was taken from the following study: Shaw, R.; *Remembering to Forget* – “Report on local techniques of Healing and Reconciliation for Child Ex-combatants in Northern Sierra Leone”, Tufts University, USA, October 2002 (hereinafter “Shaw, *Remembering to Forget*”), at page 9.

⁷ See Manifesto '99, *Traditional Methods of Conflict Management and Resolution*, at page 62.

⁸ See Shaw, *Remembering to Forget*, at page 7.

38. Traditional methods of conflict resolution are not static. They are dynamic and are capable of being adapted to deal with the kinds of violations committed during the war in Sierra Leone.
39. Since reconciliation in Sierra Leone involves traditional values and beliefs, the reconciliation process cannot move forward without the participation of the religious and traditional leaders. Article 7(2) of the TRC Act explicitly refers to the assistance from traditional and religious leaders in facilitating reconciliation. The inter-faith community in Sierra Leone has played an important role in the negotiations for peace and is still one of the strongest support networks for people affected by the war. In view of the limited mandate of the TRC, partnerships with religious and traditional leaders have become all the more important. The dialogue that has started between various groups and the community can continue with the presence of these leaders. Traditional and religious leaders can help make reconciliation more sustainable.
40. Traditional and religious leaders were involved in all the activities of the Commission, including truth telling and conflict resolution sessions, sensitisation activities, statement taking, the hearings and the reconciliation initiatives. They were consulted as to where monuments and memorials should be established. Community members assisted in identifying the sites of mass graves and torture chambers. They will continue the follow-up exercise with witnesses and implement the reconciliation programme funded by the UNDP.

The Reliance on Existing Structures

41. The TRC Act envisaged a partnership between the Commission and other bodies in promoting reconciliation. The Commission relied on existing structures that were already involved in reconciliation activities. The TRC has been a catalyst in reconciliation by creating partnerships with key stakeholders within Sierra Leone civil society, including religious and traditional leaders, NGOs, victims, ex-combatants, official bodies such as the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), the Army and the police.
42. In many parts of the country, activities were undertaken by the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) developed by NCDDR and NGOs helping communities come together and rebuild. UNICEF also played an instrumental role in reintegrating child combatants.
43. Many faith groups became entry points for the return of ex-combatants to their communities. While these efforts were not co-ordinated on a countrywide basis, it was necessary to build on the foundation they provided. The Commission sees itself as having opened a space for dialogue between divided groups and communities. It now behoves civil society, the government and other stakeholders to sustain the momentum created by the TRC process.
44. The Commission did not expect to reconcile the whole nation and has not been able to develop reconciliation activities in every village. To realise its mandate, it needed to ensure the sustainability as well as the national character of the reconciliation process. The Commission chose to develop joint reconciliation activities with various partners in order to allow civil society to continue the reconciliation process beyond the Commission's lifespan.

OVERVIEW OF TRC ACTIVITIES TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

45. The Commission's major efforts in respect of reconciliation centred on restoring relationships between various stakeholders. The Commission's efforts have mostly concentrated on facilitating the reconciliation process between:
a) victims and perpetrators, with each other and with the community; and
b) perpetrators with the community.
46. During the statement-taking phase, efforts were focussed on the sensitisation activities necessary to inform the public about the work of the Commission. TRC activities also targeted specific groups of victims and perpetrators for participation in the statement-taking process, as a prelude to reconciliation activities that might take place later on.
47. The district hearings provided the platform to address the issues affecting reconciliation in the each particular district. The hearings took place in the district headquarter towns and lasted for one week in each location. During the hearings, two kinds of reconciliation ceremonies were performed: those in which victims and perpetrators were brought together; and those in which only perpetrators begged the community for forgiveness. The ceremonies were the first step in the healing process rather than an achievement of reconciliation. Other activities during the hearings included the naming of victims who died during the conflict and the establishment of monuments and memorials in the town where the hearing was held, or at the site of a mass grave in the district.
48. The Commission organised a National Reconciliation Procession on 6 August 2003 to mark the end of its nationwide hearings. Participants included members from various political parties, the police, the Army, victim organisations, students and members of civil society. Representatives of the political parties and from the security services offered apologies for the roles their members played during the conflict. Other apologies were made during the thematic hearings held by the Commission.
48. Further work on reconciliation continued through workshops and consultations with civil society. These workshops and consultations brought together various stakeholders at both national and local levels to discuss the conditions necessary for reconciliation and the roles of the respective actors.
49. Lastly, careful provision was made for the continuation of reconciliation activities. District Reconciliation Committees were established in partnership with the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone, in order to prolong and build upon the work of the Commission on reconciliation.

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES FOR RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES

50. The TRC's reconciliation procedures began with the following step: the Commission encouraged chiefs, chiefdom committees and other local structures to hold community and other consultations before, during and after the public activities of the Commission. The Commission recommended that these consultations begin and that it did not necessarily require that people make statements before it. It was important that these consultations should identify the impediments to reconciliation in the community or district and the roles of various actors to move the process forward. The Commission was prepared to assist in furthering dialogue and to mediate in resolving whatever issues existed in the communities. The Commission recommended that the consultations at the local and other levels should culminate with perpetrators being encouraged, both by the chiefs and other community members, to acknowledge responsibility or guilt. It was the view of the Commission that the acknowledgment of past wrongdoing could foster reintegration. Finally, the Commission encouraged and organised reconciliation ceremonies with local and religious leaders officiating over the reintegration of perpetrators. The reconciliation ceremonies were the beginning of the journey to reconciliation. The dialogue that has started needs to be sustained until full reconciliation is achieved in the communities.

Support provided to TRC witnesses during the various reconciliation activities

51. The Commission established a set of guidelines for assisting witnesses who provided testimony before it. Assistance was provided to witnesses before, during and after the hearings, in the form of the following measures:

Witness support during the statement-taking phase:

- a. All statement-takers received training on gender-based violence, child development, human rights, trauma and the symptoms of trauma, as well as training on how to take statements from vulnerable groups such as victims of torture, victims of sexual violence and children. Statement-takers were also trained on how to interview ex-combatants and perpetrators without being judgmental.
- b. Statement takers were selected, among other criteria, for their ability to speak local languages, thus allowing the witnesses to speak in their own languages. The statement takers were all originally from the districts in which they worked.
- c. Witnesses were informed of the possibility of providing a confidential statement. The witness could ask that his or her name not be used in the report. In addition, each witness was asked whether he or she would wish to appear in a public or closed hearing.
- d. Female victims were interviewed by female statement-takers, in order for them to feel more comfortable and to speak more freely, especially if they were victims of sexual violence.

- e. Children were interviewed according to the Memorandum of Understanding worked out by the TRC with UNICEF and the Child Protection Agencies (CPAs). Measures included a vulnerability assessment of each child by a CPA representative before the interview took place.
- f. Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. During sensitisation, people were informed where they could come and give a statement later, if they did not want to do so immediately after a sensitisation session.
- g. Regular review meetings were organised with the statement-takers, during which additional training was given. The statement-takers gave feedback on problems they had while interviewing particular categories of witnesses such as women, children and perpetrators.

Briefing of witnesses before the hearings:

- h. All witnesses received counselling by TRC staff prior to providing testimony before the Commission.
- i. Often the willingness of a perpetrator to confess was a result of one or more sessions with a counsellor. When a perpetrator refused to confess or gave erroneous information to the Commission, an additional session with counsellors and other staff, or a meeting with the community leaders, would sometimes lead to more genuine confessions as well as participation in the reconciliation ceremonies.
- j. Special attention was paid to the briefing of children and the victims of sexual violence.

Witness support during the hearings:

- k. Before the beginning of the hearings phase, Commissioners and staff received training on trauma and the symptoms of trauma and on interview techniques.
- l. A counsellor sat next to every witness during his or her testimony, to encourage or console the witness and to provide any other support needed.
- m. All witnesses were permitted to come with a family member or friend, albeit that only a few witnesses used this opportunity.
- n. All children were heard during closed hearings, according to a Memorandum of Understanding, as mentioned previously, with UNICEF and Child Protection Agencies. On some occasions, children were accompanied by a representative of a CPA, or by a parent.
- o. Victims of sexual violence were given the choice between a public hearing or a closed hearing with only female Commissioners and staff. They were properly briefed about the possible consequences of a public hearing. Depending on the district, most women preferred a closed hearing, but in some locations, women insisted on giving a public statement. Some were even accompanied by their husbands.

- p. All victims testifying during closed hearings were filmed in a way that concealed their identity. Some of these testimonies were used in a compilation of testimonies that was shown during the thematic hearings on women and children.
- q. All witnesses were allowed to talk in their language of preference and were provided with interpreters who spoke their language.
- r. During all of the hearings, Red Cross volunteers and a nurse from the government hospital were present to assist witnesses and members of the public, based on a Memorandum of Understanding agreed upon with the Red Cross and the Ministry of Health.
- s. All witnesses were debriefed immediately after the hearings and before going home.

Referral to NGOs:

- t. The Commission tried to create an atmosphere and conditions under which witnesses would not only be encouraged to speak freely, but also to feel liberated after the hearings. If a witness required urgent assistance to address their needs as a consequence of a violation committed during the war, the Commission established a referral system with a number of NGOs in Freetown and in the provinces.
- u. On many occasions, referrals were made for medical care, skills training, education, micro-credit, psychosocial counselling, provision of artificial limbs, etc. Witnesses received a referral letter and were, wherever possible, accompanied by a TRC staff member or volunteer for their first visit.
- v. For some victims of sexual violence who continued to suffer from serious physical consequences, transport to the nearest town or even to Freetown was organised so that they could seek medical treatment. Medication was purchased for some of the most needy victims.

Follow-up on witnesses after hearings:

- w. After the hearings, the Commission organised follow-up visits to the witnesses in order to evaluate the impact of their participation in reconciliation activities. The Commission ensured that, where possible, the visits were undertaken by the same counsellors who had assisted the witnesses during the hearings, in order to preserve the relationship of confidence that had already been developed.
- x. The TRC counsellors received important assistance from the traditional and religious leaders during their follow-up visits.
- y. A questionnaire was provided to check if the hearing had a positive or negative impact on the witness, his or her family, and the community, or if he or she received any threats. This exercise commenced on 17 June 2003 and continued for one month in the Western Area, and from 14 October to 2 December 2003 in the districts. Although 403 witnesses testified during the hearings, follow-up visits were conducted with 266 victims. Reasons for not reaching some witnesses included bad road conditions, the death of witnesses, time constraints and the inability to locate witnesses because they had moved.

Sensitisation activities

52. During the preparatory phase, the TRC promoted the idea of reconciliation and truth telling through sensitisation activities in Freetown and in the districts. The Commission made extensive use of media outlets such as the radio and television and conducted grassroots activities in order to explain the work of the Commission and to promote the concepts of truth-telling and reconciliation. All of these sensitisation activities continued during the statement-taking phase of the Commission. Every visit to a chiefdom started with a meeting with local and religious leaders as well as a sensitisation session with the local population.

Emphasising the participation of specific groups

53. The Commission recognised that the reconciliation process could not take place without the participation of important stakeholders such as perpetrators and victims. Therefore, special efforts were made by the Commission to reach out to those stakeholders who were initially reluctant to cooperate with the Commission. The Amputee and War Wounded Associations were amongst those stakeholders initially refusing to participate in the TRC process.
54. In a press statement issued by the Amputees and the War Wounded Associations, it was clear that the victims belonging to either one of these two groups would not provide statements to the Commission unless the government acknowledged their plight and took proactive steps to improve their well-being. As the press statement indicated:

“...We want to draw the attention of those concerned and the Government of Sierra Leone, that a bill be passed which could be accepted as law for better care for amputees. Otherwise, we are not prepared to talk to the TRC.”

Following a list of demands that included free housing, a monthly allowance, free education for their children and medical treatment, the statement ended:

“Finally, if these problems are not addressed, no amputee will appear before the Commission.”

55. To address the problem, several meetings were facilitated between the Amputee Association, senior staff members of the Commission, by Mr. John Caulker, the Coordinator of the Truth and Reconciliation Working Group. At the meetings, the Commission explained that it did not have a budget of its own to fulfil any of the demands made by the amputees but that the mandate calls upon it to make recommendations on reparations. It was also explained to the amputees that their participation in the TRC process would give them a forum to explain their plight, which would assist the Commission in formulating recommendations on reparations.
56. The meetings resulted in a full agreement between the Amputee Association and the Commission on 15 March 2003 to participate in all of the Commission's processes. Statement-taking took place at the amputee camp in Freetown on 19 March 2003 and a joint sensitisation campaign by the TRC and representatives of the Amputee Association took place from 3 to 6 April 2003 in Bo, Kenema, Kono, Makeni and Masiaka.

57. During the sensitisation campaign, many issues were raised by the amputees and war wounded. Aside from their requests for assistance in the area of social services, some participants expressed concerns about their safety. Many feared retaliation by perpetrators who lived in their community or by members of the Republic of Sierra Leone Army (SLA) if they accused them in their testimony to the Commission.
58. In the end, the Amputee and the War-Wounded Associations participated in the thematic hearings on reparations and reconciliation. Both sets of organisations actively participated in other TRC-organised activities such as the National Reconciliation Procession on 6 August 2003, the district workshops on reconciliation, and the workshop on National Reconciliation.
59. The Commission also recognised the important role that ex-combatants played in the reconciliation process and, therefore, made a concerted effort to involve them in the activities of the Commission. In the initial stages of the statement-taking phase, the Commission took notice of the fact that very few statements were being provided by perpetrators. To increase their participation, the Commission worked with the Post Conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE), an NGO that sensitises ex-combatants on the workings of the TRC and the Special Court. The initial reluctance of the ex-combatants to cooperate with the TRC stemmed from the fact that many of them were afraid that the TRC would pass on information to the Special Court. Following the sensitisation, many ex-combatants came to testify at several of the Commission hearings in the district. In addition, the RUF, the political party that is considered to be the successor of the RUF, actively participated in the thematic hearings as well as other reconciliation activities such as the National Reconciliation Procession and the workshop on National Reconciliation.
60. To address the low level of participation in the Commission process by members of the Republic of Sierra Leone Army, the Commission in collaboration with the Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) organised awareness raising campaigns in March 2003 in various military formations across the country. Various media outlets such as the radio were also used to reach those in the army in hopes that they would provide statements to the Commission. Although the Commission obtained the full cooperation of the RSL Army authorities, the number of statements by the military remained small. However, some members of the military testified during the hearings phase, either as victims or as perpetrators, and some were reconciled with their victims following their testimony. Additionally, the members of the military actively participated in the thematic hearings of the Commission as well as in the National Reconciliation Procession.

RECONCILIATION BETWEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

61. The Commission made a concerted effort to bring together those victims and perpetrators who were willing to participate in the process of reconciliation. If a witness confessed during the hearing that he had committed a violation, or if a victim named the alleged perpetrator, efforts were made to find the other party. Based on the information provided by the victims, the Commission invited alleged perpetrators to respond to the allegations made against them. Where a perpetrator was named and he or she was present at the hearings, the Commission allowed them to present their own sides of the story during the same hearings. In other cases, victims and perpetrators were brought together at their own request. Based on a random sampling of 300 statements from the Commission's database, it was determined that 88% of victims were willing to meet with their perpetrators. With regard to perpetrators, approximately 81% were willing to meet with their victims.
62. If a perpetrator asked for forgiveness and the victim accepted, this was publicly confirmed by both of them and a traditional reconciliation ceremony organised by the Commission. Based on the same sampling of statements from the Commission's database, many perpetrators were willing to acknowledge the wrongs they had committed against their victims. Approximately 31% of the statement-givers responded that they would be willing to accept responsibility and offer an apology and 20% of the statement-givers responded that they would be willing to participate in rebuilding their communities. None of the statement-givers, however, was willing to pay reparations to his or her victims.

Reconciliation Ceremonies

63. Many reconciliation ceremonies were organised during the course of TRC hearings. The ceremonies took place with the consent of the victims and perpetrators and with the full participation of traditional and religious leaders, as well as their respective communities.

Hearing in Moyamba District – 13 June 2003

64. The following incident took place at a TRC public hearing in Moyamba District on 13 June 2003. Alpha Mohamed related to the Commission how his son, who was a member of the Kamajors, had been killed by the RUF rebels. Mr. Mohamed claimed that the death of his son was the result of a retaliatory act committed by M'Balu Boryawah (also referred to as Mamie M'Balu), a woman who claims she was mistreated by the Kamajors. Mr. Mohamed explained in his testimony that when his son was shot, Mamie M'Balu saw him and promised to inform his colleagues about his predicament. Instead, she led the RUF rebels to him and he was subsequently killed by the rebels. Mamie M'Balu initially denied the role she had played in the death of Mr. Mohamed's son. She then had a change of heart and begged Mr. Mohamed for his forgiveness and even offered him money as a sign of her remorse. The offer of money was refused by Mr. Mohamed. The Commission then inquired into Mr. Mohamed's willingness to reconcile with Mamie M'Balu. The Commission succeeded in finding Mamie M'Balu and bringing her to the hearing. An excerpt from the hearing is reproduced on the opposite page:

Leader of Evidence: I want to ask if you are willing to reconcile with the witness that is about to come.

Alpha Mohamed: I cannot say I will not agree because the Lord said that if you do not forgive, He - the Lord - will not forgive your deeds. If she gives me money, it would not be equivalent to my son's live. Therefore, I have no alternative but to accept reconciliation.

Comm. Marcus-Jones: During the war so many unforeseen things happened. People take up different causes and they believe in what they are doing. The Kamajors had one opinion and the other parties had a different opinion. That is war and innocent people like you suffer, but I am happy that you believe in God and for the progress of country you are ready to reconcile. We will not say more now until we come to the ceremony to make peace, we want you to wait. We would like to hear Mrs. M'Balu herself.

65. The previous day, the Commission had heard another witness, John Bullie, also accused Mamie M'Balu of collaborating with the RUF rebels and providing them with the plans of the Kamajors. Mr. Bullie was also asked by the Commission if he wanted to reconcile with Mamie M'Balu:

Commissioner Torto: This lady you mentioned, whom you said you saw with the rebels, if we should talk to her family will you be willing to reconcile with them?

John Bullie: Yes, I am willing to do so.

66. The Commission then invited Mamie M'Balu to testify. She explained that she suffered because of the Kamajors and that her husband had been killed. She also denied being responsible for the death of Mr. Mohamed's son and having asked him for forgiveness. Commissioner Marcus-Jones then responded:

Comm. Marcus-Jones: Each of you suffered during the war. There must have been some misunderstanding somewhere. The two witnesses that testified immediately before you are blaming you for their misfortunes. We have heard all your stories and one thing that is clear is that you all suffered. You lost close relatives; you are carrying scars on your body because of what you went through. The Commission is not ordering or commanding you, but having heard your testimonies, the Commission is saying that you - for the good of the country - reconcile and put the past behind you. The two other witnesses we listened to - Mohamed and Bullie - are ready to reconcile. We have to go through time and years. We want to know whether you are ready to reconcile.

Mamie M'Balu: I agree that the Commission facilitates reconciliation between and among us.

67. The Commission subsequently organised a reconciliation ceremony for all the parties involved in the Moyamba hearing, which consisted of several symbolic acts. The three participants were first asked to write down their grievances on a piece of paper. They then had to tear this piece of paper. The act of tearing symbolised the fact that they had put behind them whatever grievances they had towards each other and that they were willing to live together. Those pieces of paper were later burnt on the floor. Later a kola-nut was shared among them, as a symbol of unity and of peaceful co-existence. A paramount chief then gave them a glass of water that all three had to drink from. The rest of the water was poured onto the floor and later rubbed onto people's chests. In the end, there were handshakes and the ceremony was concluded with a big, collective hug. This ceremony was watched over by three hundred people. The family members of the three people, community youths, women groups, and elders all participated in the ceremony. The Commission was honoured all throughout Moyamba for this particular reconciliation ceremony.
68. During the witness follow-up visit to Mr. Alpha Mohamed on 24 October 2003, approximately four months after the original reconciliation ceremony, Mr. Mohamed expressed his gratitude that the Commission had convinced Mamie M'Balu to apologise to him. He mentioned that they now have a cordial friendship and that they have since become friends.
69. Upon a separate follow-up visit to John Bullie, he mentioned that his relationship with Mamie M'Balu had improved significantly and that she even pays him visits from time to time. He did, however, mention his disappointment at the fact that the Kamajors did not receive the acknowledgement they deserved for their contribution in helping to stop the war.
70. On a follow-up visit to Mamie M'Balu, she expressed her satisfaction with the results of the reconciliation ceremony. Nonetheless, she expressed a desire to receive financial assistance since her husband had been killed and she had no other means to support herself and her family.

Reconciliation meeting in Freetown – 4 November 2003

71. In many cases, victims expressed the desire to meet with their perpetrators. One such "reconciliation meeting" took place in Freetown on 4 November 2003.
72. Gibrill Sesay, Shekuba Kuyateh, Ibrahim Fofanah, Mohamed Bah III, Alpha Kanu and Mohamed S. Kamara all had one or more of their limbs amputated in 1998 in the Kono District. They accused a certain sergeant in the Sierra Leone Armed Forces by the name of Alhaji Baryoh, alias Staff Alhaji, of orchestrating the amputations. The paramount concern of the amputees was that the sergeant acknowledged the wrong that was done to them. The Commission's staff, with the co-operation of the Sierra Leone Army, organised several meetings with both the victims and the alleged perpetrator. At first the meetings were held separately, but then the victims and perpetrator met together. The meetings eventually led to a half-hearted apology by the perpetrator, followed by a reconciliation ceremony. An excerpt from the encounter is reproduced on the opposite page:

Sergeant Alhaji Baryoh: My name is Sgt. Alhaji, good day Sir, good day Madam. My brothers said my men during the war did this amputation to them, so they have been finding a way for us to sit and discuss. So today we are here and have asked them for forgiveness, so that's all Sir.

Gibril Sesay (victim): ... On behalf of the amputees, I want to express my thanks to the TRC for bringing our perpetrator, who is Sergeant Alhaji Baryoh, to make peace between him and ourselves, and we say thanks to God that he was brave to accept. On behalf of the amputees wronged by this man, we have reflected and concluded that he is our brother; we are unable to push him too far. For the sake of peace so that this will never occur again in Sierra Leone, we have forgiven him so that he will be able to get a freedom of movement, so that his conscience will be clear. The TRC has been able to bring us together for the sake of reconciliation between him and us. We thank the TRC for bringing him forward to reconcile with us, we cannot throw him away, he is our brother, as he has said he is sorry, that is what the TRC is here to do, to ensure that two brothers are brought back together. Let the man still continue to play a big role to ensure that our hearts continue to be pleased with him. Although now we are satisfied today, we say thanks to him for coming forward and answering for his wrongs, we say thanks to the Commission and the country entirely.

Comm. Marcus-Jones: We have heard about Staff Alhaji in the statements made to us and we are pleased about what he said just now. He said his men were supposed to have committed violations, I don't know what he is saying about himself, how much he is involved and whether the violations were done under his orders. Maybe he would want to say a little more about it, and I am going to give him the opportunity to say something.

Sergeant Alhaji Baryoh: I don't have anything to say more. I am still begging pardon to them.

Comm. Marcus-Jones: You have apologised to them.

Sergeant Alhaji Baryoh: Yes, Madam.

Comm. Marcus-Jones: From what he has said, you've accepted his apology? And are ready to go on?

Victims: If he accepts that he did it to some of us.

Sergeant Alhaji Baryoh: I gave the orders to my boys to do the amputation. Since we are here, I'm still begging for forgiveness.

Comm. Marcus-Jones: Ah! That is very clear; you have acknowledged your violation. Now that you are brought back and reintegrated, I am sure that you will turn a new page and be ready to work together in peace.

Sergeant Alhaji Baryoh: Yes, Madam.

Hearing in Freetown – 14 April 2003

73. In some cases, the Commission heard testimonies from victims who were willing to forgive their perpetrator without wanting to meet with their perpetrator. The following example is drawn from the testimony of Tamba Finnoh, who testified at a public hearing in Freetown on 14 April 2003.

74. In the testimony provided by Mr. Finnoh during the public hearing, he described his experiences in the Kono District. He recounted to the Commission how he and others were lined up and had their hands amputated one by one. According to Mr. Finnoh, his right hand was “chopped off” by a child combatant who was between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. He further described the difficulties he had encountered in trying to seek medical help. Mr. Finnoh finally reached an ECOMOG base where he was put on a helicopter flight to Freetown and, upon arrival, he was taken to Connaught Hospital for treatment. Unfortunately nothing could be done to save his right hand. Immediately after his testimony, the Chairman of the Commission, Bishop Humper, engaged in the following exchange with Tamba Finnoh:

Chairman: Do you know anything about the perpetrator and would you be ready to meet with him and reconcile?

Tamba Finnoh: the individual is in Kono and the last time I was in Kono, my nephew told me that they had wanted to attack him but I told him not to. I am a pastor and the word of God tells me that vengeance is the Lord's, not me, so I told them to leave him alone. He is still there.

Chairman: Would you want to invite him so that the two of you can meet together?

Tamba Finnoh: ...Actually, no... the cardinal principle of my religion is forgiveness, because I myself am a sinner, everyday, by thought, by words, and by actions... we forgive people who ask for forgiveness but that is for their own good, we also forgive those who have offended us even when they do not ask for forgiveness from us for our own good. With me, I have put that behind my back... But in terms of reconciling with that man, except that he is afraid of me, I don't have any problem with him.

Potential for Reparations to Foster Reconciliation between Victims and Perpetrators

75. Victims often expressed their discontent over the implementation of government-led initiatives, such as the DDR programme, for offering inordinate levels of reintegration assistance to perpetrators. As a result of human rights violations committed against victims, many are in urgent need of assistance. Reparations for these victims would serve as the catalyst to help restore the relationship between victims and perpetrators. It would contribute to the sustainability of reconciliation between victims and perpetrators.

Hearing in Freetown – 25 April 2003

76. The testimony of Kadiatu Fofanah at a TRC public hearing in Freetown on 25 April 2003 was pertinent to this point. Kadiatu Fofanah testified about the rebel attack on Freetown and how they amputated her legs. Her husband left her and her house was burnt down. She received help from several international organisations and now she lives as an amputee in the Murray Town Camp. She has engaged in petty trading as a means of generating a modest livelihood. An excerpt from her testimony is reproduced below:

Kadiatu Fofanah: I have now got my house, my toilet, some people are helping my children and that is why I say I am ready to forgive.

At the end of her testimony, Commissioner Kamara asked her whether she had any recommendations to make to the Commission:

Commissioner Kamara: We are happy about the successes you have made unlike some of your colleagues. I would like to ask you any questions or make recommendations to this Commission.

Kadiatu Fofanah: I want to ask a question on behalf of the amputees. What should we do to cater out hospital and medical needs? We would not like you to leave the entire burden to use for taking care of our children. Ibrahim (her youngest son) always said that he will retaliate in the future. We are appealing to the government not to neglect the children of the amputees. We, who are sitting on wheel chairs, must be supplied proper wheel chairs; we have seen wheel chairs in Europe which can take you to a long distance without being pushed. We have requested for a bus but they refused to give us... So you please help us, so that we can forgive with all our hearts.

Reconciling victims, perpetrators and their communities in Bonthe District – 9 July 2003

77. While the TRC supported reconciliation meetings between victims and perpetrators, it endeavoured to ensure that the reconciliation process was supported and accepted by the community. Since reconciliation is a process, participation in a ceremony is just a first step. The community's support is required to make it sustainable. The example below is drawn from the hearings that took place in the Bonthe District from 6 to 9 July 2003. The Commission facilitated reconciliation between an elderly victim, Alhaji Noah Abdul Wahab (known as Mr. Noah), who was accused of trying to imitate the amulets of the Kamajor fighters, and his perpetrator, Lamin Sadiki, a member of the Kamajors. During his testimony, Mr. Noah recounted the story of how he was beaten up by the Kamajors and had his ear nearly cut off by Mr. Sadiki. At the request of the TRC, Mr. Sadiki appeared at the hearing and told his side of the story.

78. Mr. Sadiki recalled how he was summoned by his Commander to a meeting at which they had invited Mr. Noah to come and explain his actions and why he was trying to imitate the amulets of the Kamajors:

Lamin Sidiki:

While I was there, Abdul Noah denied the thing, he said, "Well, I wouldn't do such a thing". He [the Commander] said, "well, I believe it is your doing, don't deny it." Then he started flogging Mr. Noah. While he was flogging the man... I had a knife in my hand and cut part of his ear... When he prayed that brief prayer in Allah, calling Allah's name... it made me feel bad and I left. It took me two days, I couldn't go back to Mosande because of that act that I did... I am begging that Pa Noah forgives me.

79. Mr. Sadiki begged Mr. Noah for his forgiveness by lying down on the floor. Mr. Noah stated that the accusations made against him were false but he accepted the apology by putting his hand on Mr. Sadiki's head. The Commissioners then invited the community elders to respond and Mr. Minnoh, a traditional leader, reacted on their behalf:

Mr. Minnoh:

This is what we have been looking out for. All the assembly of people here from different parts of the district, coming here to listen, this is what we have been seeking. God, who has created all of us, this is what He looks forward to. When you do wrong to anybody, don't go to any Juju man, don't go to any medicine man. The person whom you have wronged, go straight to him. This is what God requires of us. If you have wronged God, you go straight to God, God will accept you but if you wrong your fellow human being and you leave him and go to God, God will not accept you. What this man has done between him and Kamor, I believe God would answer him... because he has spoken the truth, God will set him free. I am thanking the Commissioners very, very much because you know how to investigate matters. Many God help you to continue. I thank you all.

RECONCILIATION BETWEEN PERPETRATORS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

80. When a perpetrator confessed to violations committed elsewhere or when the victim could not be found, the reconciliation ceremonies organised by the Commission focused on reconciliation between the perpetrator and his community. In many districts, the community had rejected perceived perpetrators because of their membership of armed factions, even though they had not committed any violations in that community. In these instances the perpetrators would ask the community to forgive them and to accept them back as full members of the community. Traditional and religious leaders would usually grant reintegration into the community. The participation of women representatives in some cases was particularly important when the perpetrator confessed to having committed acts of sexual violence.

Hearing in Moyamba District – 10 June 2003

81. The following example is drawn from the district hearings that took place in Moyamba District on 10 June 2003.
82. Samuel George, a teacher at Bauya, recounted his story of how he was abducted by the RUF rebels. While travelling with the rebels for almost three years, he confessed to having killed, attacked villages, looted from civilians, taken drugs and committed raped. He claimed that his actions were committed under duress. At the end of his testimony, Samuel George asked the Commission and his community for forgiveness:

Samuel George: All what I did was not my doing... all is the wish of God. I ask the Paramount Chief to forgive me and accept me into the community. I was not a bad man when I taught for twenty years. I ask the Commission to forgive me.

83. The Commission then proceeded to a reconciliation ceremony, which was attended by religious and traditional leaders, the principal and pupils of the schools in the township and local authorities, all of whom made a contribution. Excerpts of various contributions to the TRC reconciliation ceremony involving Samuel George are reproduced below:

Comm. Marcus-Jones: He is an educated man, and a teacher. He tried to be reintegrated. He is traumatised and he needs people to accept him back so that he'll be useful in the community. We appreciate the fact that you are here. Let them accept him again in the society.

[Interlude for communal prayers]

Paramount Chief: Thank you for what you have done. We have heard it... we'll tell our people. Nobody in his right mind will do such things... It was your life-saving matter. You went through a lot. God said we should forgive each other. For peace to be established we need things like this...

Chief of Police: You have been blessed and we empathised with you... It will be nice if you stand by your repentance. As from today you are free in conscience. I advise that you continue to be clean... if you would do it again, we would not tolerate it. The law would take its course. As from now on, I ask that you do nothing again.

Principal of School: I talk as a teacher and a woman. We suffered a lot. Some of you have gang-raped. We gave birth to you but when you did this you did not think of it. The day of reckoning will come and it's here. I am happy that you confess to rape even if you don't know the number... You are a man and have children. I pray that you don't do it again... This is a noble profession. Because of the war, teachers are not coming to teach in the provinces. I pray that with what has happened, the Sierra Leonean community will know that the war is over. On behalf of the teachers of Moyamba, I accept your apologies and we pray you will join us.

Samuel George: Paramount Chiefs, Commissioners, Religious Leaders, My People, School-Going Children, I have done wrong against my wish. I have burnt... I have killed. I have done so many wrong things that are against the nation through force, I didn't do it willingly. I did it against my wish. I raped, under duress. So, I am begging you for mercy. Accept me once again in your community as your son.

Representative of Elders: ... When war has come, it has come. There was no sense in us, no power in us. If you fell and you are captured, you will do things that they want you to do. He has done so many things that a human being cannot do under normal circumstances... It was the war; now the war has ended.

The traditional and religious leaders then placed their hands over Samuel George's head, symbolising his acceptance back into the community.

84. During a follow-up visit by a TRC counsellor on 23 October 2003, Samuel George expressed his satisfaction over the outcome of the hearing and declared that people have begun to accept him back into the community.

Hearing in Bonthe District – 10 July 2003

85. The following example is drawn from the hearings in the Bonthe District on 10 July 2003. Ansu Koroma testified before the Commission that he had been abducted by the RUF when he was a young boy and held for approximately eight years. He recounted in detail all the violations that he had committed:

Ansu Koroma:

Even when I joined, I did not do it out of my own free will... I was abducted. When they came here, they did a lot of destruction here. Even when they took me along, I did not know the amount of destruction they did here in my absence... but I have come to talk to you my father, my mother, brothers and sisters, all of you. I want you to forgive me please. I am a boy... I am just a child. Well, I was only working on instructions and if I had not taken those instructions, I was going to be killed. That was why I was behaving that way but I am begging and asking for forgiveness from all of you today, my fathers, my mothers, my brothers and my sisters and all of you gathered here, to forgive me to have mercy on me. I am pleading, please. I did not do it out of my own free will. It is because of war. When we were here, we never knew the rebels were going to reach here, so please as parents, forgive me. So please Paramount Chief. I thank you all... Please, that's my plea.

Ansu Koroma then knelt down before the traditional and religious leaders in a gesture of remorse. The Paramount Chief responded on behalf of the community:

Paramount Chief:

All of us have heard what Ansu Koroma has confessed. Today, Ansu has confessed publicly before all of us that in those days when the rebels came to this place, they abducted him forcefully. When they took him along, he had to join their course and then they have done a lot of destructions in the country but, as he has come before us this evening and he has confessed all what he did, I want to join him to plead to all of us my brothers and sisters and to show mercy and show forgiveness to Ansu. Let us accept him back into our community... let us not look at him the other way. What is passed is passed. Let us unite and fight the way forward and that's what I want to tell you my people.

The Paramount Chief went on to lay his hand on Ansu Koroma's head as a sign of forgiveness and acceptance. The following exchanges involved other community representatives as they responded to Ansu Koroma's statement:

Religious leader: Who would want forgiveness from God if you commit a sin here amongst all of us here? All of us need forgiveness from God is that not so? That was why God said we too also should forgive our brothers and sisters when they have wronged us. I feel very pleased when somebody confesses before me and I will become very happy to forgive that person. That is what that person wants. So my brothers and sisters, if we too are praying for forgiveness from God and we do confess and God forgave us, therefore, it is incumbent on all of us here to forgive Ansu Koroma. Let us become his advisers as from today let him too become an adviser to his colleagues so that we can develop this land. I believe all of us here will forgive him and that the only thing I will like to tell you Ansu, I want you to accept Christ as your Saviour. If you do that, I know you will receive the Kingdom of God. Are you prepared for that?

Ansu Koroma: Yes.

Women's representative: "Ansu Koroma, this evening you have shown that you have confessed all the bad things you did but what you have done now, it will be difficult for somebody to stand publicly and talk about what you did and as you have told us, me as a woman and we women do labour for people, we know the pains in child bearing, I am talking on behalf of the women in the town to say we have forgiven you and that we will remain to stay here as one for the development of Sierra Leone."

These statements were followed by prayers and the members of the community laid their hands on Ansu Koroma's head as a symbol of collective forgiveness.

Hearing in Pujehun District – July 2003

86. The next excerpt, taken from a hearing in the Pujehun District, illustrates the willingness of a perpetrator to reconcile with the community even though the perpetrator joined the fighting forces of his own free will to fight what he considered to be a “just cause”.
87. Lamin Koroma explained to the Commission that he had decided to join forces with the Kamajors to protect his community and to avenge the death of his father, who had been killed by the rebels. In his testimony, Lamin Koroma acknowledged that the Kamajors committed violations and wanted to offer an apology for any misdeeds on their behalf. The following excerpts reveal his exchanges with the Chairman, Bishop Humper, and the Leader of Evidence:

Lamin Koroma: We did not join in the war to do wrong... Whether we the Kamajors had wronged you, whether we had done the right thing, God has brought peace... We did not win the war, we were at the bottom when peace came, which means we, God and President Kabbah have saved you the civilians... Therefore today, I... as a Kamajor... I'm talking on behalf of my brothers, to let the Commission talk to our people to forgive us.

Chairman: I want you to know Lamin... that some civilians, a good number of civilians in this country are contending that the Kamajors are not doing any better than the rebels in terms of their treatment of civilians in the later stages of the conflict and if they should have any grudge against Kamajors, it was only because the Kamajors themselves became rebels in terms of dealing with people in this country. I want you to understand that.

Lamin Koroma: Yes. It may be like that. We only need to plead... but there were some civilians who were collaborators... but all I'm saying is that I'm still begging on behalf of my men.

Leader of Evidence: In the last while, since the war ended, have you seen any of your former victims?

Lamin Koroma: Many of them.

Leader of Evidence: What do you tell them when you see them?

Lamin Koroma: I met one Mr. Kallon and we have spoken over that.

Leader of Evidence: What was the outcome of your meeting?

Lamin Koroma: He said that I am one of his children. He did that because he wanted the soldiers to safeguard him and if so, let bygones be bygones.

Leader of Evidence: So if you see any of your former victims now what will you be telling them? If they appear before you now, what will you say to them?

Lamin Koroma: I will apologise to them.

Leader of Evidence: So even if they are not here, are you willing to apologise to them through the Commission?

Lamin Koroma: Yes.

Leader of Evidence: Would you like to do so now?

Lamin Koroma: Yes. My people, we were fighting the war to bring peace. Sometimes, you become frustrated or traumatised when you are in a new gathering, especially taking up arms. Sometimes, if you have never killed or wounded somebody, when you do so, it will go a long way, especially when you shoot at somebody... Having shot at somebody, definitely you will become a bit mad, the sound of the gun makes you go mad... especially when both of you are shooting at each other. If we have done so and our primary aim is to bring peace and peace has come, I'm appealing to you my people, forgive us... there were mistakes... let those mistakes be forgotten... we did not make them on purpose. I am begging you to forgive us. I am talking to the Commission to help me plead with these people. I am begging on behalf of the soldiers, the atrocities the soldiers might have committed, the Kamajors and the rebels. I'm talking to the Commission to talk to government so that there will be an assistance rendered to all victims. ... That is what I'm asking but I'm still talking to the Commission to talk to the government and I'm still talking to my people to forgive me and forgive us.

Perpetrators who refused to acknowledge responsibility

88. While the above examples clearly show the willingness of some perpetrators to acknowledge their actions during the conflict and to seek forgiveness from their communities, there were many others who were not so willing to acknowledge their wrongdoing. Perpetrators who were reluctant to acknowledge their actions simply blamed the war or even said: "God has wanted the war."

Hearing in Kailahun District – 14 May 2003

89. The next example is drawn from a closed hearing in Kailahun on 14 May 2003. Mustapha Sam Koroma was with the RUF vanguards in Kailahun District. He was a "security commander", although he claimed he did not make any decisions while in command. He also claimed he never went to the war front, which he subsequently contradicted. Due to the significance of the role he seemed to have played with the RUF in Kailahun, he was not welcome in the area. Excerpts from Mustapha Koroma's exchanges with the Commission are reproduced overleaf:

Mustapha Koroma: I am appealing to the Commission: the war was not made by human beings... it was made by God. God knows those who caused the atrocities. I am appealing to the Commission to plead to the people of Kailahun for them to have mercy on me.

Leader of Evidence: Are you ready to take any step to beg them for forgiveness? Begging for forgiveness is the beginning. But don't expect people to forgive you when you refuse to accept what you have done. What can also help is if you yourself say you are willing to reconcile.

Commissioner Kamara: If you say you were going to apologise, people will ask apologise for what?

Mustapha Koroma: I am apologising for what the war did.

Commissioner Kamara: What kind of crime do you accept to have caused?

Mustapha Koroma: I apologise for what the war has caused and, as a member of the RUF, I apologise for what the RUF did during the war. I am appealing to the government to assist us with education. As you can see there is no electricity in Kailahun. There is no good road to Kailahun and no health centres. I am appealing to the government to assist us with all of these in Kailahun.

90. During the reconciliation ceremony, Mustapha Koroma made the following statement, in which he admitted that he was involved in the commission of certain violations:

Mustapha Koroma: My name is Mustapha Koroma. I stand before all of you. That whatsoever that happened in this war... it was all of us that caused it. So please, you are my people. Forgive us. Be it burning of houses, be it beating of people, we are all involved. Please forgive us.

After his statement, Mustapha Koroma knelt down and the traditional leaders put their hands on his head as a sign of acceptance and forgiveness. The ceremony was followed by the pouring of libation and the breaking of kola nuts.

Hearing in Kono District – 26 June 2003

91. A man named Abdul Razak Kamara testified about the four years he spent with the RUF. He explained that his main purpose was to contribute to the peace process. Nevertheless, he insisted on apologising before the traditional leaders. He narrated that he was based at Mile 91 and Magburaka and that he had returned to Kono District during the peace process:

Abdul Razak Kamara: ... I also ask the Commissioners to allow me to bow before the Kono chiefs for me to beg them to forgive me for all what has happened. I ask if there was anybody I have offended during the conflict, so that the person can come forward before the Commission so that I could beg that person. I beg the Commissioners to please allow me to bow before the people of Kono to ask for forgiveness for anything I could have done.

The Commission then tried to determine what he was actually apologising for.

Commissioner Schabas: Did the RUF commit war crimes?

Abdul Razak Kamara: Yes.

Commissioner Schabas: Can you describe what they were? Describe them?

Abdul Razak Kamara: One by flogging people, by shooting people... but I never witnessed where they amputated somebody's hands. I have heard of an incident where they used to put people in a place called a container. They used to beat them severely before putting them there. So all that I believe are crimes against humanity.

Commissioner Schabas: Do you have any personal responsibility for those crimes?

Abdul Razak Kamara: As I have been saying, I was not a commander... I was assigned to help in implementing the peace process, which I did perfectly.

Commissioner Schabas: Mr. Kamara, I appreciate the detailed testimony you've given us. But why, if all you did was implementing the peace process, do you have to ask for forgiveness of anybody? What did you do to mean that you should ask for forgiveness?

Abdul Razak Kamara: During the course of my trying to implement the peace, there were many things that happened... so I don't know, maybe there are people that might feel I have wronged them. This is why I am begging the whole nation to forgive me if ever they feel I have wronged them in any way or the other.

Comm. Marcus-Jones: Well why should you be apologising if you were a peace ambassador?

Abdul Razak Kamara: Well, I want to believe that in talking to your people you have to apologise for the mere fact that I was at the side of the RUF... so I have to apologise.

Comm. Marcus-Jones: But you were four years with the RUF, were you not?

Abdul Razak Kamara: Yes.

Comm. Marcus-Jones: And during that period of four years, were you only trying to be a peace ambassador? Didn't you commit atrocities yourself?

Abdul Razak Kamara: I have never shot at somebody... I have never taken away anybody's property... I have never raped... I have never done bad to somebody.

Hearings in Tonkolili District – June 2003

92. The most striking examples of ambiguous half-hearted confessions were the hearings in the Tonkolili District in June 2003, when several ex-combatants came to testify but tried to minimise the role they played, notwithstanding extensive questioning by the Commission. Many in the community were unhappy with the events that played out during the hearings in the district. A meeting was held on the eve of the last day, before the reconciliation ceremony, in which community leaders announced that they would not participate in the closing ceremony and they would not accept the perpetrators back into the community if they did not apologise. This was of great importance given the fact that many ex-RUF combatants reside in the district, many of them being employed in an agricultural project led by Sheriff Parker, a former child combatant known as "Base Marine". TRC commissioners and staff had to mediate with and counsel the ex-combatants to secure their participation in a reconciliation ceremony. Several witnesses, along with the religious and traditional leaders of the community, made statements at the ceremony.
93. The local Chief began the reconciliation ceremony with a statement of encouragement to his fellow traditional leaders:

Chief Bai Yossor: I'm also appealing to the Section Chiefs, traditional rulers, the sound of people and all the people of Tonkolili to forgive these people because they are our children. We should accept them because we have nowhere to take them...

Excerpts from the individual statements made subsequently by several of the ex-combatants are reproduced on the following pages:

Sheriff Parker:

... It's me Sheriff Parker, talking to my people in this country today. I am here to apologise for what had been happening. We had done wrong to this country and now the war is over. We don't have anywhere to go and our only alternative is to stay with people in the community. We had been living in communities with our fathers and mothers before. Today, I am pleading with the people of Tonkolili District and the country as a whole to please forgive me. I am their son and I promise that nobody shall ever influence me to doing wrong any longer. My experiences in the war have revealed to me that war is not anything good. It's not good to offend people and go without apologising to them. Therefore, on behalf of all of us, I must take the responsibility to apologise to all those we have offended. Please forgive us... Chief, I'm your son please forgive me.

Morie Nabieu:

...I am Morie Nabieu. I was a very little boy when the war started in this country. We have fought this war and committed many atrocities. We have looted properties, we have taken people's women from them. I am standing here confessing these things and asking the people of this community through the Paramount Chief to please forgive me. I'm kindly requesting the Paramount Chief to join me in talking to Mr J.C. Kabbia so that he can forgive me. I'm proceeding to beg... Paramount Chief, I have wronged these people, please forgive me.

Ahmed One:

I'm kindly making an appeal to all of you to be forgiven for what had happened during the war. Crimes we had committed against humanity... using women for sexual slavery, looting properties, burning of houses and many others... we did not initially plan it. I am taking responsibility and I am taking the name of the Lord, asking for forgiveness. I am kindly asking you to forgive us; this is my plea to you in this community. I am pleading, please forgive me and talk to my people to forgive me.

Joseph S. Bangura:

We are convinced that what we did in this country was not good for humanity. Some of us didn't do it by any will... There is not a "bad bush to cast away a bad child". We are committed within ourselves that what we did was not good. If we have a reverse of what happened, if we were civilians and you were the combatant, we will never feel good of what you would do to us. However, we are kindly asking that you forgive us and receive us as your children and let's live as we used to live before. All of the evil that we have done in this country, I'm kindly asking that you pardon us. We are your children especially those of us who are natives of this district... Please Chief, please forgive us for all we have done to you, your people and the country as a whole. We will never do it any more.

Victor John:

...When some of us are speaking, a good number of you are surprised at us. When we had the guns in our possession, we never knew there will be an opportunity for us to come back to apologise to people. It is a clear indication from the Lord trying to manifest that He lives. When God raises you, you will think you will never come down again. As far as we are concerned, the Lord has humbled us. When we had the guns, we controlled you and today the Lord has turned the baton. Instead of us controlling you, we are under your control... I'm standing here in the presence of you all. I've done so many evils and atrocities in this country... It was not of my own will. Today, I'm standing here to apologise to all of you sitting here. Even those who are not present here, I want to assume that my voice will reach them wherever they are. If there is anyone in this hall that I had offended or even if not here, I am pleading to be forgiven.

94. During the hearings, only those witnesses who publicly acknowledged their actions and wished to reconcile with their communities or with their victims participated in the reconciliation ceremonies. Many of the apologies were half-hearted, however. Some of the perpetrators did not make a full admission of their roles.
95. The reconciliation ceremonies were meant to support and encourage the difficult dialogues that would ensue in the communities in which they took place. Without the return and acceptance of the ex-combatants into the communities, the dialogues would have had no chance of success. The reconciliation ceremonies were envisaged to confer a form of social acceptance on the ex-combatants, which would hopefully lead to peace in the community and create a platform for joint action in rebuilding the community.
96. All the witnesses, both victims and perpetrators, acknowledged that the journey to reconciliation is long and arduous. The chiefs, along with community and religious leaders, will have to continue to facilitate the dialogues between victims and perpetrators and between perpetrators and their communities well into the future. Full reconciliation and forgiveness might come later on, depending on how well the perpetrators work towards a positive relationship with their victims and with their communities.

OUTCOMES OF FOLLOW-UP MEETINGS WITH WITNESSES AFTER THE HEARINGS PROCESS

97. TRC counsellors paid follow-up visits to 266 of the witnesses who appeared before the Commission's public or closed hearings. Upon visiting these witnesses, the counsellors made an assessment of the impact on people's lives that had resulted from their testifying at the hearings. Excerpts of the questionnaire used by the counsellors for this purpose, along with a selection of responses gathered from witnesses, are reproduced over the following pages:

A) How did the witnesses perceive their testimony during the hearing?

One hundred percent (266) of the witnesses perceived their testimonies as having been good in some way – a positive move, necessary, timely or satisfying.

B) What was considered positive during the hearings?

All of the witnesses saw the hearings as an open forum to speak about the past atrocities that still haunt their lives. They saw it as an opportunity for the public and the international community to become fully aware of what happened to them during the war.

The ex-combatants saw the hearing as an opportunity to apologise and ask for forgiveness. Some even admitted that apologising before the Commission's hearings would have been difficult since they were uncertain as to how their victims would react. They mentioned that the Commission created an enabling atmosphere for them to discuss the past, to explain what they did against their people and why. They felt that asking for forgiveness and partaking in a reconciliation ceremony gave them the confidence to move freely within their communities.

Many of the witnesses expressed great satisfaction over the counselling provided to them, the patience on the part of the Commissioners to listen to them, and the efforts made by the Commission to invite people who were implicated in testimonies so that they could offer their own side of the story in hopes of reconciling differences.

C) What was considered negative during the hearings?

Out of the 266 witnesses visited, only three people found the experience a negative one. One amputee who testified in Makeni mentioned that amputees and the war wounded were not targeted enough by the Commission to provide testimony. Another witness who testified in Makeni expressed discontent over the fact that he had not been told that his testimony would be broadcasted live nationwide. One witness who testified in Kailahun said he felt like he was interrogated as if he were in a court of law.

D) What were the feelings of witnesses after they had testified?

Approximately 20% of the witnesses felt very bad or sad after they testified. They felt that their testimony brought them fresh and unwanted memories of the past. The remaining 80% either felt good, happy, or relieved or satisfied. To some of them, especially those victims who were sexually abused, it was the first time they had relayed their experiences to anyone, breaking the culture of silence.

E) What expectations did the witnesses have prior to giving testimony and were those expectations met?

About 99% expected immediate assistance and support from the TRC varying from micro-credit financing, educational support and assistance, rebuilding of homes and medical care. Virtually all respondents expected immediate benefits from the TRC.

About 30% feared that providing testimony to the TRC would result in them being prosecuted by the Special Court. In Magburaka, for example, Sheriff Parker (alias "Base Marine") was very concerned about the TRC and Special Court personnel visiting him on the same day and at the same time. The counselor told him that it was a coincidence, that the two institutions are not exchanging information in anyway, and that the Special Court has its own method of gathering information.

A few respondents had hoped that the TRC would punish the perpetrators for all that they did.

F) What was the reaction of the families and communities after the witnesses had provided testimony to the Commission?

On the whole, both community and family members reacted positively towards the witnesses. They were happy to receive them back home after their testimonies. Some were commended, and some sympathised with them, and some even had given assistance to the witness.

About 90% of the witnesses did not experience any change in their relationship with their families and or their communities. For 10% of the witnesses, there was a positive change after their testimony.

In some cases, the community came together and offered sacrifices to their ancestors and asked for forgiveness on behalf of their sons who were perpetrators, such as the case of CO Lamin of Nyandehun village in Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun district.

For some of the witnesses, especially those who came to a closed hearing, the families and communities were unaware of the fact that they testified before the Commission.

G) Did providing testimony affect the lives of witnesses in any way?

About 120 of the 266 witnesses have not been affected in any way. However, 146 of them have experienced positive changes in their lives. After provided their testimony, many felt much more relaxed and satisfied with a peace of mind. They are now hopeful something good will happen as a result of their encounter with the TRC.

H) Did the witnesses suffer any security threat, any provocation, or mockery since the hearing?

Five of the witnesses suffered security threats. The chiefs of their village were informed on time and the matters were resolved.

Eight witnesses noted that they were the subject of provocative remarks such as: "What will the TRC do after all?"; or "you can go again to the TRC and explain if you feel like it"; or "the TRC only used you to get information and at the end they will submit your name to the Special Court"; or "you will not be given any reparation or benefits".

I) Do the witnesses show any signs of trauma and did these symptoms increase or decrease since the hearing? Did they receive any trauma counselling since the hearing?

Approximately 90% of the witnesses are showing signs of symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks, psychosomatic symptoms, sleeplessness, bad appetite, nervousness, and depression. Where possible, these witnesses have been referred to the appropriate NGOs. There has been no formal counselling for any of the witnesses, other than what was given at the TRC by the counsellors.

A good number of respondents were happy with the counselling that they had received by the Commission's staff but are in need of more counselling.

J) In cases where the TRC organised a meeting between the victim and the perpetrator, has the relationship between the two of them improved?

The Commission had performed general reconciliation ceremonies where the perpetrators accepted their wrongdoings and asked for forgiveness, and the victims were also encouraged to accept and to gradually work towards forgiveness and reconciliation. Some witnesses say it is no longer necessary to organise another reconciliation session, since their victimisers have acknowledged their actions and have tried to reconcile with them. However, four people said they would like to have another meeting with their perpetrators, involving the religious and traditional leaders.

The counsellors were also able to visit some of those involved in reconciliation ceremonies after TRC hearings. Examples of their experiences are as follows:

- The RUF ex-combatants in Magburaka, located in Tonkolili district, had been key actors in the conflict. They were notorious for their activities and for the atrocities they committed. They testified at the TRC hearings, after which they pleaded for forgiveness. During the follow-up visit they confirmed that their relationship with the community had improved since the TRC hearings and the reconciliation process and that there is no cause to complain. They are living happily, without any disturbances, and have free movement within their community. Among this group of ex-combatants were Sheriff Parker (alias “Base Marine”), Joseph Sallu Bangura, Sheku Konteh (alias “Kolo”), Martyn Weah Wolo (alias “Tactical”) and Peter John Kamanda.
- In Pujehun district, a visit was made to the Kamajor ex-combatants who had apologised to the victims and the community during the hearing. The Kamajor ex-combatants testified at the hearings after which they pleaded to the people for forgiveness. Among them were Lamin Koroma (alias C.O. Lamin), Sunny Tucker, Hassan Jalloh, etc. The counsellor met with some of them during the follow-up meeting. Lamin Koroma informed the counsellor that after the reconciliation ceremony with the TRC, his people offered sacrifices on behalf of all their sons and daughters who were involved in the fighting, after which a cleansing ceremony was performed to cleanse them. Sunny Tucker, who had been reconciled with Hassan Jalloh, whose father he had killed during the war, said that his relationship with the Jalloh’s and the entire community was very good now.
- In Bo district, Mr. James Legg had implicated Mr. Kosseh Hindowa, a former CDF (Kamajor) authority for the death of his sister during the war. The Commission had invited Mr. Hindowa to the hearing and the two were reconciled. Mr. Hindowa stated that after the reconciliation session organised by the TRC, Mr. Legg’s family decided to observe a formal funeral-rite for his late sister, and Mr. Hindowa gave the family some amount of money for that purpose and it was accepted and appreciated by Mr. Legg.
- The reconciliation process in Kailahun was mainly between the community and the RUF ex-combatants, who also happen to be natives of Kailahun. The counselor contacted some of the ex-combatants like Mustapha Sam Koroma, Joe Fatorma, Morie Feika, Alex Jusu Allieu, Eric Koi Senesi, Jemba N’gobeh, Saffa Kpulon N’gobeh, and the child ex-combatants. These people have been fully re-integrated into their community, and even take part in various activities to run the affairs of the community. Susan Kulagbanda, who during the hearings complained of being harassed by some perpetrators, said during the follow-up visit that her relationship with them had greatly improved after the intervention of TRC, and that they now live together as one.

The counsellors finally met some ex-combatants in Kambia who testified before the TRC, including “Boulah”, Kennie Massaquoi, “Kaitibie”, Anthony Thollo and Brima Vandi. “Boulah”, an ex-RUF commander, told the counsellors that before the hearings, he was well known for being a commander but very few people were aware of the fact that he had made attempts to disarm ex-combatants. He mentioned during his follow-up visit that he has now won more sympathy and respect from the community after testifying. The other ex-combatants were recipients of skills training programmes and were waiting for their tools so that they could go back to their home communities.

Most of the victims in the districts requested that the TRC should continue its hearings so that they could come and expose all that had happened to them during the war.

SYMBOLIC ACTS OF RESPECT TO THE DEAD

98. At the end of each day of hearings, a list of the names of all the deceased persons mentioned by witnesses on that day was read out aloud and a minute of silence was observed as a mark of respect to the dead.
99. The excerpt reproduced below is an example of such a “Mark of Respect to the Dead” after the hearing on Thursday 10 July 2003 in the Bonthe District.

“The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission has today heard testimony as to the tragic loss of many human lives in the conflict that ravaged our country.

As a mark of respect to the deceased and their families, and as a symbol of our compassion and our solidarity, we ask that you please be upstanding in observance of a minute’s silence for the following victims:

-
- *Joe Kai*
 - *Joe Boisy and 9 other men in Gbaniga village*
 - *Yamusa Jobai*
 - *Maada Demby Sandi*
 - *Tommy Sandi*
 - *Pa Yokie*
 - *A man called ‘government’*
 - *600 people killed in Tihun town*
 - *Maaheh,*
 - *Nabie*
 - *Tiangay*
 - *Junisa*
 - *Amie*
 - *Muna*
 - *Mukah*
 - *Morie Yauguber*
 - *Maria Fatu Yauguber*
 - *700 people killed at Bawohah junction*
 - *Philip Musa, and his wife and sun*
 - *Pa Sallu*
 - *Maimat Sata Momoh*
 - *Many people in Senehun village*

- *Tommy Brewa*
- *Momoh Lugbu*
- *Abu Memo*
- *Abu Memu*
- *Pa Sallu*
- *The father of Alusine Foday*
- *Abu Musa*
- *Tommy Konneh*
- *Moiwo Musa*

FOLLOWED BY ONE MINUTE OF SILENCE

which the Presiding Chairperson closes with the words:

“May the souls of the departed rest in perfect peace.”

100. The minute of silence was observed after each hearing because many of the dead were never identified by their families or loved ones, as many victims were killed outside of their communities. It was an act of healing for the families – a symbol that their loved ones did not die in vain and that their deaths are formally acknowledged by an official institution, operating with the support of the government.

MONUMENTS AND MEMORIALS

101. In several districts, the Commission, in consultation with the communities, established monuments or memorials in the town where the hearing was held or at the site of a mass gravesite in the district. Traditional reconciliation ceremonies were organised, such as the pouring of libation and cleansing, together with religious ceremonies such as common prayers at locals where massacres took place during the conflict. These activities are extremely important for the communities because they serve as recognition of the suffering of victims as well as the collective memory of the past.
102. The following examples of TRC activities relate to monuments and memorials:
- a. Bo Town: A road intersection where, during the war, RUF fighters and government forces had engaged in combat was known as “Soja Kill Rebel Junction” on account of the acts that had taken place there. The Commission held a ceremony at the junction on the closing day of its hearings in Bo and renamed the intersection “Peace Junction.” A signboard was erected commemorating the TRC ceremony and indicating the new name of the junction.
 - b. Port Loko District: The Commission visited Manarma village, where 73 people had been locked together in a house and burnt alive. A mass grave was located in the middle of the village. The Commission held prayers and asked the community to bury the bones properly and to preserve the site by putting a fence around it.

- c. Kailahun District: The closing ceremony took place near the notorious “Slaughter House” where people were brutally murdered during the war. Libation was poured in commemoration of all those killed in the slaughter house and in the Kailahun District during the conflict. There is likely to be a bigger reconciliation programme in due course organised by the Kailahun community. The Commission also visited the site of a mass grave behind the Kailahun police station where prayers were offered in memory of the dead.
- d. Kenema Town: The Commission identified a roundabout in Kenema town where a lot of civilians had been killed during the war and inaugurated a memorial sign in their honour.
- e. Kambia Town: For the closing ceremony, everyone converged around a roundabout near the Town Council Hall. During the war, a man had been shot in the full view of the township. That roundabout was renamed “Peace Square.” Traditional leaders and other chiefdom elders poured libation for reconciliation and peace to prevail in Sierra Leone.
- f. Pujehun District: The Commission visited several mass grave sites. In Sahn Malen, which is about fourteen miles from Pujehun town, there was a grave where thirty-five men had been buried. In Bendu Malen, which is about seventeen miles from Pujehun town, the RUF/AFRC forces killed over two hundred and seventy five people. The Commission visited two graves, where bones and skulls were found. A five-year-old boy who survived the attack had been made the Chief of the village by the RUF. Candles were lit at the graves and prayers were offered in the memory of the dead.
- g. Bonthe Island: The Commission visited the town of Tihun where several hundred civilians had been killed by the RUF. The community still suffers a great deal from the trauma caused by this massacre. At the closing ceremony, there was pouring of libation. At the site of one of the mass graves, prayers were offered and candles were lit. This visit of the Commission was important to the community. It signified recognition of the suffering and the mourning the community had gone through and the beginning of their healing. Tihun was the hometown of Julius Maada Bio, former NPRC Head of State, and was attacked by the RUF as a sign of their repugnance to his leadership.
- h. Freetown: A National Reconciliation Procession was organised in Freetown on 6 August 2003, after which local and national stakeholders were involved in the unveiling of a memorial at the Congo Cross Bridge, which was renamed “Peace Bridge”. Congo Cross Bridge was the point at which the combined forces of ECOMOG and the CDF had stopped the RUF advance on Freetown during the January 1999 attack on the capital city.

IDENTIFICATION OF MASS GRAVES

103. The Commission also made a concerted effort to identify the sites of mass graves. Mass graves were identified at different locations all over the country. The Commission has not developed an exhaustive inventory of all the mass graves since it didn't have the time or the resources to do so. The Commission hopes that other efforts will assist in identifying the remaining mass graves in the country.⁹
104. For the purposes of reconciliation, the Commission sought the opinion of the communities on what should be done with the mass graves. The outcome of these consultations include the following:
- a. Bonthe District: Different suggestions were made for the commemoration of the sites. All villages asked for the creation of "monuments" that serve the community. In Tihun town, people expressed their desire for a park. In Bauya village, the erection of a market building was proposed. In Talia and Matru, people requested a barray, a place where people can gather and discuss local issues.
 - b. Moyamba District: Recommendations made by the different communities include the building of a hospital (Magbenka), a community centre or barray (Yoyema, Mosongo, Mokbanji, and Jaihun), a town hall (Kwellu), a monument (Moyolo), and a tomb/memorial (Mosenessie).
 - c. Kenema District: Many respondents were concerned over the preservation of mass gravesites and many felt that relocation was necessary due to the construction of houses in the vicinity of these sites. Various communities also suggested symbolic reparations as a way to respect the dead. The erection of monuments in remembrance of these sites was considered vital.
 - d. Kailahun District: As in the Kenema district, respondents requested symbolic reparations and the erection of monuments to honour the dead.
 - e. Koinadugu District: The different villages made recommendations as to how their friends and family can best be remembered. The residents of Falaba requested the construction of a market place in remembrance of their relatives that were killed by the rebels. The residents of Lengekoro recommended the construction of a barray. In Koinadugu, people requested the construction of a school. In Katombo 11, the respondents requested the construction of a store to keep their agricultural produce.
 - f. Bombali District: The community representatives recommended the construction of a monument.

⁹ More detail on the Commission's efforts with regard to identifying and documenting mass graves can be found in the Mass Graves Report produced as an Appendix to this report.

- g. Bo District: The communities suggested the erection of shrines in the form of shrines on the mass graves sites. Tikonko requested a monument in the form of a tomb with a tablet containing the names of the victims.
 - h. Pujehun District: The communities suggested the erection of shrines on the mass gravesites. Sahn Malen requested that a bridge be built before a shrine is erected because the site where mass graves are located is near a stream.
 - i. Western Area and Port Loko: The residents attached a lot of importance to the preservation of mass gravesites. They requested the erection of monuments on the various sites. Their suggestions included a hospital to care for the relatives left behind by the victims and a mosque for prayers that can be said on a daily basis in remembrance of the departed ones.
 - j. Kono and Tonkolili Districts: In both districts, the chiefs planned on conducting a meeting at the chiefdom level in order to make a unanimous decision.
105. The outcomes of this exercise have confirmed that most people in Sierra Leone want to remember the dead, not by emphasising all the harm and sorrow caused during the war, but by looking forward and turning it into something positive through the establishment of a useful facility at the site of a massacre.
106. Memorials and commemoration activities are not only important for the victims who want to remember the people they lost, but also for the perpetrators and for the community as a whole. Memorials can create a public space where people can come together in hopes of establishing open and lasting dialogue. Such symbolic acts of coming together can contribute significantly towards the process of reconciliation.

THE TRC NATIONAL RECONCILIATION PROCESSION AND OFFERS OF APOLOGIES BY NATIONAL BODIES

107. The final theme on which witnesses were heard during TRC Thematic Hearings was "Reconciliation, National Reintegration and Reparations." The Commission chose this theme in order to draw attention to the challenges ahead in the hope that all Sierra Leoneans could be mobilised for this project. A TRC National Reconciliation Procession was conceived to mark the end of hearings, to send a message to all Sierra Leoneans that rebuilding the community and learning to live together again is important for common survival. The procession wound its way through the streets of central Freetown on 6 August 2003, culminating in a large gathering at the National Stadium.
108. Those who participated in the procession included civil society organisations, schools, the police, the Army, political parties and victims' associations. The procession set out from Victoria Park in the heart of the city. For several hours, all the main streets of Freetown were awash with marchers, dancers, drummers, musicians and other revellers making their way towards the National Stadium. Residents hung out of their windows to observe the procession and join in the spirit of the occasion. Imaginative banners bearing slogans of reconciliation were carried by many groups and draped along the roadside. In the afternoon, having reached the stadium, representatives of several groups and institutions, including the Army, the police, the main political parties, victims' associations and civic organisations made statements to the crowd. This historic day of activities was concluded with the unveiling of a memorial in honour of the victims of the war at the Congo Cross Bridge, which was symbolically renamed "Peace Bridge".
109. Several national bodies offered their apologies for the violations they committed during the war, or for the role they played in the period leading to it. These apologies are seen as valuable contributions to the reconciliation process.
110. Apologies can be made by those responsible for violations and abuses, but also by those who bear a moral responsibility for what happened, that is, those individuals who displayed indifference and passivity at times when intervention and positive action could have made a difference.
111. Apologies offered by officials or national bodies, such as security services and political parties, can serve as an incentive for ordinary citizens who committed violations to show remorse and apologise. Apologies also serve as an important recognition of the suffering of the victims.
112. Excerpts from statements by the following persons, including several noteworthy apologies, are reproduced over the following pages:
 - a) Representative of the Sierra Leone Army, Brigadier Nelson Williams;
 - b) Representative of the Inspector General of Police;
 - c) Representative of the RUF, Jonathan Kposowa;
 - d) Representative of the SLPP, Dr. Sama Banya;
 - e) Leader of the Opposition / APC, Ernest Bai Koroma; and
 - f) President of Sierra Leone, H.E. Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah.

A) Representative of the Sierra Leone Army – Brigadier Nelson-Williams

“Today, as we gathered here to rededicate our land’s future we are not only looking at this ceremony as a first leg in the process towards our land’s future... We see this ceremony as the pathway on the military land map to reconciling Sierra Leoneans. Sierra Leoneans including the Sierra Leone armed forces must come out here to accept the God Almighty’s message in the Lord’s Prayer, which says “and forgive us our trespasses or debts, as we forgive our trespassers or debtors.

As the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces went out to fight, a lot of atrocities and crimes against humanity were committed against Sierra Leoneans... does this make sense? The answer confronts us, beleaguering our hearts, besieging our minds... Let us try to transform cruelty with kindness, insult with forbearance and patience... injustice with magnanimity and hatred with love. It is only with the presence of God that one can reconcile with such a situation that does not appear on one’s wish list.

Let me reiterate in aid of emphasis... that we beseech you to forgive the RSLAF. Forgive your fallen and living children. Forgiveness starts with reconciling with God yourself, before reconciling with your fellow human beings. It is only the Prince of Peace who can give us true peace, forgiveness and reconciliation: Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour who died on the cross for the propitiation of our sins and forgiveness, when he said: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do”.

Therefore let us all ask God Almighty for lasting forgiveness, which is the first instrument in the preservation of the national reconciliation that Sierra Leoneans need. Let us march forward with determination, commitment, fortitude and indomitable courage with no turning back and the mindset for this fellowship of purpose.

The RSLAF owes this nation a large debt. Let us resolve to pay up with interest, not only by giving democracy a chance, but also by standing in the vanguard of peace protection. The consolidation of democracy will continue to be our major preoccupation... this is our sacred duty and we cannot afford to fail again...

Finally, I want to conclude on this note: we cannot make peace, or reconcile our pains without recourse to adopting the practice of forgiveness forever and ever. As Sierra Leoneans, there is so much more in us that unites us than divides us. We must recognise this fact, and learn to live with each other. I stand here today on behalf of the RSLAF to promise that the Army has taken a human face. You labelled the police as a force for good; now we want you to label the Army as a force for good. Peace and peace to all, I thank you all.”

B) Representative of the Inspector General of Police – Francis Munu

“We on our part... we as police officers who are involved in the process of delivering justice... served both as perpetrators and victims of the decade-long civil conflict... I’m here again this afternoon to reiterate the point and to emphasise the point that we are also prepared to reconcile with all sectors of society to ensure that lasting peace remains in Sierra Leone. During the TRC’s work, you were able to carry out an environmental scanning looking at the political, economic, social, cultural and legal considerations so that the firm foundation for lasting peace could be laid in our country Sierra Leone.

I also wish on behalf of the members of the Sierra Leone Police Force, whom we have accepted *inter alia* to have been both perpetrators and victims, to express remorse for all the wrongdoings, which we and our personnel did both before and during the war... and to genuinely apologise for all such wrongdoing with a promise that such will never be repeated in the course of our history. As we strive to be a force for good, we do hope that all people within Sierra Leone and beyond who have paid so dearly a price for our past mistakes will continue to help us... so we will forge ahead and be part of the framework to establish a new Sierra Leone, a Sierra Leone which all of us will be proud of, a Sierra Leone which our children will be proud of, a Sierra Leone to which people from all over the world can come and feel safe, can come and work and can come and enjoy themselves...”

C) Representative of the RUF – Jonathan Kposowa

“Ladies and gentlemen, with all the destruction and atrocities committed by the RUF and whosoever fought the war... those attitudes were all mankind, man-made ventures... and therefore at this time in the name of the Lord Almighty God, I raise my hands to say to Sierra Leoneans that all of us are the same... whatsoever might have been injected into us to have caused atrocities, to have formed whatsoever, to have raped, to have done whatsoever chaos activities that the war might have done... I am saying that you should have pardon on us. We are your children! We are sorry! We are sorry that the episode that we have formed was not really from the brains of some us. So at this time, we are all creatively captured and we have come at this stage to say pardon, we are therefore pleading for mercy and reconciliation. May God bless us all, may God bless the continent, may God bless Africa. I thank you.

D) Representative of the SLPP – Dr. Sama Banyo

“I represent a party that ruled this country in the years immediately after independence; we may have made our own mistakes. Perhaps we should have stood up to be counted, instead of acquiescing or capitulating. We thank God for the inspiration he has given us to acknowledge and confess our wrongdoings. More importantly, for giving us the grace to forgive those who wronged us. We thank those who have counselled us, that is the members of the TRC and those who enabled us to forgive each other publicly. It may be difficult to forget, but time, the healer of pain and suffering, will help to soften our hearts as we continue to embrace each other in brotherly love.”

**E) Leader of the Opposition / Chairman of the APC – Ernest Bai Koroma
TRC Thematic Hearing on Reconciliation, 5 August 2003**

“No doubts we made mistakes as a Government, as a party in Government, I have accepted that. We have to confront our past. We should not be ashamed of that. I have accepted the responsibilities for the mistakes made by the APC, for which I have asked for forgiveness from all of you. To members of the public and everybody, mistakes were made by the APC and we are sorry for these mistakes.”

**F) President of Sierra Leone, H.E. Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah
TRC Thematic Hearing on Reconciliation, 5 August 2003**

The last witness to testify to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission during the Thematic Hearings on “Reconciliation, National Reintegration and Reparations” was the current President of Sierra Leone, H.E. Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. After his statement, some specific questions were addressed to the President on the issue of reconciliation. An excerpt from the exchanges between the President and the Commission is reproduced below:

Leader of Evidence: ...Your Excellency my final point would be to maybe rephrase my colleague’s point on reconciliation. Today is the final day of hearings by the Commission and it was deliberately chosen so that while all issues have been interrogated, in the context of other issues, today should mark the day we begin to look at the way forward... Is Your Excellency prepared to use the platform that is provided today by the Commission, thinking about reconciliation and national reintegration... thinking about tomorrow... a National Day of Reconciliation... Would Your Excellency want to use this platform to make a whole unifying statement of intent that brings all the parties together and acknowledges that some violations may have been committed by different factors in the war, but by the fact that there is a government which is a succession... that government then owes a responsibility to acknowledge the wrongs that may have been done by each predecessor or who acted in its name and perhaps some apology to the people? It takes someone willing to acknowledge that both those who acted to support the government and previous governments committed gross violations of rights and so this is the government of this country, an acknowledgment by this government and Your Excellency about this point... so that people can feel that they need to have closure and begin to think about tomorrow.

H.E. Dr. Tejan Kabbah: Now, I think what you are asking me to do is this: to apologise to people for wrongdoing... Of what use is that? I have mentioned this again in the record [of my testimony]... I don't know, maybe it's a bit long and you haven't read it all... but I said this: that I went round this country telling people, please I beg you, wrongs that have been done one way or the other, accept what it is, just forget about the past... Let's live together; let's work together and rebuild our country. I said that many, many times before this TRC was set up. It's there in that report; but I made sure that I did that. Like the former Vice President, I asked him, I said please, this is your role, go around the country, telling people these problems. Not only that but there were some of the Ministries here, who I put together with the RUF to go to these communities and explain to these people. Now I just cannot understand what more I'm expected to do...

Leader of Evidence: Your Excellency, the Leader of APC this morning, before the Commission, apologised for all the mistakes his party had made. He had done that before, he did that again today and he used the platform of the Commission in fulfilment of all the efforts of Your Excellency in this regard. Would Your Excellency want to send a direct message to the people of Sierra Leone on reconciling the differences that did exist, and possibly do exist? That was my question Sir.

H.E. Dr. Tejan Kabbah: If you want to say... I will give you ok... I want peace. I want reconciliation. I would repeat it as many times as ever you want! Please all Sierra Leoneans, all of us, let's work together, let's forget about the past... those that have to face the court, let them face the fact that they have to face the court and go on... if they have justification, it depends, let them go ahead and do it. Now, those who have done something wrong to others, please go and apologise to them; and if they don't listen to you, go to the Vice President, come to me, we will go to your communities to get things organised.

113. The recognition and symbolic acknowledgement of the Head of State regarding the violations committed by all sides during the conflict in Sierra Leone and the recognition of the suffering of all victims at this TRC hearing would have been a huge step forward in the pursuit of national reconciliation. It would have set a positive example, which individual citizens could have followed. By offering an apology, the Head of State could have taken a symbolic lead role in pursuit of reconciliation. The Commission regrets that the President, as the Father of the Nation, missed a prime opportunity to fulfil this role.

WORKSHOPS AND CONSULTATIONS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Consultations with civil society organisations

114. The Commission organised consultative workshops with a broad group of civil society organisations in order to gather their opinions and views on the issue of reconciliation. These workshops took place on 3 July 2003 and 24 July 2003. In addition, the Commission also sent out more than 150 questionnaires to local organisations and other stakeholders.
115. The organisations consulted included: women's and youth groups; religious bodies; NGOs working in the fields of humanitarian assistance, peace building, and conflict resolution; and NGOs working with victims and ex-combatants.

TRC Workshop on National Reconciliation

116. From 27 to 29 November 2003, the TRC organised a workshop on national reconciliation. Issues discussed during the workshop included such diverse themes as the proper management of state resources, anti-corruption and poverty reduction strategies. The workshop intended to work out a plan to address these issues and develop a roadmap towards national reconciliation. At the end of the three-day workshop, the Commission had hoped that the participants of the Conference, the key stakeholders of national reconciliation, would commit themselves to this roadmap.
117. Although national reconciliation was addressed during the thematic hearings, the workshop was the last in a series of efforts by the Commission to foster reconciliation before the publication of the final TRC report, through which the Commission obviously hopes to contribute to national reconciliation.
118. The workshop was organised in collaboration with the Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) and the Inter-Religious Council. These organisations have committed themselves to continue the process of reconciliation after the Commission winds up. The South African Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) and the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)¹⁰ supported the workshop through the provision of experts in reconciliation.
119. Since the workshop focused on national reconciliation, those invited to attend included national stakeholders such as the President's Office, various line ministries, national bodies such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Government Gold and Diamond Office, political parties, representatives of Parliament and the judiciary, members of civil society and the media. Among those present were the Minister of Works, the Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, and representatives from the police, Defence Headquarters, Prisons, NCDDR, NCDHR, APC, PLP and RUFF. Given the low level of participation and the absence of key national stakeholders, developing a roadmap that would lead to national reconciliation seemed impractical. Nevertheless, the contributions by participants at the workshop are reflected in this report.

¹⁰ These experts include: Charles Villa-Vicencio, Director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, South Africa; Mr. Letlapa Mphahlele, former field commander in APLA (Azanian People's Liberation Army), the military wing of the PAC (Pan-African Congress) of South Africa; General Andrew Masedo (South Africa); Felix Reategui and Eduardo Gonzalez of the Peruvian Truth Commission; and Hugo Fernandes of the East Timorese Truth Commission.

Overview of the outcome of consultations and workshops on national reconciliation

120. As a result of the workshops and consultations on reconciliation, many of the participants and respondents have identified the challenges that impede reconciliation as well as the conditions that are necessary in order to foster reconciliation. These challenges and conditions will be addressed under the nine themes that have surfaced during the consultations and workshops. These themes are: a) disarmament; b) the role of perpetrators; c) the role of victims; d) the role of citizens and the community in general; e) the role of religion and tradition; f) the role of civil society, oversight institutions, and the role of the media; g) good governance; h) the role of government in the reconciliation process; and i) external actors. The following paragraphs discuss how these different themes relate to the reconciliation process:

A) Disarmament:

Disarmament was considered to be one of the pre-conditions to reconciliation in Sierra Leone. However, many stakeholders have expressed their concerns over the fact that weapons and ammunition were hidden during the disarmament process. This could potentially serve as a threat to security in the future, especially in Kenema and Kailahun Districts, as well as impeding the reconciliation process.

B) The Role of Perpetrators:

In order for reconciliation to occur between a) perpetrators and victims and b) perpetrators with their communities, perpetrators are encouraged to acknowledge their actions during the conflict and to seek forgiveness. However, some perpetrators are not willing to participate in the reconciliation process. The unwillingness of perpetrators to participate in the process appears to stem from some of the following factors:

- Dissatisfaction with the NCDDR programme: A number of ex-combatants say that they have not benefited from the NCDDR reintegration and skills training initiatives.
- Dissatisfaction with the Government: Some former combatants, especially those associated with the CDF, are disgruntled over the inability of the government to deliver on the promises that were made to them in the way of post-conflict assistance.
- Confusion between the TRC and the Special Court: Some perpetrators have been reluctant to talk about their involvement in the conflict out of fear of being prosecuted in the Special Court, or being called as a witness against their former commanders. In addition, many members of the CDF are disgruntled over the arrest of their former leader, Chief Hinga Norman.
- The high incidence of drug use among some perpetrators impedes their ability to become proactive members of the reconciliation process.

C) The Role of Victims:

One of the major concerns addressed in the workshops and consultations was that the needs of the victims of the conflict have not been addressed by the government, whereas numerous programmes have been established to assist former combatants and perceived perpetrators. The following response was provided by the Women's Forum in its completed TRC questionnaire:

“Reconciliation should not be one-sided, especially in terms of satisfying the needs of perpetrators at the expense of victims. Government should take a decisive action to ensure that all parties' needs are met.”

Most of the consulted organisations and participants in the workshops strongly emphasised the need for reparations to help put victims in positions conducive to reconciliation. As a result of the violations committed against victims, many are in need of assistance. According to the respondents, the needs of the victims include: medical treatment, psychiatric help, psycho-social therapy, skills-training, micro-credit, education, resettlement, compensation, creation of employment, shelter and help for displaced persons and refugees to return home. The following response was given by the Sierra Leone Consumer Protection Council in its questionnaire:

“Provide food for the victims, without which nobody can stand to reconcile with another if he/she is hungry.”

The Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone stated in its questionnaire responses:

“Put the victims in the right frame of mind through psychosocial counselling and healing.”

Other organisations stressed the fact that the Special Fund for War Victims needs to be established in order to assist those victims in need, as mandated by the Lomé Peace Agreement. Care International stated in its response to the questionnaire:

“For reconciliation to be durable, the TRC itself should ensure that a sustainable package of compensation is developed and implemented while it lasts, and the Special Fund is strengthened to support those who have been crippled out. The Government should seek funding to rebuild the worst areas of the country.”

It was also mentioned in the consultations that in order to involve as many victims in the process as possible, the TRC should have conducted a grassroots campaign and organised hearings in every village. The short lifespan of the Commission and the various constraints imposed on the Commission did not allow it to reach all those victims it would have liked to reach.

D) The Role of Citizens and the Community at Large:

The main stakeholder in the reconciliation process is considered to be the average Sierra Leonean citizen. It is the responsibility of every citizen to make the process a nationally-owned process and to realise the importance of their contributions and participation, regardless of how insignificant it may seem to them. As stated by the Sierra Leonean Red Cross Society in its responses to the questionnaire: "The public will for reconciliation needs to be there."

Reintegration of ex-combatants and victims into communities is an integral part of reconciliation. Some ex-combatants and victims of abduction such as the "bush wives" cannot return to their communities for fear of being rejected, stigmatised, or punished either by individuals or by the community. This was mentioned as a particular problem in the Kailahun District. Reconciliation requires that the atmosphere for the reintegration and acceptance of such persons be created.

Additionally, respondents felt that the government, NGOs and other agencies currently engaged in reconciliation have failed to decentralise the process. There is a general feeling that "Freetown is not Sierra Leone and Sierra Leone is not Freetown." This phrase is used because most interventions only focus on the capital of Freetown and have not been extended to other parts of the country. It is imperative that the coverage of reconciliation projects widens.

There is an urgent need to embark on nationwide sensitisation and public information / education campaigns in order to get more people interested and involved in the reconciliation process. Grassroots consultations should be held with communities and their traditional and religious leaders, various groups and organisations, children, etc. in order to raise awareness. By bringing these stakeholders together, an open forum would be created whereby people can exchange their thoughts on how they want to proceed with the reconciliation process.

Many respondents also indicated the need for agents of reconciliation and conflict resolution in every community not only to settle conflicts but also to identify early warning signs of new conflict and to ensure that they are addressed properly.

E) The Role of Religion and Tradition:

The religious leaders in Sierra Leone have played a major role in the restoration of peace. However, it was noted during the consultations and workshops that in certain districts, conflicts exist amongst the religious leaders themselves. These leaders must learn to live and work together for the sake of reconciliation. As indicated by the Women's Forum in its response: "There is need for greater interaction between religious leaders of all faiths so that concerted action can be taken on issues." Obtaining the continuous commitment of the religious leaders to the reconciliation process is widely recognised as a prerequisite for its success.

Traditional leaders should be encouraged to become major stakeholders in the reconciliation process, since tradition still plays an important role in the lives of most people in Sierra Leone.

Reconciliation activities should be initiated and implemented at the community level by the government and other major stakeholders such as international and local NGOs. However, these activities should build upon local religious and traditional practices so as not to duplicate existing efforts or seem to “reinvent the wheel”.

F) The Role of Civil Society, Oversight Institutions and Media:

The reconciliation process cannot be a success without the support and participation of Sierra Leone civil society. Major civil society groups such as women’s organisations, youth groups, etc. should step up their involvement and be the force that helps to drive the process.

However, the answers to the questionnaires and the outcomes of the workshops reveal the lack of a very strong coalition of NGOs to promote, protect and “own” the peace and reconciliation process. This lack of cohesion and co-ordination is seen as a significant obstacle to reconciliation. Reasons were also offered as to why civil society is not functioning on the level that it should be functioning. These reasons include weak capacity-building initiatives, lack of transparency and accountability, as well as a lack of understanding among the public about the role of civil society. As the Network on Collaborative Peace Building Sierra Leone mentioned in its responses: “Efforts at peace building and reconciliation must be co-ordinated to avoid duplication of efforts and resource wastage.”

Many oversight institutions are considered to be ineffective and public confidence in these institutions is very low. Efforts should be made to ensure the accountability and transparency of institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, the NCDHR and the Office of the Ombudsman.

Regarding the media, the freedom of expression and press is fairly limited and constitutional change is needed. In addition, public confidence in the media is fairly low. Many see the media as being biased. One way to improve confidence is for the media to engage the public on important national issues.

G) Good Governance:

In the process of reconciling the various individuals, groups, communities, government, etc., it is important continuously to promote a culture of good governance. This includes: respect for the principles of human rights; regular free and fair elections; freedom of expression; the fight against corruption; decentralisation; equitable distribution of facilities and resources; and a well functioning judiciary. These issues have been listed by most of the consulted organisations and stakeholders as some of the major antecedents and factors responsible for the conflict in Sierra Leone. Today, bad governance is still perceived as an obstacle to reconciliation.

As the Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone stated in its response to the questionnaire:

“A combination of bad governance, corruption, and injustice is preventing the conditions for lasting reconciliation and sustainable development to be satisfied.”

Several aspects of good governance have been discussed during the consultations and workshops on reconciliation held by the Commission. Many of these were also discussed during the Thematic Hearings of the Commission. These aspects of governance include: 1) the separation of powers; 2) the inclusion of civilians; 3) the management of resources; and 4) the role of the security forces.

1) *Separation of Powers:*

The collapse of governmental institutions is one of the factors that led to the civil war. There has been a serious erosion of constitutional authority and independence, which calls for the redefinition of roles for the various organs of government, Parliament, the executive and the judiciary.

Overall, many participants in the workshops singled out the need for more transparency, the need for a stronger and more organised opposition, the centralisation of power and the lack of qualified personnel. As mentioned in the responses from Care International: “At village/community levels, let the people get justice. Let there be transparency and accountability. Let chiefs and government functionaries be sincere and honest. Remove all the man-made obstacles that will obstruct the flow of justice.”

2) *Inclusion of Civilians:*

The marginalisation of women and youth in politics and in the decision-making process, sectionalism, tribalism, nepotism, and the marginalisation of rural areas are all perceived as obstacles to reconciliation. Regarding women, particular attention was drawn to customary law and practices that limit the role of the women in society. Regarding youth, attention was drawn to the high unemployment rate. A similar affirmative action policy recommended for women should also be adopted for youth. Another problem facing youth is their lack of willingness to engage in politics. To address this problem, political parties and political institutions should accommodate greater participation for youth and women, including the occupation of key positions by these groups.

Rural areas have been forgotten and neglected for generations by the government. People in remote areas often relate more to neighbouring countries than to Sierra Leone. Reconciliation among people living in these areas will be difficult if there is a lingering feeling of neglect. As mentioned previously, there is a strong need for the decentralisation of state services.

The lack of engagement in the political process is a problem that plagues all sectors of society. It was also noted that there is a lack of political will to broaden it. Continuous public education nationwide on the tenets of democracy and civic responsibility is necessary. Citizens should also be encouraged to contest presidential, parliamentary, and local elections.

3) *Management of Resources:*

The poor socio-economic living conditions of most Sierra Leoneans are perceived as a serious obstacle to reconciliation. These conditions include a lack of basic infrastructure such as electricity, clean water supply, health care, schools, roads, housing, sanitation, income generating facilities, etc. This is generally linked to the bad management of resources, minerals and others.

More control and accountability mechanisms need to be put into place and existing mechanisms need to be reinforced and made more transparent.

The fight against corruption needs to be intensified and corrupt practices need to be exposed fearlessly and vigorously.

4) *The Role and Perception of the Security Forces*

In order for reconciliation to be fostered at the national level, the public must have confidence in the security forces. In the eyes of some people, the Army and police are seen as those who betrayed the nation and the people. The relations between civilians and the military must be addressed and improved from the national level downwards.

H) The Role of the Government:

The lack of commitment on the part of the government and politicians to reconciliation activities is seen as an obstacle to the process. The responsibility of the government to ensure the existence of peace and stability for her people and the entire nation requires its active participation and contribution to the process of reconciliation. Since the government is seen as the primary stakeholder in the reconciliation process, one of its major responsibilities is to ensure the provision of funds and other logistical support.

I) External factors:

In a somewhat shorter discussion than those that ensued around other themes, it became clear that the war in Liberia and the instability in the wider West African sub-region are also perceived as obstacles to reconciliation in Sierra Leone.

COMMUNITY-BASED RECONCILIATION

121. Community-based reconciliation is one of the central focuses of the Commission's activities on reconciliation. As witnessed in the extracts from hearings on reconciliation provided earlier in this chapter, in order for reconciliation to be sustainable between a victim and a perpetrator the ongoing support of the community is necessary.
122. The Commission is of the opinion that the organisation of reconciliation ceremonies at the end of the hearings, the daily marks of respect for the dead, the establishment of monuments and the organisation of common prayers at mass graves were not only important for the individuals concerned, but also for the entire communities in which they took place. These TRC initiatives laid the foundation for future reconciliation activities.
123. In this light and also considering that reconciliation is a long-term process, the Commission has started a nationwide programme on community-based reconciliation. The programme will continue after the end of the mandate of the TRC. The Commission has partnered with the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone, comprising of both Christian and Muslim groups. The Commission is grateful to the UNDP Country Office in Sierra Leone and to the UNDP Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Recovery for the funding of this programme. At the time of writing it is projected to last for nine months, having started in October 2003. The Commission was careful not to repeat the mistakes made during the preparatory phase with the setting up of the District Support Committees.
124. The new programme allows all chiefdoms in the country to organise reconciliation activities according to the wishes and the needs of the people. The programme comprises three steps, the first two steps having been put in place by the Commission with the Inter-Religious Council and UNDP. The implementation of the last step is left to the Inter-Religious Council and UNDP.

Step 1: Training of Trainers

The Commission selected 14 of its former statement-takers to become district reconciliation officers, while the Inter-Religious Council selected one co-ordinator per district. These 28 representatives received training on several reconciliation issues during a three-day workshop in Freetown from 14 to 16 October 2003. Training was given on the concepts of reconciliation; the role of religion and tradition; the role of women and children; comparative perspectives from other countries; lessons learnt from work with ex-combatants; the trauma of victims and perpetrators; and challenges to the reconciliation process.

Step 2: District Workshops on Reconciliation

The next step in the programme was the organisation of workshops on reconciliation in every district and in the Western Area, which brought together representatives of all the chiefdoms, religious leaders, representatives from NGOs and CBOs, as well as victims' and ex-combatants' organisations. All the workshops took place between 10 and 20 November 2003. The choice of participants respected gender balance. This was, however, unsuccessful in some districts, where women were under-represented. The requirement for balance between the two main religions was more or less respected.

The participants were invited to reflect on what reconciliation means to them; the nature of the main conditions and challenges to reconciliation; the problems affecting some particular chiefdoms; and the kind of reconciliation activities that should be developed in the chiefdoms. The outcome of these workshops will be described below.

Step 3: District Support Committees

Every workshop resulted in the election of members of a District Support Committee that will implement the programme under the guidance of the Inter-Religious Council's district co-ordinators. The Committees are composed of one representative per chiefdom, as well as representatives of NGOs and victims' organisations.

These Committees will receive a modest Reconciliation Fund, which will allow them to support reconciliation activities in every chiefdom and community on the basis of the needs and wishes of the people. The Committees will start with sensitisation in the chiefdoms. They will launch appeals for proposals on reconciliation activities and meet once a month to select successful proposals. They will also participate in the implementation of the selected proposals.

125. During the workshops, many ideas were proposed on which kinds of activities should be developed in order to promote reconciliation. These suggestions will guide the District Support Committees in their future work. The suggestions can be divided into the following eight categories: 1) traditional activities; 2) religious activities; 3) commemoration/symbolic activities; 4) sports; 5) cultural/artistic activities; 6) other social activities; 7) joint economic activities; and 8) activities that promote truth telling and reconciliation, specifically:
- 1) **Traditional Activities:** traditional secret society rituals and dances; cleansing ceremonies; and pouring of libation, etc.
 - 2) **Religious Activities:** religious gatherings of Muslims and Christians; religious lectures; open air prayers; fasting; building places of worship.
 - 3) **Commemoration / Symbolic Activities:** holding memorial services; exhumations; and erecting monuments, etc.
 - 4) **Sporting Activities:** games and inter-area sports with the amalgamated chiefdoms, etc.
 - 5) **Cultural/Artistic Activities:** film shows; concerts; storytelling; song and drama; and cultural festivities, etc.
 - 6) **Other Social Activities:** feasting; reciprocal community visits; gatherings; inter marriages; and the formation of women's groups, etc.
 - 7) **Joint Economic Activities:** establishment of market and skills training centres in various chiefdoms; repairing/brushing of feeder roads; communal farm activities; and formation of co-operative societies ("commonly known as osusus").
 - 8) **Activities to Promote Truth Telling and Reconciliation:** establishment of reconciliation committees in the various districts, sensitisation on various topics including drug use and sexual violence; and panel discussions.

126. The District Support Committees finally worked out guidelines for the reconciliation activities that should be developed in the chiefdoms. The guidelines can be summarised in four simple points, as follows:
- a. Sensitisation activities on reconciliation and the TRC - IRC/SL programme need to take place in all chiefdoms and sections and involve all stakeholders.
 - b. Since activities should be based on the culture and tradition of the people, traditional and religious leaders need to play a prominent and active role in this process.
 - c. The reconciliation activities should consider the specific problems of victims and ex-combatants. Accordingly, all activities should be geared to reducing stigma, promoting joint activities, including women and children who have suffered from the greatest of atrocities, etc.
 - d. Reconciliation activities should be decentralised to the greatest possible extent. There should be activities designed by and tailored to each village, section and chiefdom of the country.

CONCLUSION

127. Reconciliation is unfinished business in Sierra Leone. The Commission has consolidated the foundations laid by the NGOs and community-based groups whose important work facilitated the original return of so many children and ex-combatants to their home communities. The Commission has also created momentum towards reconciliation by creating space for dialogue between divided communities and facilitating encounters between victims and perpetrators. Several important initiatives have been described in this chapter.
128. Other stakeholders now need to move the process even further forward. The major catalyst for reconciliation ought to be the government. In particular, the Government of Sierra Leone should not let up in its efforts to improve the material conditions of victims and their communities all over the country. As witnesses repeatedly and rhetorically asked the TRC during its public hearings: "what is the value of reconciliation on an empty stomach?" Only with enhanced efforts towards crucial human development goals will the government begin to satisfy the appetite of all stakeholders in Sierra Leone to see sustainable reconciliation.