

The importance of reconciliation after conflict – the examples of South Africa and Bosnia-Herzegovina

The author has served as Ambassador of Sweden to Bosnia-Herzegovina (2001-05) and to South Africa (2005-08). Experiences of these and other diplomatic postings will be used to reflect on the importance of reconciliation after conflict.

It will be argued that South Africa is living a best case scenario after its first democratic elections in 1994. It will be shown that the situation during negotiations for a new constitution was fraught with danger. There was political violence and high profile ANC leaders were attacked, one was murdered. The background to the fact that the ANC stayed at the negotiation table and that its leadership embarked on a course of reconciliation will be described. An attempt will be made to sketch an alternative development, had negotiations failed and reconciliation not been embraced.

Similarly, Bosnia-Herzegovina's failure to adopt a policy of reconciliation will be analyzed. A contra-factual scenario will be constructed where reconciliation is factored in and compared to the situation today.

The importance of outside advice and support will be discussed.