

rtc

responding to conflict

Pulling Together

Community Policing in the New South Africa

This film was commissioned by Responding to Conflict. It was filmed by Robert Maletta and produced by Trojan Horse Productions Ltd with funding from Comic Relief and the Samuel Rubin Foundation.

NOTES ACCOMPANYING THE 'PULLING TOGETHER' VIDEO

1) Introduction

This video is about former enemies coming together in Daveyton, a small urban community on the outskirts of Johannesburg, South Africa.

The transition from repressive white minority rule to political freedom and democracy in South Africa is often described as a miracle. It is difficult to comprehend how people who were so bitterly opposed to each other, with needs and interests seemingly so at odds with each other, could find ways of reconciling their differences.

On July 26, 1995, the Government of National Unity in South Africa passed the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act. This Act sought to facilitate the transition from a formerly oppressive apartheid system to a democratically functional government. It included provision for the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In December 1995, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) started a program to seek out, explore, and document information about past events that the more familiar national and international tribunals were unable to capture.

The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, through the TRC, sought to close the books on apartheid by providing for:

- ❑ The investigation and the establishment of as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights committed during the period from March 1, 1960 to the cut-off date contemplated in the Constitution, within or outside the Republic, emanating from the conflicts of the past, and the fate or whereabouts of the victims of such violations;
- ❑ The granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective committed in the course of the conflicts of the past during said period; affording victims an opportunity to relate the violations they suffered;
- ❑ The taking of measures aimed at the granting of reparation to, and the rehabilitation and the restoration of the human and civil dignity of, victims of violations of human rights;
- ❑ Reporting to the Nation about such violations and victims; the making of recommendations aimed at the prevention of the commission of gross violations of human rights;
- ❑ To provide for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a Committee on Human Rights Violations, a Committee on Amnesty, and a Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation.

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* was published on October 28, 1998. This five-volume report on the work of the TRC disclosed acts of atrocities, provided rehabilitation for victims, and became the basis of amnesty for perpetrators. The TRC was intended to bring relief to the victims of the inhumane

social system during the apartheid era, thus ending a ruthless chapter in the history of South Africa. However, it is recognised that as more information emerges in future years the history of apartheid will be re-written again and again for generations to come.

All of the elements of the Act were contingent on the dynamic interplay of three functions - full disclosure of the truth, amnesty for persons making full disclosure, and reparation and rehabilitation for victims or victims' families. Reconciliation, without intervention, generally takes years, generations or even centuries.

The Act incorporating the establishment of the TRC provided a powerful national framework within which the people of South Africa could begin to reconcile with each other.

In most cases this was easier said than done, and many communities were left with bitter reminders of the harshness of life under apartheid, living side by side with former sworn enemies with no means of finding the kind of reconciliation that seemed to be required. It was left up to leaders like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu; to call for people to put the past behind them, remember what had happened, but forgive people.

In many ways the entire negotiating process, from Nelson Mandela's first meeting with then President PW Botha in 1989 to the election for the Government of National Unity on 27 April 1994, was a process not only of negotiating about the future, but also reconciling the past and forging new relationships. For the national leadership this was an excellent opportunity to deal with unresolved issues from the past and to build the kind of relationships that would be required once in government together. But divided groups on a community level lacked this kind of contact with each other.

At the same time the new Government of National Unity was faced with rising crime that threatened to destabilise the new peace that had been forged. Communities were still highly suspicious of the police, and in some cases even protected criminals from the police. There was clearly a need for communities and police to work together if anything at all could be done about the escalating crime rate. This led to the formal recognition of Community Police Forums – forums where community leaders and members of the South African Police Service could come together to identify common needs and enlist the support of the community in fighting crime.

Before these forums could begin working together a great deal needed to be done to repair the damaged relationships from the past. In particular, members of the newly named South African Police Service had to build new relationships with the communities they were now expected to serve. Frequently the leaders of these communities were political activists who had played a key role in the struggle against apartheid, and who had come into violent contact with the police. During the apartheid era the police were seen as the armed wing of the government and were often responsible for detaining, torturing and killing people in the opposition

movements. Although the country was sharply divided along colour lines the ranks of the police included people from across racial lines. This sometimes resulted in activists being confronted by police from within their own communities. These police were hated by most community members and were often chased out of their homes, killed or forced to live in secure compounds within the grounds of the police station.

The Community Policing Forums are a grassroots side to the reconciliation process. Ordinary people coming together to find new ways of living and working together, new ways of understanding what has happened in the past, and new ways of building the future. “Pulling Together – Community Policing in the New South Africa” is the story of how one community began this process.

2) Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a process as much as it is a goal. It is the way in which each society chooses to bring together the concepts of Truth, Mercy and Justice in the aftermath of violence. This does not happen overnight, or simply because legislation is passed. The full and active participation of the people who have been affected by the violence is crucial to the process of reconciliation and to the establishment of peace.

All situations of violence and war are unique, each with their own complexities, so each journey towards reconciliation and peace will also need to be unique – each with its own complexities. Often the concepts of truth, mercy and justice are understood differently. It is in the unique way in which each society, or each community, chooses to interpret and pursue them that reconciliation will become meaningful and peace will become more than just a vision.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission identified the following lessons from its own process of grappling with these issues¹:

- Reconciliation does not come easily. It requires persistence. It takes time.
- Reconciliation is based on respect for our common humanity.
- Reconciliation involves a form of restorative justice which does not seek revenge, nor does it seek impunity. In restoring the perpetrator to society, a milieu needs to emerge within which he or she may contribute to the building of democracy, a culture of human rights and political stability.
- The full disclosure of truth and an understanding of why violations took place encourage forgiveness.
- Equally important is the readiness to accept responsibility for past human rights violations.
- Reconciliation does not wipe away the memories of the past. Indeed, it is motivated by a form of memory that stresses the need to remember without debilitating pain, bitterness, revenge, fear or guilt. It understands the vital

¹ From the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation commission.

importance of learning from and redressing past violations for the sake of our shared present and our children's future.

- Reconciliation does not necessarily involve forgiveness. It does involve a minimum willingness to co-exist and work for the peaceful handling of continuing differences.
- Reconciliation requires that all South Africans accept moral and political responsibility for nurturing a culture of human rights and democracy within which political and socio-economic conflicts are addressed both seriously and in a non-violent manner.
- Reconciliation requires a commitment, especially by those who have benefited and continue to benefit from past discrimination, to the transformation of unjust inequalities and dehumanising poverty.

It is through the full and active participation of as many people as possible in this process that peace can begin to be built. This is a peace that moves beyond the absence of violence, and establishes a new way of living, indeed a new way of thinking, about each other, and about the way in which we relate to each other.

a) The Beginnings Of The Community Policing Forums (CPFs)

The Response of The Community

It took some time for people to understand the concept of community policing. It took time to establish the mandate of the CPFs and time for the community to get over the mistrust they felt towards the police, stemming from their behaviour under the apartheid government.

The Response Of The Police

The police thought that these forums were like a political watchdog, because most of the people who participated were people coming from political organisations. The police were being asked to undergo a fundamental change from 'enforcers' of apartheid to offering a service to the whole community. For some it was not easy and those who found it impossible to make this change left the police force.

Workshops and Seminars

Workshops and seminars were organised to teach both the community and the police about the role of the CPFs. There was mistrust on both sides and real anger from the community about past police behaviour. The feeling of 'them' and 'us' still persisted. Gradually, people did start to attend the meetings and expectations about the role of both the police and the community in a Community Policing system became clearer.

b) Facing The Challenges

The Community

For many community activists who became part of the CPFs there were real challenges. To sit in the same room and work in the same team as police officers, who had been feared and hated by communities for years, was not easy. Distrust was strong at the beginning. Then, gradually, as they started working together, trust and friendships began to grow.

The Police

Police officers had to overcome the mistrust of the community who, initially, could not believe that those who had oppressed them were now seeking to consult them. So they had to deal with hostile questioning and initial rejection, and had to be prepared to keep coming back until such time as a climate of trust could begin to grow.

c) Taking Risks

The Community

Under the apartheid government black people who worked with the police were considered informers and traitors. This meant that those who co-operated with this new system ran the risk of having to deal with negative attitudes towards them from their own communities.

They also run the very real risk of being targeted and attacked by criminals, who resented the attempt to crack down on crime. Indeed, civilian CPF members have been targeted and some have died.

The Police

The police too were targeted and ran constant risks because of the levels of violence in society and use of firearms by civilians. Some people were still very angry because of what the police had done and what they represented under the apartheid government. Police were attacked and killed while on duty and also, in some instances, were attacked and killed in their own homes.

d) Building Bridges

The Community

There were still those in the community who did not trust the government or the justice system and were therefore unwilling to work with the police. They took matters into their own hands, punishing those they regarded as being responsible for crimes.

CPF members had a role in educating the community members about Community Policing in South Africa and in encouraging the use of the police and the Criminal Justice System.

Women and children had a particularly difficult time with rape and child abuse being widespread. These crimes were, historically, not treated sympathetically by the police. In order to address this women engaged in dialogue with the police to improve the treatment of the victims of rape and child abuse when these crimes are reported to the police.

The Police

The Police began to take on board the concerns of the community. They ensured that there was always at least one female police officer on duty and that there was a private room set aside for interviews to be carried out in privacy and with compassion. This is an example of how the police became more willing to listen and respond to the needs of the community. Something they were unprepared to do in the past.

e) Involving The Community

The Community

To try and ensure that there was constant feedback between the police and the community a network was established that encompassed the whole township. The aim was to involve local people who understood the problems of the area, who would provide information about what was going on, and who would be accountable. Thus, solutions would come from the community and have a better chance of lasting.

One problem was that no-one worked full-time in the CPF. When there was a crisis intervention had to come from outside.

Initiatives were tried - such as 'Adopt a Cop', where two police officers were allocated to every school, in order to improve communication and build trust.

CPF members went with the police to schools and community meetings to try and build trust within communities so that they could recognise that the police were doing a job that really needed to be done.

The Police

The police, for their part, by going into schools and to community meetings, and by working with CPF members, were being more open and were trying to build trust. They recognised the importance of working alongside the CPF, realising that CPF members were respected within the community and that this partnership could help overcome some of the mistrust.

3) Using The Video With A Group

The following are some ideas on how the video might be used in a group to generate discussion, or as part of a training event.

These suggestions are not intended to be prescriptive. Group leaders, facilitators and trainers are encouraged to use their own creativity in deciding how best to use the material.

- Allow at least as long to discuss the video as it takes to watch it (30 minutes).
- Explain something about the background of the situation to the group before showing the video.

You may want to use the points below as a basis for guiding the discussion:

- Ask people as they watch the video, to make notes about particular ideas or issues that strike them *or* ask people to watch the video without making notes and try and retain points of interest for discussion later. Issues that people might like to think about while watching are :
 - what reconciliation might mean for opponents in a conflict they are familiar with
 - what ways can they think of that would bring people together
 - what do the concepts of Justice, Mercy and Truth mean in their situation
 - what additional challenges to the people of Daveyton face
 - do they think that the Community and the Police are genuinely reconciled
- Ask people to note any similarities or differences to situations they themselves are experiencing or have experienced.
- Either as a whole group, or in small groups, ask people to discuss their responses to the video. Ask them whether it has contributed anything to their understanding of working with conflict situations.
- Either as a whole group, or in small groups, ask people to discuss whether there are any ideas in the video that could be applicable to a conflict situation they are experiencing or could potentially experience in the future.
- If group members are currently working or living in a conflict situation, ask them to consider what, if any, action they or their organisations might consider taking to try and improve the current situation.

Responding to Conflict (RTC) works internationally to provide practical capacity – building programmes in support of people working for peace, rights and sustainable development.

For more information contact:

Responding to Conflict, 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham B29 6LJ, UK

Tel: +44 (0) 121 415 5641

Fax: +44 (0) 121 415 4119

E-Mail: enquiries@respond.org

Website: <http://www.respond.org/>

Registered charity no: 1015906