

Differing interpretations of reconciliation in South Africa: a discussion of the home for all campaign¹

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Abstract

The theme of reconciliation remains an important one in South African politics. The issue of reconciliation was recently highlighted by South African Human Rights Commission chairperson, Jody Kollapen. According to Kollapen, in South Africa we have a problematic narrow interpretation of reconciliation, one that presents reconciliation and transformation as being in opposition to one another. This paper explores some of the debates about reconciliation as a process and then relates these to the Home for All Campaign. This Campaign was aimed at encouraging white South Africans to acknowledge the injustices of the past and to commit themselves to healing divisions and reducing inequalities in contemporary South Africa. It conceived of reconciliation as a process in which the onus is on white South Africans to take the initiative in reconciling with black South Africans. The Campaign received much publicity and provoked debate but never managed to gain the support of a significant number of white South Africans. In this paper, I explore the reasons for the Campaign's failure to meet all of its objectives, relating this to contemporary South African discourse on reconciliation. I argue that the Campaign's interpretation of reconciliation was valuable and necessary and that it remains imperative in South Africa that white South Africans critically reflect upon past and present privileges and take the initiative in processes of inter-racial reconciliation.

More than fifteen years after the end of apartheid the topic of post-apartheid inter-racial reconciliation in South Africa remains pertinent. In 2008 this issue came to the fore again when a controversial racist video made by students at the Reitz residence of the University of the Free State (UFS) came