



Foreword

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Living up to ACCORD's responsibility as a highly rated think tank (see ACCORD's magazine, *Conflict Trends*, issue 1, 2015, inside of front cover), we are once again publishing a set of thought-provoking contributions.

With regard to Africa as a continent and five of its countries, these articles and book review address issues that are seriously disappointing, and inspire us to think about and promote remedies. The disappointment is due to the fact that where people-friendly principles were supposed to be in place, politician-expedient strategies were side-lining or even invalidating them.

Six decades ago in many African countries and two decades ago in South Africa, *democracy* was welcomed with euphoria. But in several cases, not long afterwards, self-seeking political leaders began hijacking the power of the people. Rhetorical lip-service was still paid to democratic ideals, but the disheartening realities were that crucial clauses in constitutions were circumvented and democracy was subverted by pseudo-democracy or even overturned and replaced by near autocracy.

One of the main aims of all the liberation struggles was to be delivered from the injustice inflicted by colonial regimes and to benefit from a dispensation of socio-economic and political *justice*. But there were the cases of deficient transitions and distressing backlashes. The transitional justice that had been craved for was overruled by inter-ethnic tensions and hostilities, and by a stubborn unwillingness to address the wrongs concerned.

There have also been attempts to move away from one group's superiority and towards a practice of *equality*, but inter-group, inter-class and inter-gender understanding and respect seem to be elusive objectives. And in the context of such relational breakdowns, there have been aspirations and gestures towards *reconciliation*, but disappointingly few results.

On our continent, justifiably renowned for its *ubuntu* philosophy, one expects democracy, justice, equality, reconciliation, and interrelated values to thrive. We have to cope, however, with a worldwide reality of antipathy, or at least indifference, to human altruism. Our responsibility is, therefore, to counterthink, countertalk and counteract *ubuntu*-defying values and to propagate *ubuntu*-embracing values. Pivotal questions in this regard are *what* may be done, and *how* it should be done. Wise answers to the how-question are especially important when deeply entrenched injustices – including transitional injustices – are to be confronted and uprooted. There will always be many cases in which dialogic talking may lead to breakthroughs, but there will inevitably also be the deadlock situations in which political power-wielders might be domesticated by coercive measures.

We trust that the papers and the book review in this issue will engender or further encourage ideas and approaches towards people-friendly principles as those mentioned above. There are explicit and implicit recommendations about the necessity of dealing with past wrongs, the efficacy of utilising both informal and formal methods, and the interrelatedness of attitudinal and structural changes. In all our specific and unique situations, however, our own clever and creative thinking may guide us further – into innovation and implementation.