

## **Cat.4 # 4 The content of reconciliation of nations**

By Pieter Bos

The content of reconciliation is not so much the feelings, feelings such as anger, shame, embarrassment or feeling of guilt. Those feelings are not insignificant, but they are first of all signals that there is still something to be done.

The content of the reconciliation is the culpable facts (in numbers and years), the illegitimate actions, pronouncements, broken promises, anger outbursts and all. Also, the suffered financial damage. In many reconciliation processes in which we were involved, we have done quite some effort to carefully document the facts, as nuanced as possible.

Most of these facts are terrible but cannot be expressed in money.

When all debts of all parties involved are listed, the question of David will arise. (2Sam 21: 3): "What shall we do, that you can bless us again?" A terrible question, because you deliver yourself out to the mercy, or anger, of the injured party.

This is a crucial moment in the reconciliation.

In the big Africa-Europe Reconciliation Process finally came the moment, in Berlin, after many meetings over several years, that the delegations of 14 European Nations asked forgiveness, detailed and explicitly, from the delegations of 22 African Nations. When we finished the European spokesman said, following the example of David: "whatever you ask, we will do it". A terrible moment. The guilty party is not entitled to have the suffering party say what to say, is not entitled to explain the black Pastor that he has to forgive, is not entitled to show the ex-slaves-community – if it is it is at all possible – that the money is not there, that a Government will prevent to be vulnerable in making precedents of paying out because of the threat of pulling over a whole economy.

Financial compensation has to be negotiated but still ultimately the guilty party depends on the mercy of the victim. And to the mercy of God. A terrible moment.

In retrospect, we know from the Conference in Berlin that the African delegations were very divided among themselves and that they spoke specifically and emotionally about the financial compensation. Up front the outcome was not fixed.

Because of this crucial moment no outcome of any reconciliation process can be fixed in advance.

I was in Richmond, USA, with a group of Europeans in slave jokes, to ask forgiveness of the slave imports. At the former slave market, we knelt down. A team member and I were asked to make a confession. Which I had prepared. While I was talking I felt terribly shallow and hopelessly inadequate. Suddenly I broke out in a heart-breaking cry, not acted. Immediately a black man came running to me, picked me up and cried out: "Now I see that a white man can cry about this, I suddenly want to forgive."

The culprit should go through the time of dependence; he is depending on forgiveness. A terrible time.