

May 2026

# Rebuilding Libya Through Reconciliation

## IN SHORT

Reconciliation between Libya's social and political forces is essential to place the country on a positive trajectory after more than a decade of conflict and instability. Yet, persistent political fragmentation, external interference, insecurity across society, and unaddressed grievances continue to hinder a transition towards sustainable peace and institutional legitimacy.

Advancing reconciliation goes beyond resolving disputes among political authorities, powerful elites and armed factions. It is vital for healing social fractures caused by years of violence, which have undermined the nation's ability to move towards a shared vision for the future. Therefore, advancing a process that is legitimate and sustainable must be a priority. This requires a deep understanding of the factors that have led to Libya's internal divisions, and the design of inclusive, locally owned and accountable solutions.

This Insight Paper reflects ongoing efforts, and outlines proposals to strengthen future reconciliation initiatives. The paper and its recommendations draw from the informal dialogues facilitated by CMI–Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation in 2022–24 with Libyan women from civil society, political movements, and academia.

## Authors

**Silja Grundstrom** \_\_\_\_\_

Project Manager, Women in Peacemaking, CMI

**Hala Bugaighis** \_\_\_\_\_

Director of Jusoor Center for Studies and Development

## What's hindering reconciliation efforts?

Since 2011, Libya has struggled to close the circle of conflict and embark on a transition process based on consensus and sustained dialogue. Reconciliation and transitional justice efforts have taken place without a clear, context-specific framework to adequately address societal grievances. Fundamental questions such as the nature and timeframe of these grievances, and the mechanisms to deliver justice while rebuilding trust remain unanswered. As a result, initiatives have relied on models borrowed from other post-conflict settings. According to several observers, these models have often failed to align with Libya's local dynamics, sometimes exacerbating divisions and weakening the social fabric.<sup>1</sup>

The transitional justice debate in Libya has often looked to Rwanda, mainly through the lens of technical commissions and legislation. Rwanda relied heavily on laws but also advanced judicial reform, reintegration of perpetrators, and societal healing through community-based justice initiatives. Libya, by contrast, has focussed primarily on drafting laws and establishing commissions, without drawing on the broader comparative experience. Adapting lessons to Libya's own context has lagged behind.

Since 2011, several reconciliation laws were enacted in Libya<sup>2</sup>. However, these laws often lacked comprehensiveness and were characterised by duplication and poor coordination, hindering implementation. Their provisions fell short of integrating basic human rights principles, including the protection of women's rights, or aligning with international standards.

Another obstacle has been the narrow focus on financial compensation, neglecting symbolic and non-material dimensions such as apologies to victims and their families, commemoration, the right to truth, and psychological support. Financial reparations are complex and ideally require an independent fund. However, the proliferation of committees and funds – such as crisis committees, fact-finding missions, and compensation funds – without clear mandates risks creating unmet expectations, enabling misuse of funds, and ultimately producing ineffective mechanisms.

## Path forward

Redesigning Libya's reconciliation process requires placing justice, inclusivity, and trust-building at its core, while addressing issues of governance, security, and social cohesion. For society to heal from deep divisions, redefining foundational agreements between citizens and the state is crucial to establishing shared values and responsibilities.

## Implementing transitional justice mechanisms

Reconciliation cannot be achieved without justice, nor justice without truth, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition. Previous initiatives have failed to address victims' demands for justice and truth, leaving many feeling excluded and distrustful of the process. It is also essential to distinguish between transitional and selective justice<sup>3</sup>, ensuring equitable and non-discriminatory application. Therefore, more work should be done to ensure that the current draft Reconciliation Law reflects these principles across its mechanisms.

Reconciliation and transitional justice can be strengthened by involving international and human rights organisations in monitoring and supporting the process. These entities play a vital role in ensuring accountability and fostering stakeholders' trust. Reviewing the Draft Reconciliation Law proposed by the Presidential Council<sup>4</sup> is essential to ensure adherence to international standards<sup>5</sup> and grounding in accountability, the right to truth, reparations, and gender-inclusive approaches. Additionally, it is vital to review and strengthen the capacity of judicial institutions to handle these matters effectively, taking into consideration the grievances related to gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination. This will address victims' rights and reinforce public trust in the reconciliation process and state institutions.

“ Reconciliation cannot be achieved without justice, nor justice without truth, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition.

## A multi-level approach

For reconciliation to succeed, it must engage stakeholders at multiple levels, including local communities, educational institutions, public administration, and national government. Civil society organisations and grassroots movements are critical contributors, often filling gaps in formal structures and amplifying marginalised voices. Therefore, the omission of any reference to local civil society in the latest law draft is deeply concerning and must be addressed.



Photo: Manara Magazine 2020

To ensure inclusivity, diverse segments of Libyan society, including women, youth and marginalised groups, must be meaningfully engaged. Equal representation strengthens legitimacy and fosters trust. Authorities should also prioritise sustained consultation to better understand the views and aspirations of Libya's population.

### Addressing security challenges

Libya's reconciliation process is deeply intertwined with its security landscape. Years of conflict have resulted in arms proliferation and the dominance of armed groups, many controlling significant territory and fostering selective impunity that undermines peace efforts.

Strengthening accountable security institutions is key to creating safe spaces for dialogue and rebuilding public confidence. Women's participation is vital: their inclusion in security dialogues and forces can foster trust, enhance accountability, and reduce corruption.<sup>6</sup> Steps such as reopening police academies, reintegrating female officers, and providing gender-sensitive training are essential to building institutions that support lasting peace.

### Strengthening local governance

Strengthening local governance structures is a vital part of reconciliation. Municipalities deliver essential services such as healthcare, education, and security, and manage local conflicts, making them central to stabilisation. Empowering municipalities through greater autonomy, adequate resources, and conflict mediation mechanisms is essential. The reconciliation process must also address disparities in power and resources between national and local authorities.

Establishing elected municipal councils, allocating sufficient budgets, and ensuring equitable resource distribution are critical steps.

### Establishing an independent reconciliation commission

An independent entity is crucial to oversee the reconciliation process. The government should adopt executive regulations for the High National Commission for Reconciliation, ensuring adherence to international standards and human rights principles. Adequate funding and a transparent selection process are necessary to safeguard the neutrality and integrity of the Commission.

<sup>1</sup>The following sections are based on series of closed dialogues facilitated by CMI between Libyan women from civil society, academia and political movements from 2022 to 2024. See also: Collombier, Virginie, and Wolfram Lacher (eds), *Violence and Social Transformation in Libya* (2023; online edn, Oxford Academic, 18 Jan. 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197756492.001.0001>.

<sup>2</sup>Libyan legislation included: Law No. 26 of 2012 on the High Commission for the Application of Standards of Integrity and Patriotism; Law No. 35 of 2012 on Amnesty for Certain Crimes; Law No. 38 of 2012 on Certain Special Procedures for the Transitional Phase; Law No. 13 of 2013 on Administrative and Political Isolation; Law No. 29 of 2013 on Transitional Justice; Law No. 2 of 2025 on the Election of the General Conference for National Reconciliation.

<sup>3</sup>Selective justice is the inconsistent application of legal due process, often influenced by political considerations, which leads to biased or unequal treatment under the law. J Nkolo, 'Selective Justice in International Criminal Law: The ICC and Perceptions of Bias' (2023) SHS Web of Conferences. Transitional justice refers to the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice, and achieve reconciliation: United Nations, Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice (2010).

<sup>4</sup>PC's Draft Reconciliation Law, *Libyan Law & Society*, 2024, <https://www.libyanlawandsociety.org/assets/legal-documents/Draft-law-on-reconciliation.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), *An Opportunity for Accountability and Justice*, July 2024, <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/An-opportunity-for-accountability-and-justice-EN.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>Bastick, Megan and Tobie Whitman (2013), *A Woman's Guide to Security Sector Reform*, Washington DC: Institute for Inclusive Security and Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, p. 8-9.

## CONCLUSIONS /

- The Presidential Council, legislative and executive authorities should strengthen the draft Reconciliation Law and judicial capacity to ensure compliance with international human rights standards. They should guarantee truth, justice, reparations, and non-repetition, including accountability for gender-based violence, and establish independent monitoring with human rights organisations' involvement.
- The Government of National Unity and municipal authorities should strengthen local governance through elected councils, predictable and sufficient budgets, and anti-corruption safeguards. They should ensure transparent and equitable resource distribution and formalise links between local reconciliation initiatives and national frameworks.
- The Government and the Presidential Council should operationalise the High National Commission for Reconciliation by adopting its executive regulations, securing sustainable funding, and implementing a transparent selection process to ensure its independence and neutrality in line with international human rights standards.
- Reconciliation in Libya is not only a political process but a societal one. It must move beyond elite bargaining to address deep-rooted grievances through justice, truth, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition, placing trust-building and inclusivity at its core.
- A credible reconciliation framework requires institutional coherence and accountability. Strengthening judicial capacity, ensuring alignment with international human rights standards, and establishing an independent and transparent reconciliation body are essential to restore public confidence.
- Durable peace depends on coordinated action across levels. Local, national, and international actors must work in alignment to link grassroots initiatives with national frameworks, while meaningfully engaging women, youth, and marginalised groups to ensure legitimacy and long-term stability.