

Commission Roles and Responsibilities

Introduction

Truth commissions have been used to report on human rights abuses and systemic injustices and to foster justice and healing for a whole society. They lift up the silenced and invisible voices of victims and of others directly affected by a conflict or issue, offering them an official forum to testify to their experiences. Truth commissions receive the witnesses of the testifiers, create accountability in the audience, and generate a vision for change, healing, and reconciliation.

Roles

Honorary Guest Host and Chair

The Host and Chair may be the same person or separate people. The Host calls the hearing into session, welcomes the audience, and provides remarks that inform the audience of the Commission's responsibilities and the importance of its work. The Chair convenes and moderates the Commission. He or she facilitates the hearing, guiding different constituencies in delicate, complex conversations and assuring a fair, thoughtful, respectful hearing.

Testifiers

Testifiers have personally experienced the dilemmas of conscience in war. Soldiers and those working directly with them will testify to their ethical struggles in dealing with the conflict in Iraq in a context where the only possible ground for conscientious objection is pacifism. In addition, military families will discuss the impact of current CO regulations on family members serving in the war.

Expert witnesses

Expert witnesses offer not only considerable knowledge on the exercise of conscience in war, but may also have been personally affected by war and military service. They bring medical, legal, philosophical, theological, pastoral, and journalistic expertise to bear on the importance of freedom of moral conscience in war.

Commissioners

Commissioners are leaders in U.S. society from a variety of religious traditions, nonprofit organizations, the military, academe, the arts, the media, and community groups and youth organizations. They bring knowledge to the issue and will encourage visibility for the Commission's work in their organizations and communities. They share a concern for the common good and for the importance of freedom of moral conscience in situations of conflict.

These leaders will work together to create a national interfaith conversation about the life-changing moral decisions facing service members and the need for

military policies that protect the freedom of conscience of service members from any and all of our nation's diverse faith traditions.

The Commissioners' first role is to receive the stories of the testifiers and the expert witnesses through receptive listening and reflection. The day after the hearings, the commissioners and testifiers will gather in private plenary to process the testimony from the evening before. Then, the Commissioners will divide into small groups belonging to a similar field to reflect on what they have heard and prepare their response to the testifiers to utilize to their expertise and roles in society. An Accountability Team will record the responses and monitor the progress of their plans so that the dialogue and the advocacy work on the role of conscience in war can be successfully concluded and a report issued.

Convener of Commissioners

The convener, Dr. Gabriella Lettini of the Starr King School for the Ministry, is a commissioner with experience serving on previous truth commissions. She will be the primary information source and facilitator for the Commissioners. She will lead a brief Orientation Session before the beginning of the proceeding and will oversee and facilitate the work of the whole group.

Accountability Team

The Accountability Team will insure the fostering of a national conversation on conscience in war and follow its progress until the conclusion of this project. The Convener of the Commissioners and the Planning Committee will work with Commissioners in selecting the Team, which will record the suggestions and commitments made by Commissioners.

Artists

While Truth Commission hearings rarely involve artists and art, both are crucial to the content and ethos of this Truth Commission. Artists will serve as commissioners who receive testimony and contribute to the national conversation and as musicians who will lead the hearing in moments of musical meditation.

Audience

All people gathered for the Truth Commission will be receivers of testimony, which accords them a rare forum for listening to direct experiences of the exercise of conscience in war under current CO regulations. The audience will be issued a collective challenge to reflect and take action on the testimony they have received.