Restorative justice is increasingly influential around the world. The UN recommends that countries use it more and has endorsed basic principles to ensure that it is effectively blended with criminal justice.

Some mistakenly believe, however, that restorative justice is a specific programme. It is in fact a theory of justice that calls all parties—victims, offenders, communities and the government—to recognise the importance of repairing the harm caused by crime.

This means that judges can often incorporate restorative principles when considering sentences, even if restorative processes such as victim-offender mediation are not available.

Of course they must follow the law, but often judges have opportunities to exercise some discretion even in civil law countries. Existing sanctions, such as probation, may offer enough latitude that sentences can become more restorative.

Long-term change is likely to involve legislative change and the development of new programmes within the criminal justice system. The Centre can assist those who want to implement such changes. It also stands ready to help judges consider what can be done under the existing laws and institutions.

About the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation

The Centre is the justice reform arm of Prison Fellowship International, an association of NGOs active in over 100 countries. The Centre assists governments, its affiliates, and other NGOs in addressing problems in the criminal justice system.

The Centre promotes restorative justice policies and practices as a promising approach with benefits for victims, communities and offenders.

While operating in the Christian tradition, the Centre seeks common ground, dialogue and collaboration with people from all backgrounds and traditions.

About the 10 Keys

Criminal justice practitioners around the world seek practical measures to address the serious crises that exist in many justice systems. The purpose of the 10 Keys Project is to offer ideas to assist them in doing that.
Restorative justice is a response to crime that emphasizes healing the wounds of victims, offenders, and communities caused or revealed by the criminal behaviour. It is a more comprehensive way of thinking about crime, one that values: inclusion of all parties, encounters between those parties, accountability demonstrated by making amends, and reintegration of all parties as contributing members of their communities.