

the peace accords of 1996. Referring once again to cycles, some people refer to those years as the “renaissance of the Mayan culture in Guatemala.”

Healing efforts as part of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and reconciliation measures might be summarized as follows:

1. Knowing your rights and duties as an individual as a means to community empowerment.

When individuals are aware of their rights and duties, they are better prepared to understand that they do not live in isolation, that they are part of a community, a society, a nation, a country. We are interconnected and our rights and duties presuppose the understanding of the rights and duties of others. My well-being is dependent on the well-being of others. So in order to have stronger communities, we need to start with the individuals and make them aware of their rights and duties. Building on the knowledge of basic human rights, community-based approaches help us to support displaced populations in overcoming individualism and on looking for ways to attend and respond to the needs of the collectivity.

Human rights awareness training for Guatemalan refugees started in Mexico, well before any voluntary repatriation took place. They needed to recognize themselves as holders of human rights and duties, in equal footing like any other human being, without any discrimination between men and women. Guatemala refugees learnt about their basic human rights in Mexico, at the same time that they had access to education and health facilities in their normal daily life as part of a family and a community. This became such a factor of change that they were able to negotiate directly with the Guatemalan government the terms of their voluntary repatriation (06 October 1992 agreements), being the first time in this continent that refugees themselves negotiate the conditions for their voluntary repatriation. Upon return to Guatemala, they also realized that human rights were not only part of their exile experience in Mexico, but that they also apply anywhere in the world. Women did not renounce to their rights and community organizations once back in Guatemala and for the first time in their lives, they became property owners and members of cooperatives on their own right on equal footing as men.

2. Looking for commonalities rather than differences.