

## How Restorative Justice Can Inform and Assist the Provision of Effective Remedies to Hate Crime, Case Study: The Christchurch Terrorist Attack

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**Abstract :** The 2019 terrorist attack on two masjids in Christchurch, New Zealand, was a shocking demonstration of the harm that can be caused by hate crime. As legal and governmental responses to the attack struggle to provide effective remedies to its victims, restorative justice has emerged as a tool that can assist, in terms of both meeting victims' needs and discharging the obligations of the state under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), arts 2(3), 26, 27. Restorative justice is a model that emphasizes the repair of harm caused or revealed by unjust behavior. It also prioritises the facilitation of dialogue, the restoration of equitable relationships, and the prevention of future harm. Returning to the case study, in the remarks of the sentencing judge, the terrorist's actions were described as a hate crime of vicious malevolence that the Court was required to decisively reject, as anathema to the values of acceptance, tolerance and mutual respect upon which New Zealand's inclusive society is based and which the country strives to maintain. This was one of the reasons for which the terrorist received a life sentence with no possibility of parole. However, in the report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack, it was found that victims felt the attack occurred within the context of widespread racism, discrimination and Islamophobia, where hostile behaviors, including hate-based threats and attacks, were rarely recorded, analysed or acted on. It was also found that the Government had inappropriately concentrated intelligence resources on the risk of 'Islamist' terrorism and had failed to adequately respond to concerns raised about threats against the Muslim community. In this light, the remarks of the sentencing judge can be seen to reflect a criminal justice system that, in the absence of other remedies, denies systemic accountability and renders hate crime an isolated incident rather than an expression of more widespread discrimination and hate to be holistically addressed. One of the recommendations of the Royal Commission was to explore with victims the desirability and design of restorative justice processes. This presents an opportunity for victims to meet with state representatives and pursue effective remedies (ICCPR art 2(3)) not only for the harm caused by the terrorist but the harm revealed by a system that has exposed the minority Muslim community in New Zealand to hate in all forms, including but not limited to violent extremism. In this sense, restorative justice can also assist the state in discharging its wider obligations to protect all persons from discrimination (art 26) and allow ethnic and religious minorities to enjoy their own culture and profess and practice their own religion (art 27). It can also help give effect to the law and its purpose as a remedy to hate crime, as expressed in this case study by the sentencing judge.

**Keywords :** hate crime, restorative justice, minorities, victims' rights

**Conference Title :** ICPMILMI 2022 : International Conference on The Protection of Minorities under International Law and Minority Identity

**Conference Location :** Cairo, Egypt

**Conference Dates :** December 15-16, 2022