**Situational analysis and background**

South African society has been shaped by centuries of deeply racist colonial and apartheid rule. This has created a privileged, powerful, well-resourced white minority and a disadvantaged, abused and impoverished black, coloured and Indian majority.

The Community of Nations declared the policies of colonialism and apartheid as crimes against humanity.

The South African church participated in the policies of colonialism and apartheid and, in some instances, even provided theological justification for the policies.

Eventually the world ecumenical body representing churches of a reformed tradition declared the theological justification of apartheid as a heresy.

The 1994 South African democratic dispensation abolished racist colonial and apartheid policies and created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a mechanism to allow South Africans to deal with the consequences of their oppressive and racist past. In general, very few white South Africans took responsibility for their role in and undue benefit from colonialism and apartheid. The lack of a restitution commitment is seen by most South Africans as a rejection of the possibility of meaningful reconciliation. The existence of the massive, race-based disparities between rich and poor is a perpetuation of historic injustice, which continues to mete out violence on an already oppressed population and cannot be ignored. It is unsurprising that resentment and anger are increasing as time goes on. This reality serves as a threat to sustainable peace and makes the need for restitution more urgent than ever.

**Exploring or describing Restitution**

Restitution is defined as ‘restoring matters to the state they were before an injustice occurred’. It refers to ‘paying back’ or ‘making things right’ for wrongs previously committed (although some wrongs can never be made right, such as murder, torture, etc.).

Restitution is a justice requirement (a *wrong* demands a *right*).

Restitution is a human requirement. Since the very early stages of humanity, societies have demanded restitution for unjust behaviour, e.g. Sumerians, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians.

Restitution is a biblical requirement and imperative (see biblical examples of this in the section on preaching restitution).

Restitution addresses and encompasses all forms of injustice, including land, economy, opportunity, dignity, memory, identity, cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge etc.

Restitution is urgent.

**Guiding principles for a theology of restitution**

* Naming (precise defining) and acknowledgement of the injustice. (Zacchaeus and restitution; Luke 19:1-9)
* Taking full responsibility for the unjust behaviour. (Zacchaeus and restitution; Luke 19:1-9)
* Getting to know the victims through authentic listening to better understand the full impact of unjust actions. (Lazarus and the rich man; Luke 16:19-22)
* Both victim and offender must be committed to telling the truth about the abuse. (Zacchaeus and restitution; Luke 19:1-9).
* Experiencing and expressing of sincere remorse for wrong behaviour on the part of the offender, including feelings of guilt and shame. (Zacchaeus and restitution; Luke 19:1-9)
* Repenting for wrong behaviour on the part of the offender. (Zacchaeus and restitution; Luke 19:1-9)
* Unconditional apology from the offender is key. (Zacchaeus and restitution; Luke 19:1-9)
* The offender must be committed to transformed behaviour. (Zacchaeus and restitution; Luke 19:1-9)
* The offender must be committed to doing restitution that is led by the offended party who determines what type of restitution should be rendered, acknowledges that restitution is not charity, and includes the repair or replacement of unjust systemic structures. (Restitution for the Gibeonites: 2 Sam 21:1-14; Lazarus and the rich man: Luke 16:19-22)

**New possibilities (grace) after acts of restitution**

* The possibility of living in peace with each other, acknowledging the difference between peace making and peace keeping. *Making peace*: ensuring that the root causes of the injustice are addressed; *peace keeping*: making sure the status quo is maintained. (Zacchaeus and restitution; Luke 19:1-9)
* The possibility of (re)conciliation between erstwhile enemies. Due to the general disappointment with the absence of restitution in the post-democracy reconciliation project, prospects of reconciliation will in future depend on the doing of restitution. (Zacchaeus and restitution: Luke 19:1-9)
* The possibility of forgiveness if and when survivors are ready to do so, acknowledging that forgiveness should never be forced on any person. (Zacchaeus and restitution; Luke 19:1-9)