



# EUROPEAN FORUM FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Connecting People to Restore Just Relations

## CONTACT

European Forum for Restorative Justice

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## PRESS RELEASE

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## THE LARGEST RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CONFERENCE IN EUROPE TAKES PLACE IN TALLINN

*The event features leading initiatives from around the world that address large scale violence in times of war and polarisation.*

### JUST TIMES: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE RESPONSES IN DARK TIMES

On the last week of May (29–31 May 2024), the European Forum for Restorative Justice holds an exceptional conference at the Tallinn University Conference Centre. The 12th International Conference of the EFRJ will take place in no ordinary times. It will focus on the potential of restorative justice in dark times, amidst large scale conflicts, wars and other types of wide-spread violence in the society.

The event will explore innovative responses to these challenges.

While current practices of restorative justice commonly deal with interpersonal conflicts and are connected to the traditional criminal justice system, this conference opens the discussion on its role in responding to larger scale conflicts. This is in line with one of the aims of the restorative justice movement: to create a cultural change not only within the





justice system, but also in societies.

The conference is the most significant professional gathering of the field in Europe, with important implications for people beyond the professional community. It brings together around 350 professionals to take part in plenary sessions, workshops, field trips and listen to a wide range of pioneering professionals. The event features experts in violence reduction, crisis management, war studies, diplomacy, peacebuilding and transitional justice, academics, policymakers and young activists.

The choice of the location, Tallinn, is not coincidental: Estonia, as well as Latvia and Lithuania, experienced the German and then Soviet occupation in the last century and the ongoing war in Ukraine brought up traumas

and a feeling of empathy for those who are affected by war around the world.

The local hosts of the event, the Social Insurance Board, the Estonian Ministry of Justice and RuaCrew, are well known in Europe in the field of restorative justice for their innovative work, especially in cases that involve young people and refugees, and also in domestic violence and sexual child abuse cases.

The participants of the conference also have the opportunity to get to know the Estonian initiatives relevant for restorative justice, through visits to local organisations doing pioneering work.

## ROUNDTABLE ON RESTORATIVE APPROACHES IN UNIVERSITY SETTINGS

### European Restorative Justice Award

*The ceremony of the European Restorative Justice Award will be held on the first evening of the conference: every second year the award acknowledges key figures or organisations that contribute to the development of restorative justice in Europe. (28 May 2025 at 5:45 pm at the Auditorium Maximum of Tallinn University.*

Linked to the conference, a roundtable on "Restorative Approaches in University Settings" is organised in collaboration with Tallinn University. The international gathering of leading professionals provides a unique possibility to share international experiences that bring restorative justice practices into the organisational environment of universities. Such approaches aim to support building just cultures and equity in the daily work of the university.

It will take place on Tuesday 28 May from 2 - 4 pm, with invited guests from different higher institutions in Estonia and international restorative justice professionals experienced in restorative approaches in institutional settings.





## LOCAL ORGANISERS

- **Social Insurance Board** – The Social Insurance Board is a governmental authority that works to ensure the self-sufficiency and well-being of Estonian people (including victim support and restorative justice services; child support and protection). It has been partner of many EU-funded projects on restorative justice (including i-RESTORE 2.0 with the Child Advisory Boards).
- **Ministry of Justice of Estonia** – The main duty of the Ministry of Justice is to plan and to carry out a legal and criminal policy of the state, which will help ensure an open and secure society, where people may be assured of the use and protection of their rights. Several project funding (with the lead of the Norway grants’ “Youth-friendly legal system”) have established effective preventative measures for juvenile repeat offences and increased the scope of alternative interventions, bringing the number of juveniles in prison to 0. The Criminal Policy set forth by the Ministry of Justice until 2030 is characterised by being efficient, fast, impartial, person-centred, and victim-friendly. To achieve that, further development of restorative justice is one of the priority measures, supported by European project funding “Reducing the recidivism of young offenders”.
- **RuaCrew** – The NGO RuaCrew was created in 2009 with the aim of preventing and contributing to solving social problems and delinquency among young people. Since 2016, it has been consciously adopting a restorative justice mindset in its work. Today, as a trusted centre of excellence for restorative justice, RuaCrew aims to be involved as an advocate in other parts of the world. It trains young people, parents and professionals on a variety of topics and provide services to support safe relationships. RuaCrew’s core values are respect, expertise and openness. Its mission is to support safe relationships through a restorative mindset. Its vision is creating an Estonia where restorative thinking is commonplace.





## FUNDERS

The EFRJ is funded by the Justice Programme of the European Commission, which provides the key funding for this event as well.

Additionally, we received financial or in kind support, or bursaries for experts to attend the conference from different institutions and/or individuals. Among others:

- **City of Tallinn** - The City of Tallinn supported us in many practical ways throughout the organisation of the event, mostly with touristic advise ([www.visittallinn.ee](http://www.visittallinn.ee)). It also financially contributed to some of the local expenses and offered free public transport to our participants all week long. You may follow the City on social media (@VisitTallinn).
- **European Social Fund+** - The project "Reducing the Recidivism of Young Offenders", co-financed by the European Social Fund+ financially supports 50 local professionals in participating to the conference.
- **Alta Scuola Federico Stella sulla Giustizia Penale, Italy** - The graduate school of criminal justice ASGP financially supported (thanks to the research funds of Professor Claudia Mazzucato) the participation of some members of The Encounter of Encounters, a collective of people with experience of political violence and acts of terrorism from different European countries and beyond.
- **Anonymous prisoner, Italy** - An Italian prisoner, who wishes to remain anonymous, generously offered a financial contribution for the participation in the conference of a number of young participants in restorative dialogues in cases of political violence and violent extremism.
- **Local services in Tallinn** - We received special discounts from different local services.

## FROM PEACEMAKING TO TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND VIOLENCE REDUCTION: THE PLENARY SPEAKERS

The conference features several special and internationally recognised justice initiatives from around the world that respond to large scale violence, conflicts and polarisation in society. According to the Global Risks Report 2024 of the World Economic Forum, these are

among the top 10 risks that threat societies both short and longer term. The conference offers an opportunity to learn from the original experiences of those who pioneer in addressing these challenges, and to discover the potential of restorative justice in these matters.





Here are the most unique speakers who will represent these themes:

**Mart Susi**, professor of human rights law at Tallinn University and visiting researcher at Universidad Autónoma de Chile, will introduce us to the history of justice reforms in Estonia at the opening plenary.

**Camilo Eduardo Umaña Hernández** is Deputy Minister of Criminal Policy and Restorative Justice for the Ministry of Justice and Law and a law professor in Colombia, as well as an expert on transitional justice and human rights. After the Peace agreements of 2016, Colombia is undertaking a pioneering transitional justice process that applies restorative justice principles and practices. Mr. Umaña will talk about the intersections of transitional justice and restorative justice, its potentials and challenges.

**Alona Horova** is the director of the Institute for Peace and Common Ground in Ukraine, a public organisation that promotes restorative justice as an instrument to build stronger social bonds within the Ukrainians affected by the ongoing war.

**Adelina Tërshani** and **Elina Khachatryan** are students in “Rondine Cittadella della Pace”, an Italian non-profit organisation that educates young students from conflict zones in the construction of peace models. Adelina is also a slam poetry performer and a feminist activist in Kosovo; Elina promotes dialogue and reconciliation between members of the civil society, organisations and religious realities affected by the conflict in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

**Tanya Kearns** is an activist from Northern Ireland who encourages social change through arts: she studied restorative justice and is now part of group of “The Encounter of the Encounters”, which promotes cross-borders restorative dialogue between restorative justice participants who experienced political violence and terrorism. Tanya's work is deeply influenced by her country's history of political violence between Catholics and Protestants.

**Imrana Alhaji Buba** is the founder of the Youth Initiative Against Terrorism, a youth-led organisation working to unite youth against violent extremism in north-eastern Nigeria. Along with these professionals, all the plenaries will be enriched by **Hannah Moore**, a storyteller, facilitator and arts practitioner, working with the arts for wellbeing and community building.





## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONFERENCE FOR ESTONIA

Estonia is on the road to be among leading countries in Europe innovating the justice field and investing in the development of restorative justice. The international conference of the EFRJ is the largest gathering of restorative justice professionals and advocates in Europe and is among the key restorative justice events globally as well. For a few days the Estonian capital will become the most important hub for restorative justice in Europe with this gathering, bringing together unique expertise and perspectives.

The variety of professionals that will join as speakers and trainers is ensured by their wide cultural and occupational background, as well as by a lot of different topics in the plenaries, workshops and field trips. Joining the conference means being able to share knowledge and experiences with other experts in the field.

This conference will also be a significant opportunity for Tallinn, and Estonia in general, to let the participants know more about the Estonian justice system. In particular, the field trips will provide a unique perspective on some Estonians justice facilities, such as a prison, a probation service and a police academy, reflecting about topics at the core of the conference themes.

In conclusion, through the conference Estonia will have another opportunity to be appreciated in an international landscape as a landmark for the improvement of the justice system in all Europe. It will be a chance to be known for its cultural and judicial background which, in the field of restorative justice in particular, consists in a very innovative work, especially in cases that involve young people and refugees, but also in domestic violence and sexual child abuse.

*While restorative justice mostly addresses victims and offenders of “classic” crimes, we share here two examples of effective restorative justice approaches that are addressing large scale conflicts. In these cases, restorative encounters had no impact on criminal justice procedures but they permitted participants to work collectively in a different understanding of what happened, to ensure (or at least hope) that this will not happen to others.*

### *Rami and Bassam: two fathers united by a tragic loss*

Rami Elhanan and Bassam Aramin are two fathers that lost their young daughters, due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. They met during a peace demonstration in 2005 (at the time Bassam's

daughter was still alive) and they immediately felt a very deep bond between each other, they recognised the same moral values one in the other.





Their friendship was very criticised because one of them is Israeli and the other Palestinian, but for them this was never an issue. “The line that divides us is not the one between Israelis and Palestinians, but the one between those who want peace and the ones that refuse it”, Rami said. “The mourning didn’t make us enemies but brothers. Revenge won’t bring back our daughters. Hatred is the real enemy” said Bassan.

They are also members of the Parents Circle Families Forum NGO, an organisation composed by more than 600 Israeli and Palestinian families that lost a family member to the ongoing conflict.

They both promote with all their strengths a peaceful dialogue between the two countries: they consider their mission to spread a message of peace and reconciliation, through conferences and meetings. They’re also protagonists of a book, *Apeirogon*, by the Irish writer Colum McCann, that won an important literary prize in Italy in 2022.

Thanks to their restorative encounter they didn’t surrender to hatred for their tragic loss, but they found a way to process those feelings, spreading peace as the goal of their lives. As Rami said “what will happen to the today young people if they won’t see a possibility of peace?”.

## *Restorative justice and violent extremism*

Agnese Moro is the daughter of Aldo Moro, former Italian Prime Minister who was kidnapped and killed by the Red Brigades in 1978. At that time she was 26 and the tragedy had a huge impact on her life: in several interviews she talks about a pain that will never actually leave her. In 2009 she started a restorative justice programme with the people responsible for her father’s death and, in the following years until now, she attended several conferences with them, to talk about the healing power of restorative justice. To quote her own words: “in this dialogue, that of course won’t change what happened, we can change. [...] I was able to see that humanity can’t be lost and it can always be awakened again inside everyone.

I found out that the evil isn’t almighty and neither it’s a strength external to men, but it’s just a human element and it’s inside everyone”.

Former members of the Red Brigades who participated in restorative justice encounters felt heard by their own victims and they considered that as an “enormous form of generosity from them”, they felt understood in a way they never experienced before. The focus of restorative justice is, indeed, learning to listen more than to talk, it is a “dialogue between people that seem irreconcilable”, as another offender, said.





## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

"Restorative justice is an approach that offers offenders, victims and the community an alternative pathway to justice. It promotes the safe participation of victims in resolving the situation and offers people who accept responsibility for the harm caused by their actions an opportunity to make themselves accountable to those they have harmed. It is based on the recognition that criminal behaviour not only violates the law, but also harms victims and the community."

Restorative justice is recognised and promoted by legal and policy documents of international institutions, such as the European Union, Council of Europe and the United Nations, and it is embedded in the national legislations of most European countries. Restorative justice has demonstrated its effectiveness in addressing the underlying causes of crime and in generating solutions to many contemporary social problems: building and repairing social relations, generating mutual understanding between antagonistic individuals or groups, and strengthening personal responsibility to respect the feelings, needs and values of others.

## EUROPEAN FORUM FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

The European Forum for Restorative Justice is the largest European professional network on restorative justice. It counts more than 450 members, including 91 organisations, working on restorative justice practices, research and policy in Europe and beyond. Since its establishment in 2000, the organisation offers support to implement and develop restorative justice through trainings, consultancy, research, advocacy, policy developments and events.

Every second year it organises an international conference on restorative justice, which is the most important event on this subject in Europe.

Find its publications and more information at [www.euforumrj.org](http://www.euforumrj.org).

