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Standards and Policies for Conflict Resolution, Truth, Transitional Justice and Reconciliation

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily represents those of the United Nations.

1. Introduction

In 2014 the Greenland Reconciliation Commission was established by the Greenland Government. The aim of the commission was to address the historical legacy of the colonial era in Greenland. The colonial status of Greenland ended in 1953, but the modernization process from World War II onwards meant a radical societal transformation. The challenges in the present Greenlandic society were in the mission of the Commission directly seen as related to the historical development. Social issues, a low educational level and a lack of self-confidence and believe in own abilities.

Prior to the establishment the Premier of Greenland Aleqa Hammond had asked the Danish Prime minister Helle Thorning Smith for Denmark to take part in the reconciliation process. The Danish Government did not see a need for reconciliation and rejected the invitation. The Danish reluctance to participate might also have been influenced by the rhetoric of the Greenlandic Premier towards Denmark.

Instead, the focus for the Commission came to be on the internal Greenlandic reconciliation, and the commission worked from 2014 till the end of 2017. The members of the commission were selected on the basis of professional and personal criteria, and had the freedom to plot its own course. The final report contained a number of recommendations. In this regard, a center for reconciliation placed at the University of Greenland/Ilimatusarfik was proposed. A new government has however meant a shift in priorities, but the need to address the historical development and the legacy of this development still persist. The effect of the Reconciliation Commission has however been a greater willingness in the Greenlandic public to deal with taboo subjects, such as sexual abuse of children and suicides.

In these last years the Greenlandic-Danish relationship has changed – partly on account of continued demands from Greenland of being treated as equals and partly on account of a greater focus on the Arctic from the outside world as the strategic importance and potential of Greenland is evident. This means a greater willingness from Denmark to revise its historical dealings with Greenland in order to promote equality and respect between the two countries.

In 2020 a white paper on a specific case involving danification of 22 Greenlandic children from the early 1950s was released. Danification is the idea, similar to related processes in other countries, where the dominant culture, along with the language, is imposed to a group of people in order to make the group capable of being modernized.

The premier of Greenland, Múte B. Egede and the Greenland Government recognizes the need for a continued focus on the development of Greenland following Second World War.

Three historical studies are in process. An agreement between the Governments of Greenland and Denmark was reached in the summer of 2022 on further historical studies on the modernization of

Greenland. In the same summer, a case involving apparent misconduct of the Danish health authorities in Greenland was brought to public attention. A great number of Greenlandic females had involuntarily been subject to birth control measures.

Finally, a case on the inclusion in the Danish Realm in 1953 is being examined. Here the question is how the process went, and if Denmark manipulated Greenland into becoming an equal part of the kingdom instead of an independent or a free-associated country.

2. Short description of the relationship between Greenland and Denmark

Since 2009 Greenland has been a self-governing country within the Danish Realm with jurisdiction on a number of areas. Denmark still holds the responsibility on other areas (33), but the self-Government act of 2008 recognizes the Greenland People as a people according to international law with the right to self-determination. The long-term political goal of Greenland is independence.

A constitutional commission is to deliver a proposal for a constitution for a future independent Greenland, but a date for independence has not been determined. Most likely, it will be a number of years before a referendum will be held to determine this question, and the immediate political priority is for Greenland to move still closer to managing on its own. This means raising the educational level, obliterating the social issues and building a stronger economy with a growing number of relations to other countries.

The political dealings between Greenland and Denmark are progressing - and here a joint focus on the historical development is essential. In the Danish public school system, a mandatory focus on the different countries in the Danish realm is being finalized, effectively through the official history canon. The public service media Denmark's Radio, which also produce television programs, a historical documentary on the 300-year relationship between the two countries was launched in 2022. The programs were well received, also in Greenland. A number of Greenlandic academics were included as experts and Greenlandic film makers to a large extent produced the documentary.

In Greenland history is about to be reintroduced as a school subject. Both in Greenland and in Denmark the joint or parallel history between the two countries is seen as essential in building a stronger relationship. In Greenlands case a historically informed public is seen as paramount in the ongoing nation building process.

Historically seen, the negotiations between the two countries on the political relationship has been marked by a clear objective; an ever-greater Greenlandic responsibility on own matters and thereby ultimately an independent Greenland. Already in the 1850s a political training of Greenlanders began through political councils in which an equal number of Greenlanders and Europeans (primarily Danes) participated. The councils had limited powers, but the idea was to promote the Greenlanders ability to take responsibility for the development of society. The roles of the Greenlanders and the Europeans were that the first were the ones to be educated, and the latter the

ones who taught how to be responsible. To a certain extent, this is still how Danes see Greenlanders. It should be noted, that Greenland as a nation is growing still more self-assured and finding its own course, but there are still relevant venues to address. Under the current self-governing status, the political aim of promoting responsibility and the ability to manage own affairs has largely been fulfilled.

3. Strategic importance and economic potential

Since the colonization in 1721 Denmark have had, and still have, interests in maintaining the relationship with Greenland. Till the beginning of the 20th century the main focus was on preserving the traditional seal hunting culture, as the blubber from the seal was the main revenue source. The blubber was boiled and the oil was sold to the outside world. Maintaining the seal hunting culture and thereby securing the revenue was reached by closing of Greenland from outside influence. This also meant a low level of new initiatives and trade opportunities, even though fishing and sheep farming was started certain places in the period.

During World War II the role of Greenland played a part in Denmark becoming part of the winning side, and from the late 1940s onwards Greenland was a Danish NATO contribution for the Western countries, specifically in the dealings with USA.

In 1941, during World War II, an agreement was reached between the Danish ambassador Kauffmann and the US authorities on the defense of Greenland, which gave the US military permission to establish military facilities in Greenland. At the time Denmark was occupied by Nazi Germany and Greenland was administered by two governors with the support of the provincial councils which primarily had Greenlandic members. In 1951 a new defense agreement was signed between the Danish and US governments. Neither defense agreements had Greenlandic participation. In relation to the expansion of the US Thule Air Base in 1953 the local Inughuit population was forcefully relocated, and in the late 1990s a group (Hingitaq 53 – the relocated of 53) won a court case against Denmark on account of this relocation. The Danish Government were responsible for the relocation, and gave an official apology to the group following the court decision. The strategic importance of Greenland is still apparent, and since the early 2000s the Greenland government has been included in the dialogue between Denmark and USA concerning the security and defense matters.

In 2021 a US-consulate reopened in the capital Nuuk and deals with cooperation and liaisons between Greenland and USA. Foreign and Security matters are still a Danish responsibility, but the Greenland Government has demanded inclusion on the matters. In 1994 the Greenland Government opened a foreign affairs office, and as part of the Greenlandic parliamentary system a committee on foreign and security matters has been established. Between the Greenland and Danish Government, a new foreign, security and defense committee (also including the Faroese Government) was launched in 2021 and held its first meeting in 2022. In the coming negotiations of the defense settlement of the Danish Realm Greenlandic (and Faroese) representatives will participate.

The mineral resource-potential in Greenland is apparent in relation to economic development. The potential has been a key factor in the Danish involvement in Greenland since the start of the colonization in 18th century. A number of endeavors in the field has been conducted, but only a few has succeeded. In the 1850s a cryolite mine in Southern Greenland was opened, and in the following 140 years large earnings flowed into private and public Danish pockets. The mine had been operated without Greenlandic workers, and the earnings was not part of the official Greenland account. In the 1920s a coal mine was opened on the Disko Island – the majority of the workers were Greenlanders, and a distinct workers society evolved with a marked effect on the whole of Greenland. In the 1970s the coal mine was closed with a traumatic consequence for most of the inhabitants. Since 2010 Greenland has had the responsibility in relation to mineral resources, and the economic potential in developing is still great. Large deposits of different minerals can be exploited, but there is a ban on mining with uranium. At the moment a ruby mine and an anorthosite mine are in operation. Potentially several other mines will be opened in the coming years.

Until the late 1940s the economic principal of the Danish colonial administration in Greenland was centered on an idea of balance, which meant that investments were limited. The Danish colonial policy saw a slow-moving development of the society as the most sensible approach, and only to a limited extent new venues were tested. The Greenlandic politicians and Greenlanders within administration and teaching in several instances pushed for reforms and a quicker pace for the development of society. Today Greenland receives a block grant from Denmark, which constitute a substantial part of the Greenlandic economy. The Greenland economy is growing, but further growth is needed, if Greenland were to be economic independent.

With the end of World War II and the formation of United Nations, and herein the decolonization-process, Greenland became an equal part of the Danish Realm. This process was molded from different sides. The Greenlandic politicians pushed for reforms and the majority of these supported the ties to Denmark, the international society pushed for selfdetermination for colonized territories and within the Danish administration a strategy to maintain Greenland as part of the Realm was formulated. This process has been dealt with in different historical studies, and is still part of the ongoing discussion between Greenland and Denmark. An official Greenland Government initiated study will commence in the near future. The subject of the study is on what went on in the process. It is however clear that Denmark withheld relevant options for the Greenlandic provincial council, most likely in order to maintain the connection to and control of Greenland.

A massive modernization of Greenland began in close cooperation with Denmark and with Danish funding. Greenland was to be made into a modern welfare state with a civilized population closely knitted to Denmark proper. The Greenlandic politicians had a clear interest in developing the society in close cooperation with Denmark. An industrial fishing sector was to be the economic foundation for Greenland. Fishing vessels and fishing plants were established, and the majority of the work force in Greenland was to be employed in the sector. Today fishing is Greenlands most important economic area, which constitutes 90 % of the Greenland export. This is however a vulnerability, as world market prices fluctuates, and from the Greenland Government a

diversification of the economy is prioritized.

4. A need for reconciliation, clarification and closure

Since 1945 the Greenlandic society has gone from being a Danish colony (an underdeveloped hunting society) to a modern welfare society, but the swift and radical transition has raised the need for a clarification of the historical development. This should be seen in conjuncture with the course towards a future independence. Some of the questions in relation to the historical development are: What were the reasons for the political decisions in the modernization process, and to what extent did the Greenlandic politicians influence these matters? Could the Greenlandic politicians have decided on going against Danish interests, while maintaining the relationship to Denmark? What were the consequences of the modernization for the common Greenlanders? Which reasons and interest did Denmark have for wanting to maintain the connection to Greenland?

The work of the Greenland Reconciliation Commission entailed meetings with the public, smaller research projects, gathering of interviews, production of art, music and short stories. A key feature of the work was to engage a dialogue with the public, interest groups and politicians on what subjects should be dealt with from a historical and sociological angle. Smaller research projects were launched within the agreed upon subjects. These dealt with the concentration policy and the birth criteria. The concentration policy was a cornerstone of the overall modernization of Greenland from the late 1940s onwards. From an economic perspective the population needed to be concentrated at few and bigger towns in order to lower the costs of the development. The Greenlandic politicians were in agreement on this point with the authorities in Denmark, but disagreement arose on which places should be closed or developed. As a principle, the inhabitants should not be forced to move, but in actuality they often felt pressured to the relocation. Discussions on demography are still grounded in this sore history. The birth criteria was established in 1964, and meant a lower salary if a person taking a job in Greenland had been born in Greenland. The productivity in Greenland was lower than in Denmark, and the criteria had an ambition to promote solidarity between work groups – hunters, fishermen and office workers should not be paid too differently. The criteria was officially not based on ethnicity, as also Danes born in Greenland were included. At the same time there was a need in Greenland for trained workers of different professions, and they expected a salary similar to the one in other countries. The majority of the Greenlandic politicians approved of the criteria from an economic perspective, but the criteria underlined the difference between the Greenlandic and Danish population. Greenlanders were second rate in their own country with lower salary and lower access to higher positions. After the introduction of Greenland's Home Rule in 1979 a process began to abolish the criteria and around 1990 it was finally abolished.

The result of the Commission's work was communicated through short film, public meetings, the commission's website and through radio programs. At the public meetings people could tell their own experience with the different subjects, both in plenum and through actual interviews with the commission staff. For many, this was the first time they could express their story. Opening up for

these experiences should be seen as a start of a process of reconciling. Being able to deal with issues, entail an openness for the subjects. A lot of the historical subjects and experiences have been taboo, and sought forgotten. In accordance with the mission of the Commission this means dealing with the historical legacy. The fact that the Greenland Government initiated the Commission is important, as it means taking responsibility. The members of the Commission were with a Greenlandic background, and thereby Greenlanders represented themselves. To a large degree the history of Greenland has been written by outsiders (primarily Danes), but being able to tell one's own history is an important part of defining one self. The feeling of being second rate is grounded in the historical development and the modernization of Greenland following World War II. The danification process, whereby the society as a whole should be altered, was stopped with the introduction in 1979 of the Greenland Home Rule. With the home rule Greenland took over responsibility on a number of areas, one of them being the cultural area and another the ruling of the society with a parliament and an own government. Greenlandification was the response of the Danification. This meant the beginning of raising the Greenlandic awareness and self-reliance, an ongoing process which takes time, but is crucial. The 300 years of joint and parallel history shared by Greenland and Denmark is a history of progression and negotiations, and where the power dynamics to a certain degree have shifted.

5. Concluding remarks

In a Greenlandic-Danish context history is closely related to the political dealing between the two countries. In Greenland there is a clear priority of clarification on the historical development, linked to the nation building process, which is leading towards a politically and economically independent Greenland. In a growing sense Denmark have had to acknowledge the political priorities of Greenland.

An actual equality between Greenland and Denmark is on its way, but a higher degree of understanding and knowledge can be obtained through historical studies, as the ones in process. This can lead to a reconciliation. The history of Greenland in a growing degree is being written by Greenlandic scholars, and the importance of defining oneself is apparent.