



INTERACTION COUNCIL

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A UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES

Proposed by the InterAction Council

1 September 1997

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Introductory Comment

It is time to talk about human responsibilities

Globalization of the world economy is matched by global problems, and global problems demand global solutions on the basis of ideas, values and norms respected by all cultures and societies. Recognition of the equal and inalienable rights of all the people requires a foundation of freedom, justice and peace – but this also demands that rights and responsibilities be given equal importance to establish an ethical base so that all men and women can live peacefully together and fulfil their potential. A better social order both nationally and internationally cannot be achieved by laws, prescriptions and conventions alone, but needs a global ethic. Human aspirations for progress can only be realised by agreed values and standards applying to all people and institutions at all times.

Next year will be the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. The anniversary would be an opportune time to adopt a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, which would complement the Human Rights Declaration and strengthen it and help lead to a better world.

The following draft of human responsibilities seeks to bring freedom and responsibility into balance and to promote a move from the freedom of indifference to the freedom of involvement. If one person or government seeks to maximise freedom but does it at the expense of others, a larger number of people will suffer. If human beings maximise their freedom by plundering the natural resources of the earth, then future generations will suffer.

The initiative to draft a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities is not only a way of balancing freedom with responsibility, but also a means of reconciling ideologies, beliefs and political views that were deemed antagonistic in the past. The proposed declaration points out that the exclusive insistence on rights can lead to endless dispute and conflict, that religious groups in pressing for their own freedom have a duty to respect the freedom of others. The basic premise should be to aim at the greatest amount of freedom possible, but also to develop the fullest sense of responsibility that will allow that freedom itself to grow.

The InterAction Council has been working to draft a set of human ethical standards since 1987. But its work builds on the wisdom of religious leaders and sages down the ages who have warned that freedom without acceptance of responsibility can destroy the freedom itself, whereas when rights and responsibilities are balanced, then freedom is enhanced and a better world can be created.

The InterAction Council commends the following draft Declaration for your examination and support.

Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities

(Proposed by the InterAction Council)

Preamble

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world and implies obligations or responsibilities,

whereas the exclusive insistence on rights can result in conflict, division, and endless dispute, and the neglect of human responsibilities can lead to lawlessness and chaos,

whereas the rule of law and the promotion of human rights depend on the readiness of men and women to act justly,

whereas global problems demand global solutions which can only be achieved through ideas, values, and norms respected by all cultures and societies,

whereas all people, to the best of their knowledge and ability, have a responsibility to foster a better social order, both at home and globally, a goal which cannot be achieved by laws, prescriptions, and conventions alone,

whereas human aspirations for progress and improvement can only be realized by agreed values and standards applying to all people and institutions at all times,

Now, therefore,

The General Assembly

proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities as a common standard for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall contribute to the advancement of communities and to the enlightenment of all their members. We, the peoples of the world thus renew and reinforce commitments already proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: namely, the full acceptance of the dignity of all people; their inalienable freedom and equality, and their solidarity with one another. Awareness and acceptance of these responsibilities should be taught and promoted throughout the world.

Fundamental Principles for Humanity

Article 1

Every person, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, social status, political opinion, language, age, nationality, or religion, **has a responsibility to treat all people in a humane way.**

Article 2

No person should lend support to any form of inhumane behavior, but all people have a responsibility to strive for the dignity and self-esteem of all others.

Article 3

No person, no group or organization, no state, no army or police stands above good and evil; all are subject to ethical standards. Everyone has a responsibility to promote good and to avoid evil in all things.

Article 4

All people, endowed with reason and conscience, must accept a responsibility to each and all, to families and communities, to races, nations, and religions in a spirit of solidarity: **What you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not do to others.**

Non-Violence and Respect for Life

Article 5

Every person has a responsibility to **respect life**. No one has the right to injure, to torture or to kill another human person. This does not exclude the right of justified self-defense of individuals or communities.

Article 6

Disputes between states, groups or individuals should be resolved without violence. No government should tolerate or participate in acts of genocide or terrorism, nor should it abuse women, children, or any other civilians as instruments of war. Every citizen and public official has a responsibility to act in a peaceful, non-violent way.

Article 7

Every person is infinitely precious and must be protected unconditionally. The animals and the natural environment also demand protection. All people have a responsibility to protect the air, water and soil of the earth for the sake of present inhabitants and future generations.

Justice and Solidarity

Article 8

Every person has a responsibility to behave with **integrity, honesty and fairness**. No person or group should rob or arbitrarily deprive any other person or group of their property.

Article 9

All people, given the necessary tools, have a responsibility to make serious efforts to overcome poverty, malnutrition, ignorance, and inequality. They should promote sustainable development all over the world in order to assure dignity, freedom, security and justice for all people.

Article 10

All people have a responsibility to develop their talents through diligent endeavor; they should have equal access to education and to meaningful work. Everyone should lend support to the needy, the disadvantaged, the disabled and to the victims of discrimination.

Article 11

All property and wealth must be used responsibly in accordance with justice and for the advancement of the human race. Economic and political power must not be handled as an instrument of domination, but in the service of economic justice and of the social order.

Truthfulness and Tolerance

Article 12

Every person has a responsibility to **speak and act truthfully**. No one, however high or mighty, should speak lies. The right to privacy and to personal and professional confidentiality is to be respected. No one is obliged to tell all the truth to everyone all the time.

Article 13

No politicians, public servants, business leaders, scientists, writers or artists are exempt from general ethical standards, nor are physicians, lawyers and other professionals who have special duties to clients. Professional and other codes of ethics should reflect the priority of general standards such as those of truthfulness and fairness.

Article 14

The freedom of the media to inform the public and to criticize institutions of society and governmental actions, which is essential for a just society, must be used with responsibility and discretion. Freedom of the media carries a special responsibility for accurate and truthful reporting. Sensational reporting that degrades the human person or dignity must at all times be avoided.

Article 15

While religious freedom must be guaranteed, the representatives of religions have a special responsibility to avoid expressions of prejudice and acts of discrimination toward those of different beliefs. They should not incite or legitimize hatred, fanaticism and religious wars, but should foster tolerance and mutual respect between all people.

Mutual Respect and Partnership

Article 16

All men and all women have a responsibility to show respect to one another and understanding in their partnership. No one should subject another person to sexual exploitation or dependence. Rather, sexual partners should accept the responsibility of caring for each other's well-being.

Article 17

In all its cultural and religious varieties, marriage requires love, loyalty and forgiveness and should aim at guaranteeing security and mutual support.

Article 18

Sensible family planning is the responsibility of every couple. The relationship between parents and children should reflect mutual love, respect, appreciation and concern. No parents or other adults should exploit, abuse or maltreat children.

Conclusion

Article 19

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any state, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the responsibilities, rights and freedom set forth in this Declaration and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

A UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES

Report on the Conclusions and Recommendations
by a High-level Expert Group Meeting, Vienna, Austria (20-22 April 1997)
Chaired by Helmut Schmidt

It is time to talk about human responsibilities

The call by the InterAction Council for a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities is timely. Although traditionally we have spoken of human rights, and indeed the world has gone a long way in their international recognition and protection since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations in 1948, it is time now to initiate an equally important quest for the acceptance of human duties or obligations.

This emphasis of human obligations is necessary for several reasons. Of course, this idea is new only to some regions of the world; many societies have traditionally conceived of human relations in terms of obligations rather than rights. This is true, in general terms, for instance, for much of Eastern thought. While traditionally in the West, at least since the 17th Century age of enlightenment, the concepts of freedom and individuality have been emphasized, in the East, the notions of responsibility and community have prevailed. The fact that a Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted instead of a Universal Declaration of Human Duties undoubtedly reflects the philosophical and cultural background of the document's drafters who, as is known, represented the Western powers who emerged victorious from the Second World War.

The concept of human obligations also serves to balance the notions of freedom and responsibility: while rights relate more to freedom, obligations are associated with responsibility. Despite this distinction, freedom and responsibility are interdependent. Responsibility, as a moral quality, serves as a natural, voluntary check for freedom. In any society, freedom can never be exercised without limits. Thus, the more freedom we enjoy, the greater the responsibility we bear, toward others as well as ourselves. The more talents we possess, the bigger the responsibility we have to develop them to their fullest capacity. We must move away from the freedom of indifference towards the freedom of involvement.

The opposite is also true: as we develop our sense of responsibility, we increase our internal freedom by fortifying our moral character. When freedom presents us with different possibilities for action, including the choice to do right or wrong, a responsible moral character will ensure that the former will prevail.

Sadly, this relationship between freedom and responsibility is not always understood clearly. Some ideologies have placed greater importance on the concept of individual freedom, while others concentrate on an unquestioning commitment to the social group.

Without a proper balance, unrestricted freedom is as dangerous as imposed social responsibility. Great social injustices have resulted from extreme economic

freedom and capitalist greed, while at the same time cruel oppression of people's basic liberties has been justified in the name of society's interests or communist ideals.

Either extreme is undesirable. At present, with the disappearance of the East-West conflict and the end of the Cold War, humankind seems closer to the desired balance between freedom and responsibility. We have struggled for freedom and rights. It is now time to foster responsibility and human obligations.

The InterAction Council believes that globalization of the world economy is matched by globalization of the world's problems. Because global interdependence demands that we must live with each other in harmony, human beings need rules and constraints. Ethics are the minimum standards that make a collective life possible. Without ethics and self-restraint that are their result, humankind would revert to the survival of the fittest. The world is in need of an ethical base on which to stand.

Recognizing this need, the InterAction Council began its search for universal ethical standards with a meeting of spiritual leaders and political leaders in March 1987 at La Civiltà Cattolica in Rome, Italy. The initiative was taken by the late Takeo Fukuda, former Prime Minister of Japan who founded the InterAction Council in 1983. Again in 1996, the Council requested a report by a high-level expert group on the subject of global ethical standards. The Council, at its Vancouver Plenary Meeting in May 1996, welcomed the report of this Group, which consisted of religious leaders from several faiths and experts drawn from across the globe. The findings of this report "In Search of Global Ethical Standards" demonstrated that the world faiths have much in common and the Council endorsed the recommendation that "in 1998, the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations should convene a conference to consider a Declaration of Human Obligations to complement the earlier crucial work on rights."

The initiative to draft a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities is not only a way of balancing freedom with responsibility, but also a means of reconciling ideologies and political views that were deemed antagonistic in the past. The basic premise, then, should be that humans deserve the greatest possible amount of freedom, but also should develop their sense of responsibility to its fullest in order to correctly administer their freedom.

This is hardly a new idea. Throughout the millennia prophets, saints and sages have implored mankind to take its responsibilities seriously. In our century, for example, Mahatma Gandhi preached on the seven social sins.

1. Politics without principles
2. Commerce without morality
3. Wealth without work
4. Education without character
5. Science without humanity
6. Pleasure without conscience
7. Worship without sacrifice

Globalization, however, has given new urgency to the teaching of Gandhi and other ethical leaders. Violence on our television screens is now transmitted by satellites across the planet. Speculation in far away financial markets can devastate

local communities. The influence of private tycoons now approaches the power of governments and unlike elected politicians, there is no accountability for this private power except for their own personal sense of responsibility. Never has the world needed a declaration of human responsibilities more.

From Rights to Obligations

Because rights and duties are inextricably linked, the idea of a human right only makes sense if we acknowledge the duty of all people to respect it. Regardless of a particular society's values, human relations are universally based on the existence of both rights and duties.

There is no need for a complex system of ethics to guide human action. There is one ancient rule that, if truly followed, would ensure just human relations: the Golden Rule. In its negative form, the Golden Rule mandates that we not do to others what we do not wish be done to us. The positive form implies a more active and solidary role: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Bearing in mind the Golden Rule, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides an ideal starting point from which to consider some of the main obligations which are a necessary complement to those rights.

- If we have a right to life, then we have the obligation to respect life.
- If we have a right to liberty, then we have the obligation to respect other people's liberty.
- If we have a right to security, then we have the obligation to create the conditions for every human being to enjoy human security.
- If we have a right to partake in our country's political process and elect our leaders, then we have the obligation to participate and ensure that the best leaders are chosen.
- If we have a right to work under just and favorable conditions to provide a decent standard of living for ourselves and our families, we also have the obligation to perform to the best of our capacities.
- If we have a right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, we also have the obligation to respect other's thoughts or religious principles.
- If we have a right to be educated, then we have the obligation to learn as much as our capabilities allow us and, where possible, share our knowledge and experience with others.
- If we have a right to benefit from the earth's bounty, then we have the obligation to respect, care for and restore the earth and its natural resources.

As human beings, we have unlimited potential for self-fulfilment. Thus we have the obligation to develop our physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual capacities to their fullest. The importance of the concept of responsibility towards attaining self-realization cannot be overlooked.

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The expert-group, which was convened in Vienna in April 1997, worked on a declaration of human responsibilities. The results of this work were summarized and condensed by the three academic advisors; Prof. Thomas Axworthy, Prof. Kim Kyong-dong and Prof. Hans Küng. Prof. Küng provided a very helpful first draft as the starting point for the discussion. They made recommendations to Helmut Schmidt, who chaired the meeting, Andries van Agt and Miguel de la Madrid. Oscar Arias, a member of the Council, who could not be present, contributed a welcome substantive paper.

The results of this work are contained in the draft proposal for the United Nations entitled “A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities.” The group submits with pleasure the attached draft to the InterAction Council and the world community at large.

List of Participants

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ENDORSEMENT OF THE DECLARATION

The proposed *Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities* has the endorsement of the following individuals:

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Helmut Schmidt (Honorary Chairman)

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Malcolm Fraser (Chairman)

Former Prime Minister of Australia

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Former Prime Minister of the Netherlands

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Kenneth Kaunda

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Former President of Colombia (deceased in August)

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III. Participants (in preparatory meetings in Vienna, Austria in March 1996 and April 1997) and special guests (at the 15th Plenary Session in Noordwijk, The Netherlands in June 1997)

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