

## *CHARTER OF HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES*

World Assembly of Citizens, Lille, France  
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Presentation of the Charter  
as amended according to  
suggestions of the participants of the Lille Assembly

by : Edith Sizoo

This presentation comes in three parts :

1. The idea of a Charter of Human Responsibilities
2. The results of the work done by the Assembly on the initial proposal
3. After Lille

### ***1. The Idea***

The World Assembly of Citizens which is now closing its ten days long gathering accepted the idea of creating a Charter of Human Responsibilities to stand alongside and complement the two existing "pillars" which up till now have underpinned international life : the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Charter.

The idea to take the initiative for such a Charter as *citizens* of the international civil society was accepted as well. Moreover, it was felt that as citizens we must work towards the idea of such a Charter to take root at societal level as well as -in the long run- at international governmental level.

*Why was this idea accepted ?*

By adopting the idea of a Charter of Human Responsibilities this World Assembly of Citizens is -basically- saying that :

- we cannot let it happen that Human Rights are continuously violated;
- we cannot let it happen that the main news that comes to us from all parts of the world is about violence;
- we cannot let it happen that our children and grandchildren grow up in a world where the dignity of the human being and the respect for Mother Earth as a living organ are not practised as the first and foremost guiding principles for behaviour;
- we cannot let it happen that patriarchal domination and values continue to prevail in our societies;
- we cannot let it happen that material greed is stimulated to such an extent that it will prevail over immaterial aspirations and spiritual values;
- we cannot let it happen that, while this immensely rich planet has all the resources to feed humankind, the majority of human beings, is still living in dire poverty;
- we cannot let it happen that natural resources of this planet are wasted and partly destroyed;
- we just cannot let it happen
- ...and...

- we cannot wait for the day that *all* powers that be - not some, but *all*- conceive of power as a means to be used to create conditions for a life of dignity for each human being.

We cannot let it happen..., we have to assume responsibility, each and everyone of us, according to our own potential, from the level of the home to the levels of the workplace, of economic, political and religious life.

*Where does this sense of responsibility stems from ?*

This too was clearly said by this World Assembly of Citizens who were called together by the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World.

It did not simply say : "we take responsibility because it is our duty to do so".

It said something much more profound : it is because deep down, we all experience *the passion of love for all that lives*, other human beings, flowers, animals, the beauty of nature; it is because of our love for this immense creative force of Life itself.

We cannot let it happen that this love is replaced by feelings of powerlessness or even despair.

"Love" originally means "staying with". Taking responsibility out of love then implies "staying with...", that is : not giving up, being aware, being awake *and* acting from love for all that lives.

One among the very many other ways of acting, is to take on board the idea of a Charter of Human Responsibilities, to improve it, to work with it by specifying the implications for our own fields of social and professional activities and for our own cultural contexts.

## ***2. Results of the work done by the Assembly on the initial proposal***

At the opening session of the Assembly, I presented the form in which this Charter was proposed to be shaped by using the image of a *marguerite* with a *heart* and a large number of *multi-colored petals* : the common heart of this flower would consist of a number of commonly agreed *basic principles* and the petals would present the wide variety of applications in socio-professional fields as well as culturally adapted translations for the various linguistic contexts.

During the past days, the various working groups of this Assembly have given many comments on the initial proposal for the guiding principles to be put in the heart of the *marguerite*. Comments came from the group of :

- women
- young people
- people living in precarious conditions
- artists and publishers
- trade unionists
- theologians and philosophers
- teachers
- non-governmental organisations
- politicians

- business people and engineers
- journalists
- civil servants
- scientific professionals
- people of military and juridical backgrounds
- people related to the health sector.

### *Some general observations*

Interestingly enough, a comment that was made by quite a few people, in particular the group of theologians and philosophers and the Chinese group, was that the initial proposal did not talk enough about "ethics", while in actual fact the very notion of "responsibility" is an ethical one.

Another rather general comment was that the text should be more personalised, there should be more passion in it, more "punch", emotion, contradictions, sense of complexity, doubts, in one word : more "soul". This necessity was , in fact, the very reason why the drafting committee proposed to put in the heart of the marguerite only the common principles which in order to be "common" had to be formulated in the most simple and un-ambiguous words as possible. The soul will have to come when -in the near future- the implications of these principles are worked out and transposed in the multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural petals of the marguerite.

Obviously there were many problems with the *meaning of key-notions* given the wide variety of cultural contexts people come from. For instance, our Asian friends had problems with the notion of "unity" in diversity, saying that "unity" is a hegemonistic concept and that we should rather speak of "harmony". The notion of "responsibility" itself, of "justice", of "peace" need to be contextualised as well. Consequently, several groups suggested that an extensive work will be undertaken on the *cultural and historical* meaning of key-notions of the Charter, a sort of *multi-cultural glossary* in order to make it a truly interactive text.

Another strong feeling was that the Charter should have a *plan of action* annexed to it. Some people feel that there are too many urgent problems that need immediate action and that there is really no time any more to sit down and think about a Charter. This, of course, is a most legitimate demand and will definitely be part of the follow-up of this Assembly.

### **3. After Lille**

The new Preamble plus the revised 0 + 11 principles will be put on the Web-site of the Alliance so that those Allies who have not attended the Lille Assembly can give their comments too.

In April 2002 we will produce the final text which meanwhile will be enriched with the specific charters of the various socio-professional groups. The great challenge will then be to make a common and prolonged effort so that this Charter will make headway with civil society and -at some stage- among international institutions.

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