



Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United world

How to translate the Charter of Human Responsibilities ?

- **A multilingual and multicultural Charter**
 - **How to proceed ?**
 - **How to publish ?**
 - **Intercultural glossary**

A multilingual and multicultural charter

Those who commit themselves to translate the Charter of Human Responsibilities into their mother tongue, are taking up an unusual challenge. They are supposed not to translate the text as literally as possible, but rather ***to convey its content and meaning in a way suitable to their own cultural context***. Thus the idea is to create a text in a language which strikes a chord in the hearts and minds of the people concerned.

The cultural approach to the creation of a multilingual charter has a history. The following brief sketch highlights its main moments.

Background

The period of framing a proposal for a Charter which preceded the World Assembly of Citizens, organised by the Alliance in December 2001 (Lille, France), was characterised by an iterative process : a search for commonality was followed by a search to make explicit diversity which was followed again by a search for commonality. To lay shared foundations for united action, cultural, linguistic, economic, political and geographic diversity had to be respected.

Work on *cultural* and *linguistic* diversity was realised in particular by a group of translators of the initial declaration of the Alliance, titled the *Platform*, and a number of resource persons who were invited to come together on the island of Naxos in Greece in October 1998. The purpose then was to let them share their difficulties with the cultural interpretation of that text which they had encountered when translating it into some twenty - mainly non-western- languages. Through an in-depth study of the underlying implicit meaning of words, the participants exposed questionable cultural presuppositions which were prevalent in the *Platform*, as in many international or so-called 'universal' texts.

The difficulties encountered proved to be not only problems of translation, but -more fundamentally- differences in views on the relations between human beings, and between the human being and society, nature, the cosmos.

Consequently, the question came up *to what extent a founding text of an international movement would be able to mobilise people from various different cultural and historical contexts if such a text is conceived in one or two international, dominant languages, as it happens western languages.*¹

The main recommendation coming out of this process was that the time has come to go beyond the classical ways of writing a text for international use in a mono-culturally inspired language and then translate it literally in that same cultural spirit. There was a clear desire to open up this type of texts to other world views, including different expressions of spiritual wisdom and practices. Therefore, instead of translating a 'ready-made' text into other languages, the more realistic option would be to 'transmit' the main common ideas into a whole range of texts in local languages produced in consultation with local groups. These 'contextualised' texts in culturally adapted modes of expression were thought to have more impact than literally translated ones.

Following the World Assembly of Citizens, some forty people have expressed their willingness to translate the Charter. Together they cover 26 languages of which 21 non western.

Creating together a multilingual and multicultural charter... an exciting challenge !

¹ The results of the Naxos workshop have been published in a book “ *WHAT WORDS DO NOT SAY* ” (E. Sizoo, 1999, Paris : Editions Charles Léopold Mayer).

How to proceed ?

How to arrive at a translation which is adapted to your linguistic and cultural context ?

First, a distinction has to be made between *translation* and *checking* :

- *translation* : those who make the translation (at least two people working together)
- *checking* : those who are asked to check whether the text is culturally relevant (at least ten people).

Translation

1. start by reading carefully, maybe two or even three times, the whole text of the Charter (the presentation and the Charter itself : 13 pages) in the language from which you translate it;
2. check whether there are problems of understanding the meaning of (passages of) the text;
3. if so, contact Edith Sizoo (*) for clarification;
4. make a **first version** in your own language using a mode of expression that strikes a chord in the hearts and minds of the people concerned. Do not hesitate to use expressions, proverbs, cultural references which are familiar to the people in whose language you write the translation.

Checking

5. IMPORTANT : ask people who do not know anything about this Charter to read your first version. Ask them whether they find the text comprehensible and attractive.
6. Discuss with them the idea of a *Charter of Human Responsibilities* and check whether your text seems relevant to them. (NB : please convey to Edith the important points made during this discussion in view of the *Intercultural Glossary*, see below);
7. Adjust the style used in your text to the comments and suggestions of the people whom you consulted; this revision will result in your **second version**.
8. Again : ask the same people and others to read your second version;
9. Finalise your text after this second consultation;
10. Send your translation to Edith (by *e-mail* if the text is written in western characters and *printed by post* if it is written in non western characters).

How to publish ?

1. Find someone who is able to create a lay-out which is attractive to people in your language area, as well as a local printer. Ask for a tender.
2. For paying the costs of printing, there are two possibilities : either you find yourself a financial source in your country or you submit a proposal to the Alliance (with tender attached) through the intermediary of Edith.

Intercultural glossary

One of the recommendations of the World Assembly of Citizens in Lille was to add to the multilingual and multicultural publication of the Charter an *intercultural glossary*. This glossary will set out specific cultural interpretations of some key notions used in the charter, starting with the concept of 'responsibility' itself.

Although the group of people to be consulted for this intercultural glossary will be much larger than the translators only, the latter will certainly be the resource persons par excellence !

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Annexe

The dissemination process of the Charter of Human Responsibilities

1. **Translation** of the Charter in a multilingual and multicultural form (April 2003)
2. Drawing up an **intercultural glossary** (May 2003)
3. Lay out and **publication** (June/July 2003)
4. Working out **Codes of Conduct** on the basis of the guiding principles of the Charter *by and for* the various **professional spheres**. (2003/2004)

The multilingual and multicultural text constitutes only the common foundation of the Charter of Human Responsibilities. The test of its value and its applicability lies with its transmission in codes of conduct *by and for* the various professional spheres (scientists, business people, trade unionists, teachers, publishers, financiers, politicians, etc.).

5. **Means of Dissemination** (2003/2004)
 - creating a **steering committee** (consisting of at least one person per continent) to guide the promotion of the Charter;
 - nominating one or more **promoters of the Charter per country** where the Alliance is active. These promoters may form a national promotion group.
 - starting a campaign among the **Allies who adhere to the Charter** and asking them to promote it among colleagues and friends (snowball effect).
 - sending the Charter to **international celebrities** (Nobel price winners, famous scientists, politicians, social leaders, etc.) and ask them to give their moral support.
 - **Media** : intensive campaign set up by the promoters of the Charter focussing on the media, both the mainstream media and the alternative press.
 - promoting the Charter in **meetings and conferences** at local, national, regional and international level in order to bring about widespread debate. Analyse, synthesise and publish the results of these debates for further debate within and outside the Alliance.
 - creating links with **other initiatives** pertaining to other charters so as to reinforce each other mutually while respecting each one's diversity, specificity, and target public. Organise a meeting with representatives of various initiatives. (2004)
