

Charter of Human Responsibilities

Postprocessing of the Questionnaire on the Charter

Introduction

At the World Citizens Assembly held in December 2001, the draft of a Charter of Human Responsibilities, which was the result of a period of intensive dialogue within the Alliance, was discussed by the participants. A revised version was presented at the closing session of the Assembly. It was then submitted for debate among the Allies and people outside of the Alliance through a questionnaire published on the Internet. The 185 answers showed a broad consensus. Nonetheless, there was also some criticism, in particular with regard to the principles related to the market economy and to education. Together with observance of the ample agreement, the suggestions for improvements were taken seriously into consideration for the final draft of the six theses and the guiding principles for the exercise of human responsibilities.

1. The idea of a Charter of Human Responsibilities

The idea of a Charter was generally appreciated and the majority of people who answered the questionnaire stated that they were prepared to sign it and to participate in a campaign to circulate the Charter in their country.

Forty-two persons expressed their availability to translate the Charter (see list the Appendix). Their offer covers 26 languages, 21 of which are non-Western languages.

Some doubts were nevertheless expressed:

These are great aspirations. If/when achieved, responsibility will become greater, and so will cooperation and collective prosperity. As will always be the case, however, increasing voluntary idealistic practices will promote an exploitable opportunity for less concerned individuals who can profit by not cooperating. We must be careful in allowing a collective change, and not the growth of disparity between those who want to change, and those that do not have to; otherwise the problem looks different, and will fundamentally be the same.

Must the theses and principles be considered as inseparable for the Charter to be "consistent and efficient"?

Some of the key terms need to be defined.

2.a. Debate on the Charter during the Assembly

On the one hand, most respondents considered that during the workshops, this was among the most stimulating and important of the discussions (because it focused on something concrete to be discussed in common). On the other hand, it was almost unanimously felt that there had not been enough time and that therefore in-depth contributions by the participants had not been allowed the room they would have required. This left a feeling of frustration.

Some rather negative comments:

- On reading the Charter, I get the impression that its existence will not lead to any real upheaval in world affairs ...
- It seems that this was really a foregone conclusion and we were all brought to Lille as a publicity exercise. The methodology adopted to make it anything other than a paper exercise was non-existent
- It is unfortunate that there was no real in-depth discussion in Lille on the assumptions for and the very principle of such a Charter, its legitimacy, its credibility, its nature, its status and its role, etc., considering that for many of the participants, this was their first experience with this process. In particular, I feel there is a need to refine and improve the thinking on the very concepts of "Responsibility" and "Charter."
- In Lille, there was never any discussion on using the findings of the workshops for the elaboration of a charter. I had the impression that a consensus was being sought with the smallest common denominator, and that the idea was to avoid a discussion that would have automatically revealed disagreements.
- In my group, a lot of doubts were expressed with regard to the legitimacy of the participants' drawing up a Charter.

2.B. Presentation of the summary of the work on the Charter at the closing ceremony

Overall positive comments.

3. Cross-cultural considerations on adapting the Charter to different cultures

All the respondents feel that such considerations are of utmost importance and practically all of them wish to take part in them.

4. Participation in the elaboration of a Charter of Human Responsibilities as applied to specific social and professional spheres

The majority wishes to participate in this task. Many of the respondents marked their interest in working on different socioprofessional spheres.

(Note: Unfortunately the details asked of the respondents did not include an indication of their social or professional environment).

The six “Theses” of the Charter

	Agree	Do not agree
1 Facing the radically new situation of humankind, a third ethical pillar is necessary, which is common to all societies and all social and professional spheres.	182	3
2 The same ethical principles can apply at the personal level and at the collective level, both to guide individual behavior and to serve as the foundation for the law.	179	6
3 The notion of responsibility exists in every culture. It is inseparable from that of freedom and dignity. It can constitute the core of the common ethical Charter.	179	6
4. Given the impact of human activities and the interdependence among all societies, a broader definition of responsibility is necessary. It comprises three dimensions: assuming the direct and indirect consequences of our acts; uniting to overcome helplessness; acknowledging that our responsibility is proportional to each person's knowledge and power.	182	3
5. The Charter does not impose any precepts; it proposes priorities and prompts choices.		
6. Every social and professional sphere is called to draw up, on the basis of the common Charter, the rules of its responsibility. These rules are the foundation of the contract that links it to the rest of society.	179	6
	179	6

THESES

General comments to be taken into consideration:

- This type of questions is fashioned by consensus artists. They are too general in their nature to be able to disagree.

Comments per thesis:

Th. 1:

- Not so sure.
- "Third pillar" needs to be specified in relation to the other two pillars.

Th. 2:

- I am not so sure this is true (5 x)
- Not prepared to endorse this thesis without further consideration and discussion.

Th. 3:

- Not sure this is true (10 x)
- In many cultures "responsibility" is not linked to freedom and dignity.
- Yes, but brotherhood too.
- I feel like answering "yes," but in truth, I have no idea. And who would?

Th. 4:

- An ethical concept seems missing. What does "responsibility" mean? Saying all cultures have this notion is a very bad surrogate for a clear concept. The notion remains nebulous.

Th. 6:

- I do not understand why each social and professional group should draw up its own rules of responsibility. Part of my concern is that some professional and social spheres (e.g. international businessmen and financiers) command much more power and resources than others. Why should they draw up their own rules when their rules affect so many other people?
- If each social and professional sphere is called upon to draw its own rules, it is not realistic and may turn into political activity.
- Can the officials of large corporations be held responsible?
- Change "on the basis of" to "in reference to."

Its Guiding Principles

	Agree	Do not agree
0. We are all responsible for making sure that Human Rights are expressed through our ways of thinking and through our actions.	182	3
1. The full development of human beings requires meeting both their immaterial aspirations and their material needs.	183	2
2. Every person's dignity implies that he or she contribute to the freedom and dignity of others.	183	2
3. Lasting peace cannot be established without a justice respectful of human dignity.	181	4
4. The exercise of power can only be legitimate if it serves the common good and if those over whom it is exercised have control over it.	182	3
5. In decisions regarding short-term priorities, an attempt must be made to evaluate their long-term consequences and an attitude of caution must be adopted.	182	3
6. Consumption of natural resources to meet human needs must be accompanied by an active protection of the environment.	182	3
7. The pursuit of economic prosperity through market mechanisms must include concern for an equitable sharing of wealth.	174	11
8. While taking advantage of the dynamism of the market system, non-market exchanges must be promoted, as they are indispensable for the development of human beings.	169	16
9. Freedom of scientific research implies accepting the limitations of ethical criteria.	181	5
10. Education oriented toward excellence and based on competition must be offset by education for solidarity and for peace culture.	175	10
11. To face today's and future challenges, it is just as important to unite in action as to protect cultural diversity and take advantage of its wealth.	181	4

Guiding Principles

General comments:

- It would be interesting to articulate the principles among them. To make some of them stand out as being the foundation for others, from which others could easily ensue.
- Some of the principles (6 and 11 in particular) seem weak in light of the current problems. But this is the problem with abstract formulations.
- It is doubtful that those who currently have power and financial leverage will adhere and implement these ethical guiding principles.
- The basic simplicity and brevity of the Charter is a great achievement, but perhaps the too many abstract nouns could be replaced by active verbs.
- I am disappointed at the conscious exclusion of all reference to spirituality.
- I do not think the principles can be applied through civil group action without governmental participation.

Comments to take into consideration per Guiding Principle:

Pr. 0:

- Bad English language.

Pr. 1:

- nebulous
- "immaterial" is a bad word. Do you mean "*non-material*" ? Why not say "*spiritual*"?

Pr. 2

- Highly debatable formulation.

Pr. 3:

- Sentence is too fuzzy. According to my current experience in the Middle East, lasting peace cannot be linked only to compliance with Human Rights as they are expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The political world has emptied the word "peace" of all its meaning and put in its place a political content involving the power struggle that the political and the military forces have established at the expense of the original content of the word.
- Justice respectful of human *dignity* + *recognition of the rights of others*.

Pr. 4:

- The "common good" is something that one cannot expect. Better to speak of the "*opening of power*."

Pr. 5:

- Replace “attitude of caution” by “*openness to change*”
- Caution should always be applied, not only for decision making.
- “an attempt must be made” is not sufficiently constraining.

Pr. 6.:

- Do not agree: the point is not to “protect” the environment, but to know how to manage, in the long term, natural resources, their diversity and their functions.
- I have misgivings that Food Security can not be driven by the market forces but by social justice.
- Replace “protection” of the environment by “*promotion.*”
- Consumption, use, exploitation.

Pr. 7:

- Is this feasible in international capitalism?
- We cannot continue being part of the dynamics offered by the market economy, all the more so that there are other perspectives, such as economy in solidarity, fair trade, ethical banks, etc.
- The exclusive aim of the market economy is profit. If we are considering the sharing of wealth, the economy needs to be subordinated to that objective.
- I would greatly appreciate it if there were better work done on how economic issues and market mechanisms are dealt with, so as to reach formulations that are less accommodating for the current dominant mechanisms.

Pr. 8:

- The meaning is unclear to me. Matter of bad translation? (2 x)
- Not clear (7x)
- Most ambiguous.
- To speak only of the market system seems hardly equitable to me. WHAT ABOUT economy of solidarity, exchanges, the Common Good, non-market commodities?
- We have to be aware that capitalism privileges solvent actors (only the rich obtain loans)
- Principles 7 and 8 validate a representation of the world that includes the contested dominant dichotomy (between the economic and the social), according to which the market first produces wealth and society then attenuates its negative effects by limiting its dominion (by making room for non-market exchanges) or the inequalities that it produces (by sharing wealth). It seems to me that today the major actors of the market are thoroughly irresponsible with regard to the consequences of their decisions and economic acts. Proposal: *Pr 7: The pursuit of economic prosperity is equitable only if it improves the situation of the most destitute. Pr 8: Human development requires respecting and developing the many forms of wealth and of market, non-market, and non-monetary exchanges.*

- It is impossible to share wealth equitably through market mechanisms.
- It seems to me that the expression “to take advantage” can be applied to anything, and is glib and ambiguous.

Pr. 9:

- I always wonder if the freedom of scientific research should be limited by ethical criteria. In fact, the concept of ethics varies from one culture to the next; it is plural. To submit the freedom of scientific research to ethics would be tantamount to stifling it. In reality, the problem lies not in the freedom of scientific research, but rather in the use of the results of scientific research.
- I am a bit wary of ethical criteria as they are presently defined and applied in a research context.

Pr. 10:

- What do “education oriented toward excellence” and “offset by education for solidarity” mean? The Latin Europe Regional Group advocated the introduction into school curricula of a subject on public spiritedness and solidarity.
- Delete this principle
- Many doubts about this principle
- Education to excellence is in reality a luxury for the greatest part of humanity and is not accessible to all. This principle needs to be completely reformulated.
- I am not comfortable with the idea of “offsetting” as if we had considered it acceptable to place excellence and competition as a priority.
- The present wording implies “excellence” as a negative, and equates it with the commodification of education. I believe the two are distinctly different and it is most unfortunate to take the business model use of “excellence” and imply that education should not aspire to excellence. Reject commodification / commercialization of education: YES. But aspire to excellence in education: YES. Excellence is not only about performance; it is also about the moral imperative of education. Education SHOULD strive towards excellence as it strives to educate all, especially young people, towards “goodness” as citizens, as informed and competent adults, as individuals of compassion, justice, and integrity. Excellence, as a moral imperative, is related to the sense of responsibility which the Charter and the Assembly are all about. My suggestion for rewording this principle is: *“When it is being faithful to itself, education is oriented towards the development of human goodness (excellence) and seeks to foster solidarity and the culture of peace.”*

Pr. 11:

- Replace “protect” cultural diversity by “*appreciate*”
- What does “take advantage of its wealth” mean?

APPENDIX: TRANSLATION

Persons who have expressed their interest in translating the Charter in their own language:

LANGUAGE	PERSON	COUNTRY
Arabic	Tannous BASSIL Mohamed BOUCHENTOUF Mohamed LACHKAR Larbi BOUGUERRA Doba CHAMS	Lebanon Algeria Morocco Tunisia/France Lebanon
Kurd	Doba CHAMS	Lebanon
Hebrew	Doba CHAMS	Lebanon
Hindi	Makarand PARANJAPE Joseph THOMAS	India India
Bahasa Malaysia	CHAN Ngai Weng	Malaysia
Bahasa Indonesia	KWE Sylvia Tjiong	Indonesia
Chinese	TAN Xuewen GONG Yan Zi YU Shuo	China China France
Filipino	Benjamin QUINONES Fleur de Lys CUPINO	Malaysia Philippines
Sri Lankan	Dickella PREMAKUMARA	Sri Lanka
Vietnamese	THE Xuan Linh	Vietnam
Madagascan	Raja KAHAMVELO Nicolo RAMBELO	Madagascar Madagascar
Ewe	Folly Théophile AMOUZOU	Togo
Wolof	Youssoupha GUEYE Sidiki Abdoul DAFF	Senegal Senegal
Pulaar	Sidiki Abdoul DAFF	Senegal
Fon, Mina, Yoruba, Dendi	Aurélien C. ATIDEGLA ASSAH Gustave	Benin Benin
Hausa	ASSAH Gustave	Benin
Tajik	SANGUINON	Tajikistan

Russian	Babayeva ELARA	Azerbaijan
Macedonian	Ivan BLINKOV	Macedonia
Slovak	Sonia CHECHOVA	Slovakia
Czech	Jan KELLER Jacob JIRSA	Czech Republic Czech Republic
Greek	Vanda CHALYVOPOULOU Nicos ANASTASOPOULOU	Greece Greece
Spanish	Eulalia FLOR Luis Carlos ARBOLEDA Cuauhtémoc CARDENAS SOLORZANO Altagracia VILLARREAL SANTOS Paul MAQUET MAKEDONSKI	Ecuador Colombia Mexico Mexico Peru
Portuguese	Hermila FIGUEIREDO Ana Mary DA COSTA LINO CARNEIRO Rui Mesquita CORDEIRO	Brazil Brazil Brazil
German	Knut UNGER	Germany
Dutch	Edith SIZOO	Netherlands