



INTER ACTION COUNCIL

Established in 1983

Summary Report of the Steering Committee Meeting on the

**Dissemination of
the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities**

Chaired by: Malcolm Fraser

March 20-21, 1998
Frankfurt, Germany

1. The preparatory meeting for the 16th Plenary Session of the InterAction Council took place in Frankfurt on March 20-21 to consider how the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities can be further disseminated. The participants were aware that it will take years before the moral appeal of the document will be accepted by the multitude of people around the world. The Council's objective is to present the core message of the Declaration to entice people around the world to accept moral principles. Members also realized that there will be alterations before the document is broadly accepted.

2. Global reactions to the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities have been mixed and wide-ranging from the very encouraging and strong support from numerous prominent individuals and several governments (the Declaration is now in 17 languages); to hesitancy on the part of several major Western governments despite their endorsement of the moral principles themselves; to the outright opposition from some corners of the Western press.

Summary of Reactions

Governments

3. Supporters recognize that the Declaration is a moral appeal trying to set ethical standards essential in a globalized age, and they understand that responsibilities are required in exerting rights. The governments of Finland, Greece, Cyprus, and Brazil (where the Declaration is well known and there are no heavy opposition) plus a host of Asian governments have indicated their willingness to sponsor the document in the United Nations, provided a major Western government is also involved. Finland, for example, would consider the introduction of the Declaration into the United Nations, if a group of countries with a good record of human rights issues can jointly co-sponsor it. The question was whether these governments would be able to edit the document and whether the Responsibilities Declaration could be introduced to the United

Nations for a debate as a subordinate document to the Human Rights Declaration.

4. It was suggested that Canada, a G7 member, and perhaps the Netherlands should be approached.
5. The main problem of reluctant governments, in paying due consideration to human rights activists, is their erroneous notion that the promotion of the Responsibilities Declaration will weaken the issue of human rights, while the intention of the Council is to strengthen the concept of human rights through a broader acceptance of the concept of responsibilities that goes with rights.
6. Human rights are not often realized because there is not enough moral impulse behind it. Political will is often ethical will. Ethical motivations are very basic for the realization of human rights. In order to realize human rights in many countries, the people with political will and moral will are essential. Realization of human rights in most cases depends upon a sense of responsibility, without which human rights will fall to the ground.
7. Some in the West are concerned that Asian governments may readily embrace the concept of human responsibilities as a substitute for the advancement of human rights. This attitude is adversely affecting some Western countries. It shows a significant misunderstanding of what we are about and of the nature of our proposal. Since the exercise of responsibility is essential for the full implementation of human rights, our proposed Declaration can only enhance the advancement of human rights. To suggest otherwise is misconceived.
8. During the 1990s alone the world has seen 25 limited wars stemming from social injustice mixed with religious and ideological elements. It is foreseen that more wars will break out in the future. It is essential to at least get some political and intellectual elite of the West understand that the people on the other side, who believe also on higher authority, basically have the same ethical principles in the back of their mind, the golden rules for instance. It is in the interest of

the West, if some of these clashes are to be avoided, if they become more aware that there are remarkable concurrence between the East and the West.

9. The original motivation of the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities was to have the world understand the necessity of establishing universal ethical standards. It is essential for all people to understand that human rights and human responsibilities are complementary.
10. An American participant pointed out that 80 percent of Americans believe they are conservatives but recognize the missing concept of responsibility. The concept of self-responsibility has become an important theme in the United States; that in celebrating rights, they have neglected responsibilities. He asserted that if the Council comes to the United States and highlights this theme, significant support will be found.

Human Rights Activists

11. The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has questioned the introduction of the proposed Declaration of Human Responsibilities on the ground that much more progress needs to be made in human rights. The High Commissioner seems to have suggested that introduction of another Declaration may be a distraction. This again is misconceived. It is important for us to argue the complementary nature of both rights and responsibilities. It is necessary to gain support of human rights activists. This will occur to the extent that they understand that acceptance of human responsibilities will advance the acceptance of human rights. Those who suggest that acceptance of human responsibilities will weaken the Human Rights Declaration misunderstand the purpose of the Council.
12. Many have pointed out that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is designed as a bulwark against excessive use of power and authority by governments and other established authority. The Declaration of Human Responsibilities is significantly different. It is not an attempt to proclaim rules or to codify a set of responsibilities. It is much more a moral appeal, an attempt to set basic standards and goals. The suggestion that the Declaration of Human

Responsibilities could be equivalent to the Declaration of Human Rights may have led to misunderstanding and to belief that the documents are rivals, rather than complementary.

13. The distinction must be made between rights which, in many cases, are considered rules and responsibilities which are ethical standards or goals. The Declaration of Human Responsibilities, as a moral appeal, does not have a direct binding character of international law, but it proclaims to the world public some basic norms for collective and individual behaviors which apply to everyone. While the appeal is also meant to have an effect on legal and political practice, it does not aim at any legalistic morality. This is the key feature of the Declaration of Human Responsibilities.
14. Legal codification is impossible in moral attitudes like truthfulness and fairness. It aims at voluntarily taking responsibility. The Responsibilities Declaration is morally rather than legally binding. All these are the question of conscience and not the question of law. The Declaration appeals to the ethical impetus of individuals.
15. Ethical impulse is needed for the realization of human rights. This is the key point for the Council's efforts to convince those who fear that the Human Rights Declaration will be in jeopardy. The full enjoyment of the rights can be realized if only people recognize that they have responsibilities toward each other .
16. The members of the InterAction Council belong to those generations of politicians who served the cause of human rights in their own countries. The Council (with a sense of detachment from day-to-day politics and its unavoidable tactical maneuvering) is recommending that a further step be taken to reinforce human rights.

Press

17. The Western media has attacked the Responsibilities Declaration, as embodied in the World Freedom Press Committee's joint letter to the U.N. Secretary-

General. The underlining issue of the media opposition is freedom of the press. Their concern is “Who is to judge whether they are writing responsibly?” They misinterpret the IAC Declaration as suggesting the authority, the established power does.

18. If the media themselves must be responsible, Article 14 of the Declaration must be redrafted clearly to say the press is to judge when they are being responsible, that it is up to them to have the sense of responsibility, and that it is not for the established power to judge. In order to give the sense of ethical impulse, it should be made clear that the impulse must come from the people themselves, not for the power, not from the authority. A sentence should be added in the preamble which will clarify that the Human Rights Declaration seeks to protect people from power, whereas the Responsibilities Declaration seeks to address the exercise of conscience, which is not to be judged by governments but by people themselves.
19. The desirability of discussion with a broad segment of the press, including the World Freedom Press Committee, was recommended. However, once the Council defines the position clearly on “not governmental judgment of responsibility” and on treating the press as a profession with its own code, it can build upon where it has natural support, rather than only liming to turning around those who are declared enemies.
20. As the first step, Mr. Kalevi Sorsa will represent the InterAction Council in the 47th Annual Meeting of the International Press Institute in Moscow at the end of May to exchange views with journalists. Inviting 10 leading columnists who are either open-minded or sympathetic to begin with (i.e., William Pfaff, George Will) was suggested. They could help the Council in creating the climate that will isolate the extremists. The American Newspapers Publishers Association and the American Managing Editors Association, big, major groupings of all prints, have committees on press responsibility, on press ethics. Inquiring them where they stand on this issue would be useful and they might appreciate being consulted.

Modification of the Immediate Objective

21. The initial objective of having the Responsibilities Declaration presented to the U.N. General Assembly for adoption as a resolution on the 50th anniversary of the Human Rights Declaration will have to be modified to discussion in the U.N. Since the western support needed for the adoption of the document within 1998 cannot be guaranteed, the Council should consider modifying the immediate objective of the introduction of its Declaration to the General Assembly by a group of appropriate countries. It may also be suggested that the document be referred to a special committee for reporting back to the General Assembly. It is hoped that such a procedure could lead to a widespread acceptance of the Declaration and its principles.

Revising the Draft Declaration:

22. It was agreed that some revision of the Declaration is essential, particularly to remove legitimate concerns expressed by the media. Deliberate efforts should be made to explain the proposed changes and the intent of the document as a whole to the media groups, especially those who have expressed concern. A cover sentence should also be provided on “ethical impulse” to distinguish the Declaration from the perception of “imposed obligations.” Below are the proposed amendments to the Declaration:

23. **Amendment 1:** (The proposed amendment is placed as an additional clause at the end of the Preamble.)

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights addresses itself to the inalienable rights of humanity, and to the protection of all people against abuse of power by governments or institutions of governments, this proposed declaration is a moral appeal which addresses itself to issues of conscience and ethical behaviour. While governments are clearly responsible for just and equitable laws, there are many matters of conscience for which we must be our own judges.

24. **Amendment 2:** On the third line, the word *shall contribute* should be changed to *should contribute*. That is the only change suggested in this paragraph.

Explanation: As written, the word *shall* is mandatory and strongly suggests that some means of ensuring compliance is to be established. The change to *should* removes that implication.

25. **Amendment 3:** Article 4: It is suggested, that the word *must* in the first line is to be replaced by *should*.

Explanation: The word *must* again suggests that some means of ensuring compliance will be established when in these moral and ethical matters, it is more a matter of individual conscience.

26. **Amendment 4:** Article 13: It is suggested that the last sentence be replaced by a new one, which would read, *It is for the professions and their members to establish appropriate ethical codes which reflect the priority of general standards, such as those of truthfulness and fairness.* This amendment is suggested for internal consistency and to make it perfectly clear that the professions are responsible for their own internal codes.

27. **Amendment 5:** Article 14 should be replaced by the following: *The freedom of the media to inform the public and to criticize the institutions of society and governmental actions is essential for a just society. It is the responsibility of those involved to exercise their freedom with a sense of responsibility and discretion.*

Explanation: This amendment is critical to prevent misunderstanding of the proposed declaration and of our intentions. Many people have asked concerning this clause, “who is going to make this judgement?” The purpose of this amendment is to place responsibility clearly on the media itself.

Promotion of the Declaration

28. The United Nations is not to be discarded totally, but it is not the only body from which the Council can get a resounding echo. A number of constructive ideas were expressed. The proposals are designed to achieve widespread understanding and support for the concept of responsibility. However desirable

such a process may be, it could not be achieved without substantial resources and a permanent staff to organize appropriate events.

29. Parliamentary debates by cross parties should be initiated in various countries, which may arouse public attention.

30. The Council's purpose is to instigate debates in many different circles; the United Nations, scientific articles, Foreign Affairs, leading national newspapers, universities, etc. Discussion in many places are required to make the core message understood. It should be presented in a provocative way and entice upon people that they should read it and criticize and make suggestions to ameliorate the Declaration.

31. Several independent initiatives have been made on the concept of human responsibilities, the International Council of Human Duties (which can be considered a scientific wing of the efforts), the University of California, the Club of Rome, and UNESCO. Close cooperation and communication are desirable since human attention is disturbed by too many preachers. The goals of the institutions are quite converging, whether coming from scientific, religious, ethical, and philosophical. Time will come for the broad acceptance of the notion that a sense of responsibilities are essential.

32. Public education is necessary to support official work and to persuade people to accept the concept. A part of the strategy could be some 10 major events, in which the Council could invite dialogues on the issue of responsibilities. That could help at least in getting the Declaration of Human Responsibilities known to the public. Hopefully that would, in turn gain the support of the responsible press, helping to create a climate in which governments may be more inclined to act. Such events to discuss the issue include:

- Moral Rearmament Movement in Crux, Switzerland, which has enlisted a number of well-to do industrialists; i.e. potential sponsors.
- The Plenary Session of the World Economic Forum.

- Convening inter-religious dialogues which inevitably could be heard and printed or televised.
- Crown Prince Hassan's foundation in Jordan which aims at reconciliation and understanding; if the Council wanted to suggest that this Declaration might be a subject of discussion in any meeting they would convene.
- A proposal to launch a series of unique concerts (such as Mahler's Symphony No. 8 held on Good Friday in 1999 in Munich, Germany, to be played by 1,000 musicians to launch a foundation specifically to sponsor activities of the InterAction Council) was made. A discussion meeting on Human Responsibilities, involving prominent Council members, before such an event is a possibility.
- The possibility of getting one or more heads of state to host in their palaces discussion meetings on this subject; royalties, in particular, have an irresistible appeal also on prominent journalists.
- Organizing a meeting with a prominent Western universities, like Oxford and Harvard.
- Joint events with other occasions, such as the international association of political scientists. A forum could consist of having someone from Asia to talk about responsibilities only, human rightists to exclusively focus on rights and a neutral third person to comment. If the press participation is desired, some controversy is essential.
- President Nelson Mandela to promote the Declaration by making speeches in different places.
- Conferences, including active politicians who are convincing but who would not have to speak out exactly for the declaration, could be held in Baden-Baden under the auspices of European industrialists.
- An Iranian-backed foundation in Cyprus which organized the world dialogue of religions might be interested in hosting a conference.
- Art exhibitions from the countries represented in the Council, assembled together which can be made into an event to disseminate the ideas of the Council.

- A major summit in Washington, D.C. in July 1999 where half a million people will congregate, might be one of the occasions in which the Council could bring this kind of dialogue.
- An American entrepreneur, who is very much in favor of the Council's proposed document, suggests for promotion a documentary, a congress, similar to Prague and Vienna, segments in network news shows, regional congresses, etc.

Funding

33. If the Council is to go down the above track, a sufficient fund will be required to run an office with a full-time high-quality professional who can promote effectively all these ideas. The Council should try and get funds for a three-year program of concrete proposals. The Secretary-General was mandated to test the water, but cooperation of all others is essential. Proposals must be drawn up to sound out if potential donors can provide funds to underwrite the program. Ideas are expensive; money can be found on good ideas.

**IAC STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING
ON BROADER DISSEMINATION OF
THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES**

20-21 March 1998 at Frankfurt, Germany

Participants

Mr. Helmut Schmidt, Honorary Chairman
Mr. Malcolm Fraser, Chairman
Mr. Andries van Agt
Dr. Kurt Furgler
Mr. Kiichi Miyazawa (has to leave on the p.m. of the 20th)
Mr. Kalevi Sorsa (has to leave on the a.m. of the 21st)
Mr. George Vassiliou

Mrs. Flora Lewis (has to leave on the a.m. of the 21st)
Prof. Hans Kueng

Mr. Isamu Miyazaki
Mr. Jens Fischer

Additional invitation: Prof. Amitai Etzioni
Prof. Sergio Paoletti
Prof. Benedetto de Bernard

Venue: Hotel Steigenberger Frankfurter Hof
Am Kaiserplatz
60311 Frankfurt
Tel: 49-69-21-502
Fax: 49-69-21-5901