

## **Report from the Salzburg Meeting, June 2001**

### **Preamble:**

Today there is an urgent need for a council which expresses our values as citizens of the world, rather than just global consumers. This council would seek and offer counsel and moral leadership on the future of the planet, guiding us on the most challenging journey we have ever faced. The membership of the council should combine the guidance of the wise, the inspiration of creative success stories and heroic actions and the challenges of youth. The Initiative for a World Future Council held its first meeting in Salzburg in June 2001 at the invitation of the Governor of the State of Salzburg.

The Initiative for a World Future Council has been set up to encourage the debate about and the development of such a Council.

- The challenges now facing humanity are historically unique, both in their globality and their long-term consequences. We have unprecedented power over and responsibilities for both present and future generations. But, blinded by our successes, we have lost our place in the larger story of life. At a time when even geological time-scales have become morally relevant, we have given power to belief systems which lack a long-term vision, are deeply uncomfortable with values and see society only as a jumble of conflicting interests filled with human "robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes" (Richard Dawkins). The orgy of consumerism over the past forty years has not made the global rich any happier. More and more of us feel increasingly uncomfortable, lost, angry and frustrated with a system which is sacrificing our deeply held values for a goal - global consumerism - which is in direct conflict with maintaining a liveable planet.
- At a time when the world craves visionary leadership, our political leaders have become prisoners of an economic fundamentalism which undermines the values and institutions on which the urgently needed, wrenching transformation of our societies needs to be built. They no longer represent us as citizens, only in our (much narrower) capacity as consumers. They deplete our ethical, social and natural capital, "sell the family silver", monetarize our non-market wealth - and ask to be applauded for this unprecedented "wealth creation". Their main worry is that one of the richest peoples on Earth - the Japanese - no longer consumes enough... They sacrifice the children of the poor on the altar of their accounting practices and banking regulations by demanding that Third World "debt" be repaid with compound interest. They embrace the commodification of life through genetic manipulation, applying a false reductionist and mechanistic mindset to living systems. Over the past ten years they have chosen to focus their energies on giving the international legal protection of corporate profits a higher standing than basic human, social and environmental rights.

- Not surprisingly they face cynicism, disinterest and violent opposition. For we feel alienated from a system which offers such dismal choices. We feel cheated by empty promises of a "global village" against the reality of enforced brutal competition and the introduction of adversarial money bargaining into all areas of life, breaking down trust and community. We fear the judgment of our grandchildren...
- Our modern experiment of putting scientific and economic freedom first and then using ethics to deal with the consequences no longer works. If we want to avoid rising levels of global conflict and environmental stress, we need to re-cast the debate on our future in moral terms and impose our values on our economics instead of vice versa. We need a new definition of acceptable behaviour. The energetic imperative of a transition to a global solar culture of sharing is today a moral imperative - for unless we obey it, there may be no future for any human moral debate.

In many areas it is already too late for an orderly transition. Global oil production is expected to peak as early as this year and climate change is calculated by UNEP to bankrupt the global economy in less than a lifetime unless drastic measures are taken. We need to de-trivialize the global debate and speak some simple truths. Much of what is currently politically acceptable is in fact international commercial and financial terrorism. Allowing CO2 emissions causing climate change is a crime against humanity - as are policies forcing the poor to sacrifice their children to pay dubious debts to the rich while ignoring the historical and ecological debts of the North. Those responsible must be held liable. Private corporations acting against the common good should be dismantled - as was the case historically both in the USA and the UK.

- The consensus which inter alia permitted such dis-incorporation was dismantled by a coup d'état of a greedy rich minority (and their servants in politics, the judiciary, media etc.) in a few countries, who now want to globalise their rules and rule. Their response to criticism is to suggest a "dialogue" on the assumption that we all hold contradictory value systems and are united only by common greed. But this is not so. When we are addressed as consumers we respond as such. When nothing else is offered or demanded, shopping becomes the principal cultural expression of "modern" societies. But the victory of consumerism over our higher values is a Pyrrhic one. The rising tide of drugs, depression, illness and intolerance in the rich countries shows that we are on a path destructive not just to our planet but also to ourselves and our societies.
- Researchers have found a widespread global consensus on citizen values and value priorities. This basic consensus overrides diverse world views and is shared by believers and non-believers of very different social backgrounds and countries. A global citizens' community with common values does not have to be laboriously created. It already exists!

Our basic problem is not a "values vacuum" but that widely agreed values are not acted on. Their voice is increasingly drowned out by the cacophony of commercial speech in societies where the loudest voice is that of advertising. Starting with pre-school children, it aims to foster a culture of permanent dissatisfaction, immaturity and irresponsibility. The statement of the youth delegates at the first State of the World Forum describes the consequences: "We currently face a global crisis of the spirit in the

search for meaning. As our confidence and self-esteem decline, the value of friendship, family, society, trust and respect begins to lose the battle against selfishness and the pursuit of material gain. It is difficult to know what to believe in these days..."

- The most serious threat today is not the continuation of present policies - which will soon be impossible. It is the collapse of our societies as our leaders lose their credibility and are replaced by preachers of intolerance and obscurantism in a reaction against market fundamentalism.
- We lack a powerful global voice, which appeals and responds to our common citizen values and speaks up for our inner awareness that we are on a wrong path. We propose the creation of such a voice to remind us of our unique responsibilities and provide an ethical audit on important decisions.

The power of the Council we propose would be moral - but should not be underestimated. As a voice of Global Stewardship, speaking for shared human values and traditions, the Council would provide valuable guidance and could become a powerful change agent. It would help us reclaim our minds and sensitivities, eroded by consumerist brainwashing. It would build on the invaluable work which has already been done to define our rights and duties as planetary citizens.

The Council would not attempt to "represent" others, but rather to represent express and manifest common values and goals - as citizens taking responsibility for the future. It would aim to be a catalytic force that crystallizes and manifests the moral / intellectual offensive against the ruling global ideology. It would restore confidence in our power to change by inspiring and advancing our vision of possible futures, evaluating decisions and articulating the long view. It would encourage and energize those who now feel voiceless, alienated and excluded, providing protection for moral courage and highlighting new definitions of well-being and progress.

The Council we propose would initiate a moral debate to prepare us for the tough decisions ahead by fostering an ethical culture and nurturing mindfulness about the consequences of our actions. It would provide depletion indicators, highlighting the ecological, human, social and institutional (democratic) costs of current "growth".

- Speaking the language of values, the Council would provide an ongoing reminder of the daily betrayal of future generations - all for an end, which no sane person would want. It would initiate a global dialogue on the most difficult journey our species has ever undertaken - the journey to an ecologically sustainable, just and peaceful global order - and away from our culturally conditioned fallacy, which sees nature as purely mechanical and celebrates the primacy of matter.
- The Council would be legitimised by the quality of its work. It would listen, study and speak out at regular public sessions (which German SWR Television has offered to transmit world-wide). Its standing and moral power will grow over time as the gap it fills in the architecture of global governance becomes apparent. While no organization currently fills this gap, the Council would help strengthen initiatives with similar goals of fostering a sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. It could provide valuable guidance to emerging global institutions such as the proposed E-

Parliament electronically linking the world's democratically elected parliamentarians. It would stimulate the creation of national, regional and local councils and serve as a resource and reference-point for their work. It would ensure that the invaluable work done, e.g. by the prominent international commissions of the past decades, is connected, built on and given a permanent voice instead of - as at present - being filed away and mostly ignored.

- It is envisaged that the Council would have a core membership of between 50 and 100 persons, drawn from "the heroes, the wise and the youth", who would meet annually. A smaller Executive Committee would meet more frequently, providing a "rapid response facility". A head office with a director and small support staff will be established, as well as at least two small offices. The minimum annual budget for meetings, offices, staff, translation and consultancies / expert advice is estimated at US \$ 1 million.

Part of the council membership would rotate every year. While members will serve in a personal capacity, the aim is to include recognized leaders and representatives of different geographical areas and sectors of society who have shown an awareness and understanding of global values. It is aimed to complement this core circle with advisory circles from civil society, politics, academia, culture, business etc.