

## GLOBAL CO-OPERATION - A NEW VISION FOR YOUTH

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You are a parent, full of wisdom and understanding, looking around at your burgeoning family of young adolescents and your job is to guide them on the path to a better future. What questions would you ask your children to help them define more clearly their own role in life?

You are a loving and responsible parent. You see the qualities of each of your children, regardless of their different ages, capacities and personalities. You want the best for your children. Would you force them to do the things you wanted them to do by imposing your ideas and standards? Or would you encourage the development of their own ideas, seek to nurture their talents and potential by asking them what they wanted to do, what their aims were? What they would hope to achieve, and whether they were ready to take responsibility for their own actions?

If you transfer this image onto the world's stage, does your perspective change? Would you still look equally upon all your children, or would you favour one more than the other? What would you do to encourage the development of the whole family so that there was a deep respect amongst all your children, so that the whole family could grow and move forward together with love and co-operation?

### Setting the Stage for Global Co-operation

The world around us is changing at an ever-accelerating pace. Every unfolding scene is history in the making, and the events we only recently dreamt about happening in the future have very quickly become memories of the past.

Have we stopped long enough to ask ourselves where we are going, or to consider for a moment what we really want for the future, for the future of our children, and of our planet?

In the middle of the 20th century we saw the world from space for the first time. From space we see a small and fragile ball dominated not so much by human activity but by a pattern of clouds, oceans, greenery and soils. And yet life on earth is challenged by life-threatening hazards, from environmental degradation and over-population to nuclear destruction. The age of modern technology and fast communications has opened up a new dimension in human relationships by breaking down the barriers that once existed between great nations of the world, and has forced a re-evaluation of our awareness and understanding in order to span the cultural, economic and social divides. Whereas in the past it might have been possible to bury our heads in the sand and cry ignorance, the future demands that we look ahead and take a new perspective of bios (life) based on responsibility and vision. As the world's population slowly starts to expand its consciousness beyond the boundaries of "I" and "my country", to take in a more global vision of the world as a whole, each nation, each individual, must surely become more aware that they can no longer act independently. Each one must recognise their own role and responsibility within the world and in relationships with others. The movement towards interdependence is not only based on the urgency of the future - the present climate demands it.

Interdependence calls upon one human factor - co-operation. As Sir Shridath Ramphal, Secretary General of the Commonwealth said, on launching the "Global Co-operation for a Better World" initiative on April 21 1988, from the House of Commons in London: "The path to sustainable human development requires a degree of internationalism which cannot forever be overborne by the nationalist notions of the past. As we approach the 21st century - a new millennium - our perception of the future surely cannot be defined essentially in national terms."

### The Need for Co-operation

Co-operation means working together towards achieving a common goal. The goal cannot be reached unless all parties put aside their differences, personal or national ambition and work in unison. Equally, there can be no solidarity in working together unless the goal is common to all.

"The peaceful resolution of problems depends more than anything else on a convergence of interests", writes Javier Perez de Cueller in his 1987 report on the work of the United Nations (UN).

It is only within the last few years that we seem to be entering into a new phase, a more peaceful phase. The United States of America (USA) and the Soviet Union (USSR) have taken the first step towards nuclear disarmament. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan is now underway. "Perestroika" has gone a long way to opening doors in international relations and cultural exchanges. The UN is celebrating the accomplishment of the Secretary General in securing a cease-fire between Iraq and Iran. Efforts are now intensifying to solve the conflicts in Angola, Namibia, North Africa, Cyprus and Kampuchea. The initiative demonstrated by the Jordanian Government has created a new

dimension in the Middle East conflict.

Co-operation has come about because there has been a "convergence of interests", an identification of objectives. There has been greater co-operation between the USSR and the USA because both countries have identified a need for reflection; a time to restore the national balance away from arms-spending and the nuclear arms race; to come to grips with the budget deficit (in the case of the USA) and other internal "restructuring" (in the case of the USSR).

In September 1987, the first accord to protect the ozone layer from man-made chemical destruction was signed at a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Montreal by 24 countries. It was hoped that other countries would back the treaty which called for a freeze in the production of chlorofluoro-carbons at 1986 levels by 1990, with the ultimate objective of total elimination. Such an accord was only possible because countries had foreseen the dangers of this global problem and were prepared to adopt forward-looking strategies to prevent an irreversible crisis.

These examples of co-operative efforts show how, once the aims and objectives have been clarified in a positive and meaningful way, all energy and attention can be placed on securing their success. Only then is it possible for all concerned parties to work together with understanding, dedication, and for the co-operative process to begin.

Unquestionably, the world is witnessing an important trend towards international co-operation which must be sustained. Co-operation is the key to opening new doors in human development and respect for life. Without co-operation, forward-looking strategies do not work, with co-operation they do. Not only is co-operation essential in furthering international agreements and understanding, it must be embraced on an individual and community level to secure better community relationships and individual growth.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a new perspective to the meaning of co-operation and the conceptual framework within which the cooperative process can contribute to the development of a positive vision of the future, while at the same time provide a meaningful opportunity for young people to commit themselves to working towards a better world.

In an important address to the United Nations General Assembly in 1961, the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, called for a Year of International Co-operation: "Little is known, or little is said about this co-operation that is going on, but a great deal is said about every point of conflict, and so the world is full of this idea that the conflicts go on and we live on the verge of disaster. Perhaps it would be a truer picture if the co-operating elements in the world today were put forward and we were made to think that the world depends on co-operation and not conflict".<sup>1</sup> Nehru's proposal was adopted in 1963, but he never lived to see the fulfilment of his vision which is now becoming a reality.

## **Bios and Youth**

How many times have we heard adults say "the children are our hope for the future", and how many times have we heard young people say "we have no hope for the future"?

A strange paradox which underlines one important point. When the adults of the world lose hope in themselves and in the future, they start to pin their hopes on their children; when children discover that adults have lost hope, they quickly realise that there is no future worthy of any hope.

In both cases, we can observe a negative response or attitude which often results in a renegeing of responsibility of the self and the world.

Bios is a gift which belongs to people of all races, all backgrounds and ages.<sup>2,3,4</sup> But when bios is rejected either on an individual or collective level, then an attempt is made to pass responsibility onto someone else. When individuals lose sight of the value of life, they also lose value or respect for themselves.

Recent psychological studies have shown that the primary fear that young people have is of the destruction of the planet. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that they come under increasing mental and emotional pressure in the face of such unmitigating evidence of the older generation's lack of respect for the planet and the people who inhabit it. There is no need to mention here all the environmental atrocities performed each day by individuals, corporations and governments which defile the earth's resources and dramatically alter the processes of nature. But lack of respect for bios goes deeper. Young people today are faced with an unprecedented breakdown in systemic values and family life, with one in three marriages ending in divorce, a dramatic increase in child abuse and a growing dependency on drugs and other forms of addiction. Last year, during the course of a BBC interview, I asked a group of young people what they talked about most at school, and what ultimately concerned them. They replied, and in this order, "AIDS, drugs, sex".

A recent study at the University of Minnesota amongst high school children in the USA, demonstrates that aggressive or intolerant and prejudiced behaviour towards people of other backgrounds or opinions is a direct result of low self-esteem.<sup>5</sup> Crime, hooliganism, violence in the classroom, nihilistic trends within youth culture, all point to a vision of an undisciplined youth, uncomfortable and fearful of the world they

inhabit, and perhaps lacking the power and the commitment to make any changes.

Meanwhile, adults keep looking to the young for answers, ("they are the hope for the future") who can only respond with blank bewilderment. The adults of today are responsible for creating the world the adults of tomorrow will inherit, and the young dislike it. This is where the co-operative process breaks down.

In 1985 an article was printed in the Toronto Star describing the experiences of a Priest assigned for a summer holiday to a correctional institute in Ontario, Canada. He asked the young people why they felt they had ended up in such a centre, and what advice they had to offer parents to prevent other young people from making the same mistakes. From their responses he drew up a code of behaviour for parents:

1. Do not lose your temper with us
2. Set an example of behaviour that we can respect by not indulging in alcohol or drugs
3. Show strength of character
4. Tell us God is not dead, or "sleeping", or "on vacation", for we need to believe in Him
5. Let us know when we make mistakes
6. Use discipline when necessary, but never forget that love and law are inseparable
7. Do not compromise with nor be intimidated by our own moodiness
8. Always be honest with us
9. Give praise when it is warranted so that criticism can be easily understood and accepted.

If we are to begin to build "bridges of understanding" between generations and to clarify where responsibilities lie in creating a better world for the future, then the first step within the co-operative process is the harnessing of our collective vision of the world in terms of the environment, human relationships and human potential.

Recent trends of thinking have put forward the argument that in order to contribute to the overall well-being of society, assisting the individual to develop his/her own capacities or potential is of primary importance. Research carried out by the Taylor Nelson Monitor Group in the United Kingdom suggests that poor economic performance is directly linked to the "mind set", or attitudes and beliefs of various social groups.<sup>6</sup>

In western countries, over the past decade, there has been a growing trend towards management training, back-to-work schemes and training schemes for the unemployed (especially the young unemployed) which are a vital part of any government's policy to reduce unemployment. They do not always work. At last there is an increasing awareness of the need to put people first -- before the machines, the programmes, the statistics.

However, one virtually untapped resource which can provide a key to the unleashing of a new source of energy in the advancement of human potential, is vision.

The lesson we can learn from the past, as we approach the third millennium, is never to underestimate the importance of human beings. Everyone has value and potential. Creating a greater awareness amongst young people of their value and importance within society enhances their respect for bios and their own self-respect.

### **People of Vision**

Throughout history there have been individuals whose ideas have inspired others, influenced actions and changed the course of world events. Often they have been men and women who have dared to stand at the crossroads of change. They are the makers of history, people of vision. Mahatma Gandhi dreamt of a world of non-violence. He captured his vision and worked towards it with diligence and dignity. The vision Martin Luther King had of "the promised land" continues to inspire people to work for human rights and justice. But it is not only world leaders who have vision - in fact everyone has vision, though not everyone uses or knows how to use it.

To have vision means to come close to the heart of a situation, to capture a feeling, an intuition. It comes from opening up, sometimes in a flash of inspiration or a deep realisation. Vision is powerful because as part of the human potential, it belongs to each individual. Unlike food, shelter and other physical necessities, vision cannot be taken away.

The underlying principle to understand about this integral human resource is that vision lies dormant. Vision cannot be taught; it requires a releasing or a re-awakening. To have vision means setting a goal or target to look beyond present restrictions or problems and see the path ahead with clarity. Vision comes with understanding and wisdom, as part of that innate ability of humans to know right from wrong, and act upon it.

Over the years we have ignored this potential aspect and pretended it no longer exists. Vision has been suppressed by modern trends of

thinking, verging on exaggerated pragmatism, and in some cases, covert nihilism. This is not to say I support transcendent idealism which springs from ineffectual thinking or idealistic day-dreaming. That is not vision. An overall perspective of the world today shows a predominant inclination towards that which is negative, difficult or problematic. Paradoxes exist within our education systems which seek to encourage young people and spur them on to greater heights; and yet at the same time, teach them to embrace concepts of struggle and hardship as a natural part of preparation for the cruel realities of life, such as violence, addiction, abuse and unemployment.

Can there be a vision of a better world for humanity when all our energy and attention, our total preoccupation, is burdened by a narrow perspective focused purely on problems and channelled through a deeply ingrained pattern of negative thinking? One cannot pretend that problems do not exist and ignore attempts to solve them. On the contrary, vision extends one's thoughts, feelings and perceptions beyond problems and helps find the courage to 'see', 'think' and 'feel' in a new and totally positive way. The process of an individual "opening-up" to untapped vision often results in the emergence of a different creative energy. Even if that vision is captured only for a moment, it releases other experiences which are essential to development and the co-operative process. The experiences or qualitative states of the human dimension are referred to as hope, enthusiasm and joy.

Can there be positive actions without hope for something better? Is there sufficient energy to put a thought into action without enthusiasm? Is there greatness in the desire to do anything of benefit unless it is accompanied by a real sense of happiness and joy?

Recently, I visited a school and conducted a workshop on creativity to a fifth form class. When I asked the students if they thought they were creative, they all replied negatively. After 45 minutes of focusing on the use of positive thought to enhance their creativity, they changed. I will never forget the smiles that crept across their quizzical faces as they discovered their own natural ability to create and communicate. Once young people are inspired with and discover their own vision, there is no holding back. An idea, plan, strategy, or commitment to action can then spread like wildfire.

Vision, in this sense, requires some degree of expertise. It is not the kind of expertise which has been documented, researched or even recorded over a long period of time, but is based on solid experience of working with people of all ages to formulate strategies which have changed their lives and led to some degree of self-determination. The key, perhaps, is giving and encouraging others to do the same, which is part of the co-operative process. This is bios.

### **Putting People First**

The United Nations charter begins "We the peoples...". This principle of putting people first is what made the vision of the Founding Fathers a great one - in all situations, whether at peace or at war, the nations of the world are eventually drawn back to this unforgettable truth: people matter and people are important.

The last few years has seen a rise in popularity of global projects. Band Aid and Sport Aid unleashed on the consciousness, particularly the young, a profound realisation that members of the human race were suffering, in pain and in need of help. Perhaps, for the first time, the widescale atrocity of the African famine left its imprint on the minds of people everywhere moving them to act in unison.

Very often those working at the grassroots level find a need to bridge the gap between "thinking globally" and "acting locally". More and more people are seeking out the relevance of certain issues. They want to be a part of something global, and yet want to work in areas which have a personal meaning to them.

The United Nations International Year of Peace gave rise to two major global projects. The first was Earth Run, whose objective was to run a torch across the world as a symbol of human hope, in conjunction with raising funds for UNICEF. The second was the Million Minutes of Peace - an unusual initiative which had as its main aim to encourage people all over the world to give a donation of peace through prayer, meditation and positive thought.<sup>7</sup> Over 1.3 billion minutes were collected worldwide from over 80 countries and presented to the Secretary General of the United Nations in September 1986.

In addition to all the minutes collected, which really represented the commitment of millions of people worldwide to peace, countless activities were organised to include people from all walks of life. School children sent in their poems and paintings on peace. World leaders sent in their messages. Whole schools in villages across Kenya came to a complete standstill so that students and teachers alike could share a minute of silence, whilst children in Australia and New Zealand threaded beads into a symbolic garland or necklace representing their commitment to peaceful activities undertaken in the community.

The success of these kinds of projects demonstrates one interesting factor: they serve to bring out the common aspirations of people, by revealing that we are "one people" regardless of age, colour and educational background.

When the people of the world are inspired to take part in a worldwide activity, they feel a sense of kinship with the rest of the world, a sense of responsibility. They feel the surge of excitement in knowing they are moving forward under the same momentum as others, and rediscover the confidence to do something positive because they recognise that in giving they are valued; above all, they are valued.

As a result of the success of numerous projects undertaken during the International Year of Peace, the Secretary General bestowed a series of Peace Messenger Awards on those organisations who had worked for peace. It was also the first step in establishing important links between non-governmental organisations under the title of the Peace Messenger Network. The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, a non-governmental organisation on the roster of the Economic and Social Council, and in consultative status with UNICEF, was encouraged by the United Nations Peace Studies Unity, which continues the work begun by the IYP Secretariat, to initiate the first Peace Messenger Initiative entitled Global Co-operation for a Better World.<sup>8</sup>

Global co-operation focuses on two main themes of creativity and co-operation as a means of involving people all over the world in their own decision-making process and inspiring them to co-operate in the creation of a better world for humanity. Within the project, special emphasis is placed on encouraging and developing the creative and co-operative skills of school children and youth.

### **A New Vision for Youth**

The year 2000 has become a target date, a focal point, for the realisation of many aspirations for a better world, both on a national and international level.

Clearly, in order to arrive at a better world by the year 2000 we need to know what we want. It is equally important to arrive at some kind of consensus of ideas, in planning and working towards a future which is desirable and beneficial for all of humanity and particularly the young. Unless there is an overall perspective and desire to work honestly towards it, in co-operation with others, the year 2000 will have passed us by.

There are six main ingredients which lay the foundation of Global Co-operation for a Better World project, which can be equally applied and moulded into the future strategies of any project or undertaking:

Creativity <-----> Vision <-----> Involvement  
Co-operation <-----> Action <-----> Commitment

The two main objectives of the project are to stimulate and re-awaken the vision of people all over the world, inspiring them to put this vision into action. The project taps levels of activity previously unknown to individuals unaccustomed to using their ideas in a positive and dynamic way, whether it be in the creation of a better world for themselves personally, for their friends and family, or for their own community.

The co-operative process is called into play as the project brings people together in small creative groups to "brainstorm" and share their ideas before reaching a consensus of the group's vision and subsequent action plan. Co-operation is also tested and inevitably strengthened in the process of deciding on an action plan and implementing it.

The result of stimulating and refining these two essential qualities of the human potential, creativity and co-operation, has led to a high degree of qualitative involvement on the part of people representing all sectors of society, and moreover, has created a groundswell of commitment towards the creation of a better world, from people who would not otherwise actively involve themselves in working for peace.

Whereas before there might have been a degree of apathy or lack of hope for the future, a question mark over an individual's belief in the power to achieve a certain goal or aspiration, or an inability or even an objection to taking responsibility to work with others towards a common goal, Global Co-operation for a Better World has made important inroads. In schools, community organisations, homes for the elderly, prisons, businesses, among professional groups, within governmental departments - the scope and success of the basic concept of the project has fired people's imagination and produced some noteworthy results in bringing a more positive change in attitudes, habits, behaviour and personal development within the framework of expanding human potential.

One very clear example of this was displayed in the behaviour change in a class of young school children. They were introduced to some ideas contained in the special pack for teachers, Co-operation in the Classroom. Over a period of two months they worked on developing their creative and co-operative skills through a series of games and class activities. The teacher noticed a marked improvement in communication between the children, a drop in aggressiveness and an overall growth in their individual self-esteem. The children, who live on one of the largest housing estates in Europe, later helped to launch the Global Co-operation for a Better World project from the Houses of Parliament in London before a large press gathering and a reception of celebrities and dignitaries. Their model depicting their vision of a better world received international press coverage. On September 20 1988, the children received the only Peace Messenger Award in the United Kingdom from the United Nations. The experience of the children at the launch and subsequent receipt of the award, not only left a huge impression in their minds of the feeling of being valued and respected, but a positive wave of enthusiasm has reverberated around the whole estate.

Vision and co-operation are not merely within the capacity of an educated or privileged few. The project has outlets in over 80 countries and has documented creative ideas and co-operative activities which have been generated from both rural and urban communities. Not only have participants experienced personal benefit from their involvement and subsequent commitment, but whole communities have benefitted from a sharing of skills between people who were afraid to work together, to a building of bridges between people and professional communities who

were previously unable to communicate with each other. The result has been an overall raising of awareness of the sacrosanctity of the planet, and the individual and collective responsibility towards respecting human life and the environment.

### **How Global Co-operation Works**

As a totally non-political and non-fundraising initiative, Global Co-operation for a Better World focuses on three main areas of participation:

1. Individuals - can donate their vision and action plan. Goal-setting can be facilitated by answering three fundamental questions:
  - a. What kind of world do you want to have? (the world in general)
  - b. What kind of characteristics would you have in that world? (yourself)
  - c. How would you like people to relate to each other? (relationships)
2. Schools/Families/Organisations/Businesses - groups of people come together in small "Creative Groups" led by a trained facilitator to work on a group vision and action plan. Using positive ideas and language only, creative and co-operative skills are easily developed. Training programmes for future facilitators are offered. Ongoing projects are also dedicated to Global Co-operation.
3. Professionals - through conferences, seminars, papers and questionnaires, specialist skills are concentrated on the positive creation of a better world.

Professionals are encouraged to consider their profession within the context of creating blueprints for the future, and to contribute their creative ideas and practical plans and actions.

Intercommunication across all three areas of participation is encouraged and actively promoted as a means of sharing ideas between different generations, cultures and religions.

### **Global Co-operation Bank - A Bank of Creative Ideas**

All ideas and activities directly inspired by the project are donated to the Global Co-operation Bank (a bank of ideas and actions - no money is requested).<sup>2,3,4</sup> Research projects and other activities are dedicated to Global Co-operation for a Better World as a way of providing an 'umbrella' framework for all endeavours related to global co-operation. The bank will then be able to evaluate certain trends and provide a set of statistics to show what people are thinking and doing to create a better world. Following an International Summit in Mt. Abu, India, in February 1989, members of the International Advisory Committee will set down initial guidelines for a People's Agenda or a Global Plan.

By 1990, the project will not only have stimulated the creative ideas of millions of people and prompted them to act on those ideas, but it will also have established a global vision of that better world towards which we are all working. Once that common vision has been established the co-operation necessary towards achieving it becomes second-nature.

### **Some Specific Activities Related to Youth**

- "Co-operation in the Classroom" - a specially designed pack for teachers with over 60 co-operative activities endorsed by ministries of education in 10 countries.
- "Operation Co-operation" - a special activity for youth groups (Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, YMCA, YWCA, etc.) to develop a blueprint of their better town/country/world.
- "Creative Groups" - an opportunity to create a group vision and collective action plan, develops creative and co-operative skills, provides a focus on training of facilitators or group leaders to enhance leadership skills and is used in Youth Centres, Youth Clubs, Correctional Institutes, etc..
- "Youth Ambassadors Scheme" - young people develop their vision and action plan for a better world and communicate their ideas to youth in other countries. An activity for 1989 developed in co-operation with sister cities of Australia and World Forum of Sister Cities, as a means of promoting cultural exchanges and international understanding and co-operation.

### **CONCLUSION**

In a world which is constantly diverting attention to human suffering and conflict, it may, on the surface, appear to be somewhat innocent or even naive to invite a positive vision of the future free from these huge human problems. There is however, perhaps one important observation which gives complete validity to such an approach.

In any human situation no two roles are the same. Each one of us brings to every situation our own unique contribution of talents, skills, attitudes and personal qualities. A plumber, an engineer, a doctor and an architect illustrate four unique roles in any society. While the plumber installs and maintains, the engineer constructs, the doctor attempts repair, the architect stands out as one who works with both eyes on the future. This is the unique role of Global Co-operation. Not to repair or even assess, but to look further, dig deeper and dare to lay down blueprints of order and harmony of life. The blueprint we require needs to be of such a quality and substance and based on such a clear

understanding. It will take time. But it is the blueprint which defines the direction in which we travel, the decisions we make for our development and the resources we call on. Unless there exists that blueprint, that vision, we will misuse those resources and may perish.

The desire for a better world must lie in the hearts of all and co-operation must be our method. Global Co-operation aims to provide a context to encourage and find acceptance of those desires. The project gives voice to any individual or organisation, for any idea of any quality. Global Co-operation for a Better World awaits the emergence of visionaries from all backgrounds, accepts them as advisors and brings them together. In perceiving the rich potential of the human spirit, Global Co-operation for a Better World has defined a vital role which it has clearly, if humbly, adopted as the architect of the future. The future that awaits the youth of today.

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