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Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together

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Hope for Global Citizens: Conscience, Education and Culture

Presented by

Dr. Hong, Tao-Tze

Vice-President and member of Advisory Board of AWC,
NGO in Consultative Status with ECOSOC and
NGO Representative to the
United Nations Department of Public Information; and
President of Federation of World Peace and Love
Zhang-men-ren of Tai Ji Men



The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at a historic UN Summit officially go into force in 2016. The 66th UN DPI/NGO Conference which takes place in the first year of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is especially meaningful.

This year's NGO Conference entitled "Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together" promises to establish an important framework for the next 15 years. SDG Goal number four reiterates that obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improve the standard of living and sustainable development, which calls for learners acquiring the knowledge and skills required for sustainability, including promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

As we contemplate the path forward through the SDG, we are burdened by the reality that the world is constantly plagued by wars and conflicts. Children are the victims of the deteriorating living environment. Today's most important objective is to inspire the awakening of consciences. The children's rights to education, to good health and to a better living will be protected when world leaders implement systems taking into account human rights and the best interests of humanity.

In response to the SDG four, I would like to share with you "Hope for Global Citizens: Conscience, Education and Culture." It is anticipated that a culture of love and peace based upon conscience will play a pivotal role in leading international communities and the essence of cultures will be strengthened to extend the positive influences on the hearts of people, facilitating the attainment of the 2030 Agenda.

Education of Global citizenship is not merely an ideal, but a key to advancing sustainable development goals. When quality education and culture are nourished with conscience, true global citizens will be cultivated and a sustainable future achieved.

"One foundation changes our world; triangular balance saves the Earth and humanity"

Heart is the anchor of life. It holds the key to change the destiny of an individual and the world. As more global citizens have their conscience awakened, a safer environment will

be achieved. The more positive energy the world has, the fewer atrocities will be committed, saving the world from continued degradation of the natural environment. Conscience elevates humanity, as surely as yeast raises bread and is the key to save the world. Good conscience will continue to be fermented in our hearts, extolled and spread to benefit the world and its people.

The origin of conscience

Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher said “The top virtue is like water, benefitting all, contending with none.” Selfishness is the evil in human nature, devouring people’s hearts like the growth of bacteria. Thoughts and actions based upon self-interest become a flashpoint of conflicts among people and nations. However, conscience is the goodness in human nature, which through education and self-awareness can stop evil and spread goodness to benefit our society, country and the world. When conscience is awakened in our hearts and balance is restored, peace will not be far away.

The ultimate clarity and goodness of the heart is a fountain of wisdom. Be it the clarity to deal with people, to live life, or the wisdom to run a government and manage a nation, you will find it in the heart. Once the heart is anchored firmly, we will gain control in all circumstances.

By placing “conscience” at the apex on the top, “culture” and “education” at the base, a platform to sustainability is established with stability and balance.

Passing down culture

Beyond historical relics and sites passed down from ancient civilization, intangible cultural heritage, such as those safeguarded by UNESCO projects, is passed down from generation to generation, and is a precious nutrient to the spirit and mind of humanity. The culture developed with the core values of love and peace is like a compass, guiding mankind to navigate in the uncharted waters of technological advancement.

Culture is like the DNA in genetics. Customs, ethics, morality, philosophy and wisdom have been preserved and passed down through family education, schooling, societal education and lifelong learning. Culture is adaptive and inclusive. Truthfulness, kindness and beauty will nurture people’s hearts and lead to positive movement. Nations have

spared no efforts to preserve their own cultural heritage and recognize it as the core foundation upon which a nation is built. Cultural heritage is the key to the vitality and sustainability of any human society.

Core of education

The education of global citizenship that the world needs is an education of conscience, health in all aspects, love and peace, respect and harmony, a global vision and oneness.

I announced the Declaration of World Citizens on World Citizen Day on April 1st, 2016. Article 6 of the Declaration states "Nourish and educate young generations with conscience, as well as place emphasis on the education of character, human rights and life". These three aspects are the core values of quality education that all world citizens must have.

First, Character Education is fundamental for all when dealing with others. UNESCO pointed out that primary challenges of humanity in 21st century are the disagreements over ethics, morality and values. We need a role model of moral character to admire, to be mindful of the cultivation, learning and development of the heart as a practitioner, and to be willing to demonstrate the fine spirit of kindness and brotherhood. This is the process of nurturing character from inside out.

Second, human rights education is fundamental for dealing with all aspects of life. Human rights are inalienable. The subtle relationship between human rights and political power is recorded in history. The implementation of human rights influences public support while the support determines the rise and fall of a government. Advancing justice and protecting human rights are the main goals of the United Nations. Governments shoulder the major responsibility of human rights protection. Human rights and justice could be attained through wide implementation of global citizenship education. A nation prospers once its people live in peace. The world will be peaceful once mankind lives in harmony.

Third, education for the meaning of life is fundamental. The profound mystery of life is hard to understand. The importance of life and death is not as a topic of philosophy or belief, but in the task of leading a good life. How can we avoid living a life where we are born unconsciously, spend life in bewilderment and pass away hastily? Education of life requires special guidance from those with wisdom, not just schooling or reading books.

Through the process of doing, changing and enlightened refinement, one can benefit others, advance oneself, eventually transcending life and death and achieve the ultimate state which all beliefs aspire to.

What will the Earth be like in 15 years? What is the fate of humanity? The answer lies in the heart of every global citizen. Heart possesses the power to stabilize the world. Global citizenship education can help awaken conscience and promote culture of peace and non-violence to facilitate peace, wellbeing, prosperity and sustainable development. We hope the revival of fine cultures will bring the true era of conscience.

We look forward a world where everyone embraces love, hope and peace, and is willing to devote their efforts to a future of security, harmony and wellbeing for all.

Thank you for your participation and I wish you good health, peace and happiness.