

World Citizenship

*Note: Paper written in the context of Social summit, Copenhagen, 1995, which the author attended on behalf of CERPA.**

Citizenship, as presently understood involves allegiance to a land, mostly by birth and sometime by adoption, if host country so permits. In return for this allegiance, the "motherland" assures and often guarantees certain minimum needs, both physical and spiritual, including freedom of expression, travel, location, choice of work within its borders etc. On the same basis concept of world citizenship has to assure some 'benefits' to its prospective constituents in return for the allegiance it seeks and duties it may impose.

This assurance, at this stage of our development, is difficult to obtain. If at all, may be, it will take a long time to do so. That too, if we initiate our efforts in this direction in all seriousness. For this purpose a framework or concept document may have to be developed which, in due course of time, and with such changes as time demands, will become the constitution of the world society.

This concept document, by which the World Citizen may ultimately swear will need to be framed by a collective body of a few eminent persons which may include selected Noble Laureates, known Humanists and, people who have a proven record of having risen both in thought and action above parochial or regional considerations devoted themselves to the service of the humanity at large.

May be, it will take a few years to develop such a document which can then be circulated for consideration to leading Non-Government Organisations, Governments, regional and sub-regional organisations and also the United Nations. At an appropriate time a World Constituent Assembly can be constituted which takes into account all observations and situations give this document a working shape. This process of preparing the concept document and its adoption as world constitution may take several years, but beginning in this direction should be made soon enough.

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At an appropriate stage the concept of World Citizen can be given a formal shape. A few passports "whiter than white" can be issued by an appropriate authority, which has the approval of all Governments, to a few described as "World Citizen". This passport should ensure the entry of their holders in any country of the world and also facilitate their stay in whatever country they wish. We may begin with a small number, which should gradually increase so that, may be, over a very long time almost all born on this planet should be able to describe themselves as world citizens.

To begin with World Citizenship may go together with one's national citizenship as at present, though overtime such a precaution should become unnecessary.

World Constituents Assembly

The Institution or the body that should frame the basic document, and constitute the Constituent Assembly, and issue the World Citizenship passport should be autonomous and non-Government international organisation. It may be assisted and supported by the United Nations, Member countries of the United Nations and International and National NGOs but to begin with, it should not be part of any official or U.N. organisation. This is desirable because the basic spirit of the proposed organisation is world ethics, world morality and other apolitical concepts dear and relevant to the humanity as a whole, which are transnational, and reflect the voice of the conscience or basic need of mankind for peace, equity, freedom etc. U.N. on the other hand is a corporate body of nation states, intended to serve its constituent nation states as best as it can, within the framework of their existing boundaries, constitution and all that goes with the nation state, its national interest, and its constituents that is the citizens within its borders.

In fact, till recently, because of this framework, U.N. was fairly jettisoned in some part of its functioning because bipolar world had to

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reconcile the interest of two major constituents with differing world view. It is only now that it has got somewhat better bearings, when all its members are able to take a more pragmatic view. In this background the task of the proposed World Constituent Assembly is facilitated. Also its need is emphasized by the fact that while the world is shrinking in size, communication-wise, and holds greater possibility for higher mobility of capital and (elite) labour, it is witnessing a rise of ethnic, religious and other man-made conflicts which mankind does not want but somehow tend to arise, basically for want of a world citizenship approach based on Global loyalty by the people and the nation states.

Loyalties other than to humanity as a whole are taking charge because mankind, the way it is organised at present, has failed to assure all its constituents the security of their person and their basic needs in their respective geographic and ethnic divides. Some segments of humanity, feeling insecure are adrift and consider their security lies in an exclusive protective circle of their ethnicity, geography or whatever which they should save from the rest of humanity, even by confrontation, if need be. These adrift segments of humanity are not to be blamed if humanity at large has failed to provide them the assurance they expect from it.

Hitherto, the entire educational process stops at emphasizing superiority of national loyalty to all other loyalties such as religious, state, language, community, family etc. though recognises the legitimacy of such loyalties as relevant to human need but subordinate to national loyalty. This is the basis on which nation states are constituted and so is the UN which is constituted of these nation states. Neither the nation states nor the UN, therefore, can constitute and bring into being an institution which is in contradiction to this basic concept of national loyalty. The concept of world loyalty, therefore, has to take birth outside the present "System" and has to flourish in the hearts of the people till it can take a formal pedestal. But this concept to its formal acceptance and adoption needs an (informal) framework put together by well meaning world leaders who

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have a vision of one world and wish to meaningfully work for it. Without such a framework, the whole idea of world citizenship will be adrift. I and many like me would like to know, in advance, in which direction we have to move, so that in due course we have something by which we can swear i.e. the World Constitution which has the blessing of well meaning world leaders. And for this we need, at this stage, some concept document.

Some elements of this constitution can be picked up from the NGO treaties entered into at Rio at the time of UNCED. These treaties did try to lay down some sound basis for the future progress of mankind. But, unfortunately, NGOs could not create an institutional framework which will oversee and overview the implementation of these treaties. Can we provide, in this body of wisemen, an institutional arrangement to reconsider these treaties, adopt their essence in a World Constitution and proceed to assure the journey of humanity in that direction. Commission for Sustainable Development may provide a useful clearing house for what has been formally and officially agreed at UNCED and also in the implementation of Agenda 21. But it, of necessity, has to function within the concept of nation State. To go beyond the nation State we need special institutional arrangements.

The NGO treaties do have in them the spirit of humanity. These cut across north-south divide and speak the language of responsibility of humanity to all human beings. But NGOs at Rio could not think of constituting themselves into an international secretariat to provide the basis for a world wide agenda for a world citizen and its rights and responsibilities. The task needs to be performed now by whosoever has the capability and resources for it.

Constitution of World Secretariat

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Such an institution, if it is initiated, can bring together some of the existing thought processes on the subject. A number of organisations and persons are thinking along these lines. Some NGOs have also initiated efforts at universal ethical conduct. May be the one World Secretariat when constituted in whatever rudimentary form will put together these pieces of scattered wisdom and action and chart out a Global work plan. We may be Centuries away from the goal, but let the process and the journey begin.

Even though the journey may be long and arduous, things have been made easier by some of the recent events. Global interdependence is now fairly recognised and isolation abhorred. The Governments of the day, though solidly holding on to the loyalty of their citizens to their own country, have initiated a number of dialogues and in fact signed a number of bilateral and multilateral treaties which in effect amount to surrendering some part of sovereignty, as it has been understood so far, to partake in the global or multinational effort at universal well being. Regional multilateral organisations such as the EEC, NAFTA etc. are gaining greater control over their individual member states, and same is true of the United Nations.

In this scenario, a universal citizenship is almost an automatic corollary, though stage has not come where individuals or nation states will accept this proposition or propagate it. If, at all, they will abhor such an idea or concept because it tends to dilute the loyalty of their constituents to the nation State. Our hope, through the future, therefore, lies in encouraging nation states to voluntarily surrender, piecemeal, parts of their sovereignty for international (including national) good, while preparing the citizen to accept and encourage such mutilation of sovereignty of the nation state, on its journey to the world citizenship including the right to relocate oneself anywhere in the World, by Choice. Afterall, all the "Institutional arrangements are intended to enhance the well being and happiness of mankind, which consists of individuals and households, and this happiness is best defined as enlargement of area of

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choice for each, including the choice of place of work and living. This choice, in the ultimate analysis, world citizenship will entail.

Further, though UN and also the nation States that it represents will not on their own preach extra - national loyalties, and even perhaps dilute national loyalties, their concurrence will be necessary to make any world citizenship concept feasible and world Citizen Passport Valid. In view of this it may even be useful if UN accredited NGOs, may be with others interested, to form a World Citizenship Forum and initiate efforts to work with UN and the nation States towards development of a Concept Paper acceptable to them. Also to which individuals all over the world may owe allegiance, perhaps, to begin with, in addition to allegiance to their respective Nation States.

At present, there is a general feeling, that most work programmes, though desirable and useful, do not provide for that satisfaction that arises from knowing that our micro efforts are truly related to a global one world objective and goals which ensure equity, opportunity, freedom etc. to all in a global context where any ones national passport and nationality do not circumscribe his/her freedom but contribute to it. And these assurances should be provided for in a well drafted pre-agreed document relating to World Governance through future years.

Such a document will be similar to the assurance that any national constitution gives to its constituents. Without such assurance and obligations on the part of the World Community including freedom from want, freedom to realize one's best in any location, pursue any religion, culture etc. the journey that we wish to begin in the direction of World Citizenship appears without a defined destination. At present, some believe, that environment, democracy, human rights and all similar concepts are perhaps being internationalized because needs of some are best met by their globalization. The way these proposals are at present drafted these cast global obligations on people without defining their global

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rights which in the first place may include access to global resources, wherever these be located. This is different from marginal transfers of capital and technologies across border under foreign aid schemes which by virtue of their content and quality can only be grasped by the elite and through the elite. Can we simultaneously begin defining these global rights somewhat more comprehensively, specially to ensure the relatively disadvantaged that they too have a place in this global village?

World Citizenship vis-a-vis Globalisation

Globalisation, at present, largely reflects near freedom of commercial interaction throughout the World. It facilitates exchange between two parties who have something to offer to each other. There are, however, many who have nothing to offer and there are others who have only their labour to offer. How these people are to be provided in a global system of exchange needs consideration at the highest international level which is an important purpose of the proposed World Constituent Assembly.

The Globalising Process at present facilitates maximisation of returns to capital, management and technology the three highly elite inputs, but unfortunately it does not do so for labour which is characterized by rigidity of location enforced in addition to socio-economic factors, by the present political system. We hope that the World Citizenship and its guiding principles will dilute some part of this rigidity of location. This will, in turn, facilitate improving or maximising returns to labour, which may be the only asset that many poor have to offer. Those who are ill-located in the economic (and also socio-political) nexus also deserve a deal which humanity should be able to assure under a world umbrella, if they have to be made a partner in the upkeep of the Planet Earth, now seen to be a universal obligation.

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Nation States and their earlier forms, perhaps, came into being to provide ground rules for households to live together. It was evident that acquisitive instinct of humans is unlimited. There was thus a danger of constant fighting between them to acquire and hold more at the cost of others. Therefore, an authority was needed to organise the society in such a manner that households are able to pursue their legitimate goals within a functioning system. Also some minimum infrastructural facilities such as transport, had also to be organised on a common basis.

Unfortunately, over time, nation states have themselves become so acquisitive that they have taken upon themselves the characteristics of the private households. Many wars that have been fought in recent years can be attributed to this acquisitiveness instinct of the Nation States. In fact, a large number of prospective war situations may also be identified with such acquisitiveness of the States. It appears that whereas nation states have been able to enforce law and order on their constituents, the penumbra of law and order that governs their own conduct is very weak and not enforceable. We need a few more effective system of World Governance to ensure more ethical conduct on the part of nation states in keeping with the needs of a Globalizing society where each global citizen is to be seen as an equal partner in the affairs of the globe irrespective of size and strength of its native land.

One way the States will agree to live in peace and harmony is if they recognise the whole humanity as one fraternity and not limit their advantages to their own constituents to which others are denied access. The whole problem of inter-state wars and allied problems arises from this syndrome of access and denial. If the concept of World Citizenship is accepted acquisitiveness will be of no advantage to any nation State since all can take part in its acquisitions. If such sharing becomes possible it will bring into focus the responsibility of all inhabiting this globe to the total wealth, including environmental health and wealth, of the globe since these will constitute common assets. Till such sharing becomes possible, "some"

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will continue to believe that "others" have conspired to worry about the health of the planet for their own benefit and are insisting on us to participate in it for their sake. This needs to be changed. World Citizenship may also make a large part of defence expenditure redundant, at least, in due course. A limited military with supporting police force will be sufficient to correct anti-civil and anti-social situations. This will release considerable resources and help vertically raise the global equilibrium both in term of economic and social welfare.

In this background Humanity, through appropriate forums, may create a preamble and a workable constitution along the lines tentatively suggested here or any other set of principles that collective wisdom of humanity may consider appropriate.

All humanity is responsible for the upkeep of the Planet Earth and should so conduct itself as to contribute to its upkeep & betterment.

All humanity is a member of the same fraternity, therefore, has equal access to world resources wherever these be located within Universal Laws as be applicable to all. These universal laws will ensure freedom of speech, expression, thought, religion and location for maximum realization of self by all. Within these universal laws, local laws as best suited to local cultures, situations, conventions etc. may guide their daily conduct.

Humanity accepts primacy of human survival and will ensure this for all at reasonable acceptable levels within its current and prospective capabilities.

Humanity takes responsibility to so limit itself as to be within the carrying capacity of the Planet Earth and its natural resources.

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Humanity accepts its responsibility to all who are in any manner disadvantaged and deserve support and nurture such as children, youth, women, handicapped, poor and others similarly placed.

Humanity will through an appropriate and feasible process reduce political, economic, trade, social and cultural barriers so that, over a long run, these are eliminated.

Several societies which are co-existing with different languages, religious, ethnic and important socio-cultural differences under common constitutions suggest that it is feasible and possible, if only humanity was to so will it. Therefore there is nothing sacrosanct about current divisions of humanity and these are, perhaps, historical accidents and aberrations. Future history may have to correct these aberrations, since survival of the planet earth with these historical political divisions as a legacy is in danger, and survival of planet earth takes primacy over sovereignty of the nation state as conventionally understood and practised. Nature initially was born as an integrated system and did not provide for artificial, man-made political divisions, which were feudal lordships to begin with, and gradually acquired the respectability of the nation state. Nature in its raw form has adequate balance of different resources to bring about welfare equilibrium for all humanity at a level far higher than humanity is able to realize with its current self limiting divisions, which ensure large differentials in welfare, at great cost to the over-all welfare of all humanity put together. We have to start a journey in this direction, and realize maximum welfare of maximum numbers so that global welfare is much enhanced consistent with global well being including environmental health of the Planet.

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