

WHAT IS THE WORKABLE WORLD TRUST?

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Four score and seven years ago, my mother brought forth, in Brooklyn, New York, a new citizen of Planet Earth: Me. Admittedly, that opening lacks the gravitas of “Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address,” but it does point out, hopefully in a memorable way, that I am now eighty-seven years old. More importantly, it establishes a bridge between what you are about to hear and what Lincoln contemplated in 1863, namely: what will “long endure”? In the case of the United States, the verdict is in. Our country has indeed endured and, despite a bumpy road ahead, will almost surely do so for some time to come. In my case the outlook is mixed. On the one hand, it is clear that this mass of withering protoplasm now standing before you will soon turn to dust. On the other hand, let me recall the words in Longfellow’s immortal “Psalm of Life”: “Dust thou art, to dust returnest, was not spoken of the soul.” So what, apart from dust, lies ahead for me?

Like many folks in my age bracket, I am concerned about my legacy. Some time ago I executed a will that designated more than a dozen educational institutions and outstanding non-governmental organizations as recipients of the bulk of my life savings. On reflection, I envisaged that my heirs would receive a bunch of sincere, but pro forma, letters of appreciation and that, before long, I would be forgotten. Ultimately, I concluded that I could and should make a more meaningful and enduring mark. My vehicle for doing so is The Workable World Trust, which was legally established in December 2014. I changed my will accordingly.

The main purpose of the Trust is to promote and disseminate the ideas put forward in my most recent book, *Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World*, published by the United Nations University Press in November 2013. Directed by me, the Trust is proud to have as its Honorary Director, Mark Ritchie, Minnesota’s past Secretary of State, whom you will get to hear tomorrow morning. Additionally, a Board of Trustees includes my dear friends: Michael Andregg, Dick Bernard, Nancy Dunlavy, Ron Glossop, Gail Hughes, and my partner, Louise Pardee, all with present or former links to Citizens for Global Solutions and/or its predecessor, the World Federalist Association. Nancy, the Trust’s sole paid staff member, is an incredibly efficient worker and, more than anyone else, is responsible for putting this conference together. Special thanks to her and also to her assistant, Raymond Kindva, and many others who contributed in various ways. Thanks are also due to our host institution, the Humphrey School of Public Affairs; to our moderator, John Trent; and to all of the stellar group of presenters who will be addressing us this afternoon and tomorrow.

Although my book on transforming – not just reforming – the UN system was six years in the making, it was, by no means, my most ambitious academic undertaking. It does, however, embody my conclusions from more than six decades of thinking and is, at least in my opinion, the most important thing I’ve ever written. Yet, despite its having received numerous enthusiastic endorsements from renowned global thinkers and activists – Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Thomas Pickering, Sir Brian Urquhart, Johan Galtung and others – my work is not especially well known. Its relative obscurity is largely attributable to the fact that, for lack of funds, the United Nations University Press, went out of business scarcely three months after publication and spent virtually nothing to promote the work. Nevertheless, feedback from those who have read the book has been overwhelmingly positive. And I have abundant evidence that a number of its recommendations for improving our system of global governance are already being seriously discussed in the diplomatic community (albeit behind the scenes), notwithstanding their radical nature.

But diplomats, like most academics, are notoriously cautious when confronting new paradigms and challenges to received wisdom. Significant changes are tough and come slowly. In the case of the sclerotic United Nations system, the problem is compounded by the power of the veto vested in the permanent members of the Security Council, the so-called P5 – China, France, Russia, the UK and the US – who were the principal victors in a war concluded seventy years ago. This anachronistic diplomatic gimmick, most experts tell us, perpetuates the geopolitical oligopoly created in 1945. The experts claim that meaningful change is impossible and, thus far, they seem to be correct. But, once you say you can’t, you can’t. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

One of the mantras of the world federalist movement, with which I’ve been associated since 1950, is that “global problems require global solutions.” As it is presently constituted, however, the UN system is generally incapable of providing workable global solutions. Consider the complex problem of climate change. Think about the obscene North-South economic gap. Judge nations on their records in respect to human rights. Reflect on the causes of global terrorism and the ineptitude of the world’s response. Ask why so many UN peacekeeping missions have failed and why so many urgently needed missions were never even launched. The list of unsolved problems goes on and on. And the UN is increasingly by-passed by the United States and other powerful nations, generally with comparably abysmal results.

It need not be this way. Throughout the world, people are becoming increasingly aware of the existential problems confronting us. It is one thing, however, to recognize a problem – that’s relatively easy – and quite another to understand and persuasively promote workable solutions. That is why I wrote my book. And that is why the Trust has signed contracts to have the book translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish, with a view to having inexpensive e-editions available to critical masses of people throughout the world. The Spanish translation, I’m pleased to note, is now almost complete.

The Trust is acting in other ways to promote fundamental change in the system of global governance. Sponsoring this conference is one such effort. The Trust has also endowed

two annual Workable World Fellowships at this university, one here in the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, the other in the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change, in the College of Liberal Arts. The Trust has provided several small grants for projects that it deems compatible with its own mission and contemplates many more. One of those awards enabled an Arabic-speaking Israeli to represent the World Federalist Movement at the World Social Forum held in Tunis this past March. He did a splendid job, establishing connections that nobody would have thought possible.

Thanks to the magic of the Internet, political activists worldwide are now learning how to act in unison on behalf of the planet as a whole. Their voices are still largely dismissed, of course, by the holders of power; but they cannot be indefinitely ignored. The problems will not disappear. On the contrary, they are becoming increasingly urgent with the passage of time.

Complementing the growing moral force exerted by ordinary people is the burgeoning influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), often referred to as civil society. It is in these agencies that one will find most of the expertise needed to guide global policy initiatives. Change that the experts now tell us is impossible will inevitably occur when politically savvy alliances of people's movements and NGOs are forged. The World Social Forum, to which I referred a moment ago, provides one potentially potent avenue for action. Even more promising as a legitimate democratizing force would be the creation of a World Parliamentary Assembly, the case for which is provided not only in my book, but also, with equal or greater force, in one of the presentations that you will hear tomorrow morning.

I have noted in this brief talk my long association with the world federalist movement. Although I firmly believe that some form of democratic federal world government is in the best long-term interest of humanity and our shared planetary home, I am enough of a realist to know that this idea, which seemed so plausible to millions of people in the aftermath of World War II, has fallen out of favor. It is, in fact, now regarded as laughably utopian in most diplomatic and academic circles. As previously suggested, however, we appear to be near, if not yet on, the cusp of radical change. But we still have a long, long way to get to the world I envisage.

In the course of a long life, I have been a party to countless inconclusive discussions of what a world government can and ought to be. Recently, however, I've come to the realization that such discussions, absent meaningful action, are relatively futile. What does it matter if our visions of the future differ here and there, so long as we are marching resolutely – more or less in the same direction – toward a more just, democratic and sustainable world, a world in which disputes can be resolved by reliance on the force of law, rather than on the law of force. In short, toward an increasingly workable world. Can any person of good will oppose such a goal? To bring it closer to fruition is the purpose of The Workable World Trust and of this conference. On behalf of the entire Workable World Trust Advisory Board, I welcome you.