Globalization: A Challenge for Young Leaders

“Globalization” has been used to describe many phenomena:

✱ actions by the world’s most economically powerful nations on questions of international trade that have caused social and economic inequities, environmental destruction, and increasing violence in the world

✱ the application of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights to all countries and cultures

✱ the co-mingling of many cultures, and the seeming domination of them all by American popular culture

✱ the search for a set of values that will encourage the people of the world to live harmoniously in an environmentally sustainable way

Globalization in its most general sense, is the process by which human beings are becoming more interconnected within a system whose parts mutually influence one another. The global system does not operate in space alone. It also functions over time. It determines the world we inherit by tightly structuring the range of opportunities and choices that each succeeding generation can pursue. As globalization proceeds it becomes less possible for any of us to ignore that what happens in one part of the world has immediate and demonstrable effects on all the other parts.

Young people are more dramatically affected by globalization than are adults, since they are more sensitive to changes in the various environments in which they grow up and mature. As it intensifies, the problems of globalization will affect more and more young people who aspire to be leaders will need to understand and be equipped to respond to the effects of globalization.

A Response

To support young leaders’ roles as stakeholders within the globalization process, an international coalition of NGOs have planned a four-day retreat in Santa Barbara, California, April 1-4, 2002. A diverse group of speakers and workshop facilitators have been invited to discuss the effects on the young, of all aspects of the globalization process: spiritual, psychological, ethical, economic and social. Special attention will be given to leadership in the age of globalization, in order to encourage participants to take an active role in the process.

“I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them.”

Mohandas Gandhi

The Program

The centerpiece of the four-day event is a residential retreat, including dynamic lectures, engaging workshops, and an optional service project for 30 participants (ages 18 and 30 years). Located a few miles south of the city of Santa Barbara, the retreat site. La Casa de Maria, offers a serene environment and a panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean. In order to maximize our experience together, conference organizers invite participants to take ownership of this event by suggesting additions to the general program structure. We want to hear from you about important issues, good speakers and facilitators, and specific leadership skills you want to develop. There will time allotted for participant-planned activities. We especially would like input and applications from international students studying in California, as we would invite the participants in the retreat to be an international mixture of youth. We ask that each participant contribute $100 toward the costs of the total program. Scholarships are available.

Thoughts to Consider from Invited Speakers and Facilitators

Raj Jayadev

“The central issue globalization poses for young people today, lies in finding meaning and voice in a world system that is attempting to deny them both. We exist in a media saturated and corporate dominated moment—one that actively campaigns against independent thought and expression. In the USA, in particular, this assault against the liberated mind has left young people with no progressive movement with which to identify and from which to gain inspiration. But this same vacuum provides us with a historic opportunity to create a vibrant social movement responsive to our needs; one that projects a vision of the future based on our own values.”

Satish Kumar

“The 20th century has been the century of human domination over nature. Science, technology and education have been used to increase consumerism, materialism and the supremacy of mankind. The legacy of the 20th century is being handed over to the 21st in the form of many achievements, and many problems. The next generation will celebrate the achievement, but will also have to tackle the problems of proliferation, population, resource depletion and global warming. The young people who will shape the 21st century will have an enormous challenge to face. This challenge can only be met adequately with wisdom directed towards wholeness and harmony.”

Antonia Juhasz

“What will the world of the future be like? Will it be a world of increasing economic, social and political inequality: where fewer and fewer people enjoy less of an ever disappearing supply of natural resources? Will it be a world in which the political power of democratic governments is increasingly usurped by the small number of multinational corporations? Or will it be a world in which people, living together in environmentally sustainable communities, work with their fairly and freely elected officials to construct a just, equitable and truly democratic global society? The youth of today will have to answer these questions and define the future we all must face.”

Nandini Iyer

“We need to explore whether and how not only ethics, but spiritually and broadly religious ideals, can be meaningful taught and practiced, without being grounded in narrow, sectarian religious frameworks. How do we change the current systems and goals of entire societies and cultures? Can we legitimate whole nations into better values? Is this giving the state too much authority? Can we allow the state, as we have sometimes allowed religion, to take priority over individual conscience? Can we educate students into being ethical? These are problems, challenges and dilemmas upon which we need to reflect?”

Colin Rajah

“The intensification of global trade between 1950 and our own time, has had deep consequences that positively affect the rich and the powerful at the expense of the working classes. Since students consistently have been at the forefront of major movements for social change, it is vital they build strong alliances with other young workers from working class communities, especially those of color, in order to challenge this trend.”

Johan Galtung

“What if we try to open the natural curiosity of the young for other cultures, provide insights into other languages and other ways of being human? It’s a way of getting our cultural prison walls to start crumbling down. But we don’t have to limit it to two or three cultures. If we combine two cultures, that becomes itself a culture and then we can combine it with some other combination of cultures. This seems to be the positive aspect of globalization. I don’t see globalization as being condemned to the spread of some kind of Global English, as the tripod M.-Mickey Mouse, McDonald’s and Madonna—throws in. There must be more to globalization than this. What’s going on today I see as a kind of transitional phase. There are tremendous possibilities lying ahead of us if only we could see them clearly.”

David Krieger

“One of the unfortunate ways in which globalization has taken place is through the Militarization of the planet. The consequences of the nuclear arms race have left no place on this planet and no person safe from nuclear attack. Although we need to put it out of our minds, humanity stands at risk of nuclear annihilation. We must awaken to the threat that confronts us, and to the nuclear weapons threat to humanity. We must also demilitarize the earth, air and water of our planet, and assure that outer space is not weaponized. Some $750 billion annually could be reallocated to meeting human needs.”

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Youth at the Millennium: An Intergenerational Dialogue on Youth, Leadership, and the Global Society

Have you ever thought about the world you live in, and wondered

- How much of the world is determined by choices I make,
- How much is my experience of the contemporary world shared by others,
- How can I help create a global society based on compassion, nonviolence, and respect,
- How much is the world I live in determined by the decisions I make,
- How can I learn more about current world problems such as environmental sustainability, hunger, and nuclear weapons,
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