

A brief history of the genesis of the Charter and of the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities

The long term commitment of FPH to the global ethics, the Charter of Universal responsibilities, and the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities

In the mid eighties, FPH launched an international think tank called the Vezelay group, tackling with the major issues of our time. In its first report, in 1987, the group highlighted the idea of a great transition to come which would concern our vision of the world and our institutions. One key point was the need to agree on some common issues with the different societies of the planet, although the major differences in level of development would make it very difficult. We also understood that everybody was talking of a global village but there was not such thing as there was, at the global level, neither institutions or laws nor the conscience of belonging to a global community. If a global community was to be built, how to build it, how to found it? Neither on a shared history nor on shared beliefs. It could only be built on common values and on common challenges.

This is the reason why we launched in 1994 the Alliance for an United and responsible world. It gathered, around common topics, people from all the continents (www.alliance21.org). One of the working group was the inter-religious and inter-philosophical one which was working on a core question: it is not matter of creating a synthetic faith which would be considered as an universal truth but to see whether through our diversity we could agree on common core values for the sake of the safeguard of humanity and planet.

The work of this group met an other approach, the one which emerged from the Rio Earth Summit under the guidance of Maurice Strong.. Maurice had been the Secretary General of the Earth Summit. As soon as 1972, at the Stockholm first international Conference on environment, he had come to the conclusion that the international community was missing a « third pillar », along with the UN Charter and the Universal declaration on human rights: a pillar dealing with the responsibility of humanity towards the safeguard of environment and of the planet, which he called « the Earth Charter ». The Maurice Strong expectation had been that the heads of state would, at the Earth Summit, endorse such a Charter and many Charter draft were issued before the Summit. However, the world leaders were not ready at that time to endorse such a Charter. Therefore, Maurice Strong took, along with Mikhaïl Gorbatchev in his capacity of chairman of Green Cross international, a civil society initiative of drafting an Earth Charter. Pierre Calame, executive president of FPH was required to be part of the drafting committee of the Charter. Our hope was to join the efforts of the Alliance and of the Earth Charter initiative (ECI). Unfortunately it proved difficult as the Alliance was still looking after a third pillar for the international Community while the ECI was looking after a document which would remain devoted to environmental issues and mainly for educative purposes. This dialog has however been useful, helping the Alliance and the inter-religious group to better understand what should be the guidelines of such a third pillar: appealing to every culture; meaningful for individual; being able to found a future international law.

The inter-religious group conclusion was that this pillar should be focused on responsibility (see the background document of Edith Sizoo and the book “responsibility and cultures of the world”) (as the notion of responsibility and co-responsibility can be found in any society. Therefore, the group drafted a Charter of Human Responsibilities (CHR). It was presented at the first ever World Citizens Assembly (WCA) which took place in Lille in France december 2001 at the invitation of the Alliance and fph. The document was amended and endorsed by the Assembly.

From 2002 to 2010, fph supported the diffusion and discussion of the CHR in two directions. The first one has been geographical and would aim at checking that CHR would really appeal to the heart of different cultures and people. The CHR has been translated in many languages and discussed and used in different continents: India, China, south Asia, Africa, Europe, Brazil and Latin America, USA.; the second one has been socio-professional and would aim at understanding how the concept of human responsibility could be interpreted by a range of socio-professional branches, service men, journalists, scientists, inhabitants of poor communities, professionals, youth etc. . as the basis of their behavior and social contract. These two approaches proved very productive and showed that the ethical concept of responsibility and co-responsibility was a real guide for individual and collective behavior.

The next step has been to bring the concept of responsibility at the international community level: our bottom up approach, which was the necessary one, had at one moment to reach the top. Rio+20 was an unique opportunity to do it. But many similar initiatives, such as the Declaration of Interdependence sponsored by Michel Rocard, former French Prime Minister or the Interaction group initiative sponsored by former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt or the Earth Charter initiative itself, sponsored by Gorbachev and Strong had failed. Edith Sizoo was commissioned by fph to write a comparative analysis of all these drafts. From this analysis we could understand that what was needed was a short text, different from our CHR, which would be the basis for future international law. Therefore fph worked with international lawyers the draft of the Charter of Universal Responsibilities (CRU) and presented it first to members of the Brazilian cabinet to see whether the Brazilian government would be willing to put it on the agenda of the Rio+20 conference. The response by now has been positive. But for it to succeed a Brazilian initiative should be backed by like minded countries, preferably not European as Europe is suspected, since the adoption of the Universal declaration of Human Rights that its own values are the only one to be universal. Michel Rocard and fph agreed with the Brazilian cabinet to join hands in order to create this group of like minded countries.