

Reflection on Action Document

Towards Cultures of Responsibilities

**Engaging With Human Rights Defenders on Ethics, Rights and
Responsibilities**

Sudha S. and John Clammer

Preface

As our global situation deteriorates along many dimensions – ecological, resource depletion, conflict, terrorism, loss of bio-diversity and many others – the realization has dawned that, essential as are human rights to any civilized life on Earth, they need to be balanced by a parallel concern with human responsibilities, both towards nature and towards each other. Over the past decade, concerned citizens, members of NGOs, bureaucrats, professionals from many walks of life, have been meeting at diverse locations around the world to think together about what a culture of responsibilities – one in which responsibilities are not imposed traditional or legal obligations, but rather integral to cultural life in all its dimensions – might look like and how it might be cultivated. One of the most important dimensions of this global discussion has been dialogue between defenders of human rights and those who have stressed the notion of human responsibilities. Not a few activists in the field of rights see the notion of responsibilities as diluting or distracting from the critical issues of defining and defending human rights. The document that follows records and reports dialogues between the two perspectives and demonstrates that far from being opposed or contradictory, they are actually complementary and mutually essential when addressing questions of social and ecological justice. It is itself offered as a document for discussion – one which will hopefully stimulate further constructive discussion, debate and clarification. It is essentially a digest of many conversations between diverse groups, but all committed to the pursuit of justice and sustainable futures, and an introduction to the concept of a universal charter of human responsibilities for those yet unfamiliar with the idea. Our hope is that it will clarify and advance cooperation between the emphasis on human rights and human responsibilities to the mutual benefit of both.

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February 2016

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One of the most significant events in recent human history may well be the signing in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That document, together with the founding Charter of the United Nations, laid the basis for the evolution of the modern international political order and set out the basis of a new conception of international and national law – one in which all human beings, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion or nationality, were recognized as having basic and inviolable rights, and that it was the responsibility of governments and judiciaries to protect and enforce those rights in all circumstances. Formulated in the shadow of the Second World War and of the atrocities, large among which was the Holocaust, the UDHR created the cornerstone for many subsequent developments in the form of additional charters with specific applications to vulnerable groups (children, migrants, national minorities), extended to include social and economic rights, providing the basic legal architecture upon which subsequent significant legal developments were based, such as the foundation of the International Criminal Court and its principle that no one, including serving or former heads of state, is exempt from its due processes when crimes against humanity are concerned, and providing the inspiration for declarations of UN bodies such as UNESCO with its Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity (2005). These achievements have been immense, both in practice in protecting and defending human beings particularly from politically inspired forms of violence, but also in establishing the very principle of *Universal* human rights.

A potential problem with the concept of rights however, when taken alone, is that it tends to breed a culture of entitlement: that the individual has rights and that these are inviolable regardless of the effects of their application on the wider social context and on other people. One can even conceive of situations in which the single-minded defense of my rights violates one or more of yours, quite apart from the larger (and contested) issue of the rights of nature, or of other beings that share the Earth with us (and on whom we are to a great extent dependent). This situation has led to the growing awareness that rights need to be complemented with responsibilities, that they are integral to each other. But as yet no agreed document exists (although there are many drafts and proposals) that would stand as a “Third Pillar” together with the Charter of the United Nations and the UDHR – in fact a Universal Charter of Human Responsibilities. A movement has however grown up to promote this idea and its members have

sought to collectively define what such a document might look like (see appendix A for one such draft) and to encourage the idea of such a document being adopted, ultimately by the General Assembly of the United Nations. In the interim, and as steps towards the formulation of a broadly accepted document, many local and regional consultations have taken place around the world. One of these is the Rights and Responsibilities Collective, founded in India in 2010. As a step towards activating and supporting the wider movement towards a Universal Declaration, this booklet sets out the activities, strategies and recommendations of the Rights and Responsibilities Collective as one model of how those larger goals have been pursued and the lessons learnt from that particular set of experiences, some of which are specific to India or other South Asian societies, but others of which are hopefully of more general application.

The Background to the Collective

The Collective started its work with a shared assumption: that a fundamental characteristic that any ethically informed human being possesses is a sense of responsibility. This is commonly reflected in everyday language in the contexts of family, work and other social situations, and emerges seemingly more spontaneously than a discourse of rights as in expressions such as “why did you fail in your responsibility?”, “you should be more responsible, take responsibility, behave responsibly” and so forth. Such expressions signal a willingness to take care of what is valued and as such is embedded in our ethical and moral systems and cultural traditions, and which define a great deal of what we expect from human relationships and desired behavioral patterns.

Hence “responsibility” is not an abstract concept, but is one easily identifiable by its presence or absence because it is concretely grounded in our relationships with each other, which mean so often taking responsibility for something or someone. It is actually the ability of human beings to respond to challenges posed by themselves and by their social and natural environments. The concept and practice of responsibility is a unifying idea, transcending the citizenship of any particular country, but seen rather as the (ideal) foundational basis of all human intercourse.

One of the main activities of the Rights and Responsibilities Collective has been a continuous engagement focusing on healthy dialogue and creative interaction with human rights defenders. In this process we have come across a number of misconceptions and significant questions from them regarding the principle of human responsibility. Much of our work has been to clarify and respond to these misconceptions (including political, ideological and cultural issues) by highlighting the complementarity of the principles of rights with those of responsibilities, and to identify areas of convergence that might lead to joint initiatives to create cultures of responsibility in which naturally rights are respected. This objective has been pursued through a series of dialogues with human rights activists which have proved to be very positive experiences for all parties concerned and which have encouraged human rights workers to

engage with the principle of responsibility and to work towards the composition and acceptance of a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities.

The major objectives of the Collective, in conjunction with the associated Ethics and Responsibilities movement, has been then to deepen the understanding of the *principle* of responsibility and the promotion of *cultures* of responsibility in all possible spheres of life, their recognition not only by states, but also by individual citizens, and influential actors at the political, economic, social and cultural levels. This we believe is the basis of inspiring an international effort that will lead to renewed reflection within communities, civil society, different sectors of the economy, and the academy, as well as state, national and international governments and agencies on the relevance of individual and collective responsibility for the future of humankind and the planet.

With this perspective in mind the Collective has undertaken the following programs:

- The identification of human rights activists and thinkers and key people from a range of social and professional groups and to act as an interface between human rights groups and academic and professional communities with the objective of promoting a shared culture of responsibility in a world infested with unethical and irresponsible behavior and corruption within governments, businesses, academia, the media, the military and other sectors.
- To promote dialogues with specific professional and special interest groups (civil servants, medical doctors, people working with children, etc.) to create the conditions for internalizing the principle of responsibility in those domains and to encourage the creation of charters relevant to the nature and conditions of their work (see Appendix X for some examples of the outcome of this process).

Methodologically this was done by building a network of contacts with both state and non-state actors throughout the country, forming a core team of individuals committed to the objectives of the Collective and who would work to carry forward its work, administering a survey to capture popular perceptions on the relationship between rights and responsibilities, and sponsoring a series of workshops where both the principle of responsibilities could be introduced and where a large body of feedback could be collected.

The following document has two main parts which summarize these processes: a description and analysis of interaction with human rights defenders and professional and social groups through the dialogues and workshops, and an analysis of the findings of a questionnaire that was distributed to human rights groups and others throughout the country.

Part One: Interactions with Human Rights Defenders and Social and Professional Groups Through Dialogues, Workshops and Seminars

The Rights and Responsibilities Collective has been successful in constituting a body of considerable theoretical and practical experiences on a range of issues related to violations of human rights in the broadest sense, including gender and children's rights, protection of livelihoods and food rights, discrimination against Dalits (so-called "untouchables"), sexual and religious minorities, forced displacement, ecological rights and the dangers of nuclear energy on surrounding communities and questions of professional ethics. The workshops themselves were organized in different regions of India and involved youth, women, children, professionals in a number of fields such as medicine, law and academia and interested members of the public, and through this means the Collective was able to collect a large body of information on viewpoints, dilemmas, problems and experiences both positive and negative from these various constituencies. It was intentional that the participants were drawn from different religious traditions, political positions, and social and academic backgrounds and included state related actors such as bureaucrats and government officials and people from a range of activist positions, including feminists and those active in human rights protection, and who were drawn from different regions of India, a huge country with many internal regional and linguistic differences. A broad consensus was the need for renewed reflection within communities, civil society, economic actors, academia and state, national and international governments and agencies on the relevance of interdependence and individual and collective responsibility for the future of humankind and the planet. It was widely hoped that such a dialogic process would create the ideas appropriate to the formation of cultures of responsibility, and would act as catalysts for creating awareness of the desirability of an internationally recognized reference text (the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities) and propagating such a text throughout the public domain.

Issues, concerns and Convergences

Other groups around the world have been discussing the general issues of responsibility, so it was felt incumbent on the Rights and Responsibilities Collective to specifically define the principle of responsibility in the Asian context. This was initiated with the "Dialogue Meet on Contextualizing Principles of the Charter of Human Responsibilities in the South Asian Socio-Political Context, with Special Focus on India". Fairly naturally in the Indian context, the discussion began with the idea that to build a culture of responsibility one might well start with a re-examination of the Gandhian approach. Gandhi himself argued that the concept of rights should be balanced by an equal emphasis on responsibilities. A major limitation at the present time however is that there is no universally agreed document in the international system that specifies the nature of human responsibilities and the part that this might play in promoting harmony, respect for cultures and cultural diversity and for nature, and for promoting peace and giving humans a sense of their place in a larger frame of mutually supporting ecological, social, economic and political forces. While it is true that some of these dimensions have been the

subject of international declarations such as UNESCO's Declarations but these do not provide a holistic approach.

It quickly emerged a consensus around the ideas that creating and institutionalizing a culture of responsibility is a major challenge and an important task for all of us, not just some special or elite group, and that a precondition of this is a truly functioning democratic political system in which popular participation is the norm and in which citizens can challenge irresponsible behavior of governments and of other "anti-people" organizations, such as some corporations. It was pointed out that in many Asian countries neither the media nor the judiciary are autonomous or free. Responsible citizens emerge where a new understanding of the inter-relationship between rights and responsibilities has been established. Indeed, abdication of responsibilities *leads* to the violation of human rights precisely because it is intrinsic in the nature of responsibility that responsible individuals respect and honour the rights of others.

A key point that frequently emerged during deliberations was that, while exercising responsibility at the personal level, one nevertheless encounters dilemmas arising from one's position or location within such structural entities as caste, class, religion or gender, which often had the effect of inhibiting such personal responsibility. For instance in the tragic circumstances of the communal riots that have occurred not infrequently in India, polarization along religious lines into us/them categories tends to lead to taking sides on the basis of that loyalty rather than on the basis of responsibility, even when it is obvious which position is the just one. Generally in South Asian societies, community belonging or group identities (caste, ethnicity, religion) are strong, and tend to carry more weight and obligations than feelings of individual choice when taking action.

Religion in fact, often ignored by rights activists as not part of their generally secular world view, remains a constant backdrop for everyday experience and consciousness for most of the people in Asian societies, and continues to be a dominant organizing principle of social life, giving it a sense of unity and coherence. It is for very many people the axiomatic root of meaning systems and large areas of life, whether within 'civil society' or 'polity' are nurtured by religiosity, which remains as a major force that shapes the dominant ethos and hence also the ecological perceptions and practices of people. It is consequently paradoxical that while the foundational message of all religions is one of love, peace, equality, non-violence and the well-being of people, the last decades have seen the rise of communal politics defined as the construction of political identities along religious lines and the mobilization of religious sentiments and consciousness for partisan political ends. The consequence, as we see in many parts of the world, has been socially constructed prejudice, tension and conflict between religions that have led to unprecedented brutality and resulting insecurity amongst communities and individuals across the globe. Nevertheless religions have a major role to play in the recovery of those original values upon which they are based, including such key ones as love, peace, justice, responsibility towards each other and to nature, both in Asian societies and in the world at large. As a result participants stressed the need for further interfaith dialogues in the Asian context to

explore and propose how religions can respond to the multiple crises that our planet now faces, and how they can better respond to human aspirations for justice, peace, and social harmony and facilitate the building of cultures of responsibility in our violence torn world.

Participants also noted that such elements of the social context such as family and caste “filter” one’s ability to assume responsibility and to make sensible choices between right and wrong. Unlike human rights, which are codified and ratified by governments and the United Nations, a parallel code of responsibilities is not yet systematized or developed. Indeed, as a more abstract notion the idea of ‘responsibility’ is itself sometimes unclear, even though it is embedded in and arises from existing ethical and moral spheres. This calls for a deeper search for a new paradigm in which responsibility becomes the central pivot of a moral and political framework that challenges individualism and the selfish center of so much public life. This paradigm also extends to the area of authority and power. Any power relationship that does not recognize the principle of responsibility is authoritarian if it denies opportunities for others to exercise freedom with responsibility. Clearly an aspect of power is gender. Any patriarchal structure will deny spaces for women not only to exercise rights, but also to take responsibility for making decisions within and without the family. Overcoming patriarchy and its many negative characteristics means on the one hand protecting and advancing women’s rights and dignity, and on the other the taking over by men of greater responsibility in such areas as sharing household work, looking after children and creating favorable social conditions and spaces for women to be free from coercive duties and obligations. In this context, the responsible behavior of both men and women is the transformation of the patriarchal system that so often negates and even enslaves women.

Dialogues with Professional Groups

Dialogues with professional groups focused on the desirability of developing appropriate codes of professional ethics or profession-specific charters of responsibility to guide their professional practices in ways compatible with a human rights perspective. Morality and ethics have a great deal to do with the quality of human well-being through defining what is right and wrong in relation to both the self and the other. Ethics in fact works in a multi-dimensional field at the intersection of law, morality, self and society, and this field is a dynamic one as each element is constantly challenged by transformation in both itself and the other elements. To this we should add the issue of our relationship to the natural world. Responsibilities act as a kind of ‘fulcrum’ assisting right decision making in respect to the use of common resources, corporate exploitation of those resources, and corresponding damage to nature. The responsibility to protect nature is not just directed at nature, but plays a vital role in correcting corporate interventions and helps in the evolution of the principle of corporate social responsibility and codes of conduct, and helps in the building of social and ecological capital.

Health, Legal and Education Professionals

Different professions face different issues specific to their activities, in addition to sharing in the general ethical culture. For example, in the medical profession, the direct relationship between the doctor and patient is now often mediated by technology. In this common situation, professional ethics need to be re-defined to make the doctor-patient relationship more accountable. Similarly, the medical field is now pervaded with commercialization and the privatization of health care institutions where profit becomes the main motive for the provision of care, potentially denying such access to those who cannot pay. A parallel trend can be seen in education where commercial expectations force teachers to mould students to meet the needs of the market economy. In such a system the emphasis will naturally be on ability to retain and process information rather than the self development of the students, and the values of morality and basic human values of caring and sharing are undermined. In an increasingly commercialized and expensive legal profession it is becoming increasingly difficult for poor people to obtain legal remedies for wrongs and injustices.

Engaging with Bureaucrats

Many participants expressed the view that civil servants/bureaucrats frequently delay decision making and implementation of welfare programs that seriously affect the ability of the poor to realize their entitlement rights. This observation was part of a wider critique of the prevailing bureaucratic culture. The sheer size of the bureaucracy in countries like India, and the power that the civil services wield allows them to be all too often unresponsive to both citizens and even elected representatives and to distance themselves from the everyday life situations of ordinary people. The lifetime tenure system allows them to perceive themselves as permanent and indispensable. Many surveys have indeed documented the unresponsiveness of civil servants towards the citizens, and a top-down governance model allows them to often ignore or deny citizen's rights to public services.

Given these characteristics, the bureaucracy has the potential to also manipulate the elected representatives and hence to undemocratically direct or influence public policy. While structural or institutional factors (for example anti-corruption agencies) can play an important role, ultimately it is the individual sense of responsibility that restrains the civil servant from transgressing the limits of his or her power and/or using his office to bestow favors with private sector actors for mutual benefit. Bureaucracy was seen as being fundamentally un or even anti-democratic by many, which creates the major problem of how to reconcile its (often necessary) activities with democratic political institutions. Bureaucrats themselves who attended the dialogues often expressed the desire to be honest in the exercise of their duties, but felt constantly constrained by pressure from their political masters and the internal culture of the bureaucracy. Defiance can lead to transfer to remote places or demotion or other formal or informal sanctions, powerful disincentives to honest exercise of duties. Frequently changing governments also creates instability, and in particular in situations where a patronage system is

strong, bureaucratic autonomy and freedom to be honest and efficient is severely compromised. Ideally administrative responsibilities and ethics should go hand in hand to ensure good governance and the provision of welfare by the bureaucracy. In order to move towards defining such a code, a “Charter of Administrative Ethics and Responsibilities” was written, emerging out of these dialogues and a copy is attached in Appendix B.

Engaging with Environmental Activists

The environment is the one area around which a large number of people are now mobilizing and which transcends national, ethnic and religious boundaries. Dialogue with environmentalists and others concerned with ecological issues strongly emphasized the need for a culture of responsibility related to nature. In particular, the re-definition of the concept of sustainability as a holistic concept was stressed, and not one merely restricted to the limited sense of supposedly “sustainable” exploitation of nature for human benefit. This in turn involves the necessity of moving beyond the anthropocentrism and purely human-centered approach embodied in most contemporary human rights discourses. The notion of “Eco-Justice” needs to be based on a vision of the wholeness of life beyond the fragmentation generated by contemporary society, science and academic specialities. While this certainly implies the recognition of limits to human consumption and its impact on the globe, it is also important to promote the idea that limits need not imply a loss of the richness of life, but rather the rediscovery of alternative lifestyles more in harmony with nature and imposing less stress on the planet and its bio-systems, a paradigm that is in fact rooted in our civilizational history and lived by many communities before the onslaught of industrialization and modernization.

Many participants felt that there are many inspiring elements in the world views of indigenous peoples, including a greater sense of holism. Many such peoples have in fact, without defining it as such, been living a culture of responsibility which protects the wholeness of creation. For them nature was/is not a sum of objects to be manipulated, but the source of life and the extension of their being. The recovery of this sense of wholeness is an important task for the modern world and its science, economics and ecology.

In Summary

A stimulating aspect of many of these dialogues was that, while participants were very familiar with the idea of human rights, many had not previously been exposed to discussion on the issue of human responsibilities. Overall, the discussions culminated in the view that major professions such as social workers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers, sociologists, scientists, religions, business, bureaucracy and workers in the area of human rights, should create teams to articulate both the contours of a model Charter of Human Responsibilities and state charters to guide and evaluate their own professional activities. (An example of a general Charter is annexed in Appendix A).

Children’s Rights and Citizen’s Responsibility

The protection of children and their right to a dignified childhood is an integral part of the work of the Rights and Responsibilities Collective. The Collective constantly interacts with child rights groups to protect, promote and preserve the best interests of children and to create a society that is child friendly. To cultivate and promote a culture of responsibility is also to improve the life of children and to protect their rights and freedoms, as all children deserve respect and special care and protection to develop and grow as they should. But the discharge of their responsibilities by parents, guardians, schools and society at large is often weak. Child abuse is a serious concern in South Asian societies, where in many cases they form, with other younger people, the majority of the population. Such young people have in principle inalienable rights to a home, to care and protection from a family, a decent standard of living, the right to an education, and the right to adequate nutrition and good health, and certainly have the right to protection under state laws, and to equal opportunities for their futures.

However, the South Asian reality is that there is often positively inhuman behavior towards innocent children. This raises a whole series of questions that we felt it our duty to address including:

- *What is the role of parents, guardians and civil society in the protection of children's dignity?
- *What is the role of professionals such as doctors, lawyers, judges, the police, public policy makers, educationalists, and religious leaders towards children?
- *What are the responsibilities of educational and other formative institutions towards children?
- * What are the responsibilities of the state towards upholding the rights of the child, and how well are these responsibilities discharged through day to day functioning of government departments and welfare agencies?
- *Why do such 'concerned' institutions so often fail in their duties and become instead organs of neglect?

The shared responsibility for the protection of children clearly lies equally with parents, families, communities, educational institutions, the judiciary, doctors and medical workers, welfare workers, religious leaders and civil society. Although more awareness is gradually being created, exploitation and abuse of children still persists in many forms. Based upon these insights, the Collective felt it necessary to initiate a campaign to encourage every citizen to take responsibility to protect, care and nurture every child, whether their own or others'. Amongst the key issues identified for the campaign were child labor, sexual slavery, the sale and trafficking of children, the use of children in drug trafficking, the physical, sexual and psychological abuse of children, including within families in situations such as incest, discrimination against children with HIV/AIDS, the differently abled, forced displacement of children with and without their families in violent situations, in armed conflicts and as refugees for environmental or religious reasons, and the use of children as combatants.

A concrete outcome of the campaign which brought together a large number of social activists, NGOs and professionals, was the production of a **Citizen's Charter of Responsibilities Towards Children** (attached as Appendix C) as a guide for initiating responsible action to protect the well-being of children. Overall, there has emerged from these discussions the view that responsibility is not just an abstract concept and is an active term rather than a descriptive one that implies action in relation to all disadvantaged groups, not in a paternalistic way, but as a natural co-sharing of concern.

The Universal Charter of Human Responsibilities: A Preliminary Version

Another effort made by the collective was to draft, as a basis for further discussion and consultation, a "Universal Charter of Human Responsibilities", and a drafting group of professionals and academics who had been actively involved with the Collective met to do this. The resulting draft is attached as Appendix D. The aim of this was to move beyond the affirmation that such a Charter would be a good idea, to actually demonstrating what one might look like. This draft is aimed at showing how cultures of responsibility might be built by providing the basis for generating widespread discussions and promoting awareness through internalizing the concept and practice of responsibility in order to foster healthy relationships among human beings, among societies and between humankind and eco-systems, with the final intention of creating a new 'Sustainable World Order'. The draft has been widely circulated and has provoked discussion that will constitute feedback into the further refinement of the draft version.

This feedback and through constant interaction with stakeholders have provided valuable lessons for the Collective, and provide the basis for redefining its future activities. In order to build an universal consensus deep reflection on these questions is needed. Some of the important questions were as follows:

*How to define responsibility principles under divergent social, political and ecological contexts, especially in pluralistic societies with different faiths, religious practices, cultures, ethical norms and moral principles?

*What is the distinction between the principle of responsibility and duty? In Indian and other South Asian contexts, the duty overlaps with responsibility. Responsibility is more of an individual choice, while duty is seen more as a communal obligation, integral to the social and ethical core of communities.

*Is responsibility more context related (i.e. relative) or can it be theoretically constructed as a universal principle with a common definition?

*How do we define the inter-relationship between rights and responsibilities? This is important in relation to much human rights activism, which tends to work independently of the principle of human responsibility. Many participants felt that integration of the two is an urgent priority.

Such questions are basic to understanding the multiple dimensions of the challenges raised during interaction with human rights defenders, and suggest the need for further probing and require more data and analysis of people's perceptions of responsibilities in order to clarify its meaning and scope. This led to the development of a methodology of eliciting information from a wider range of respondents than could physically attend workshops through the medium of a questionnaire.

Analysis of Findings

As an effort to clarify misconceptions, to uncover political, ideological and cultural differences, and to help formulate practical steps to implement as future widely agreed Charter of Human Responsibilities, a questionnaire was prepared to elicit the views of human rights defenders and others to develop a theoretical basis for and to popularize the concept of responsibility. A pilot questionnaire was administered to a small group and on the basis of their feedback a shortened version was sent to seventy selected persons – social activists in a number of fields including gender, children, consumers, elders and civil rights, human rights defenders, academicians, lawyers, judges, doctors, educationalists, civil servants, media workers, religious leaders and youth leaders from India, Nepal, Brazil and France. About sixty persons responded, and while the questionnaire does not pretend to be representative, the kinds of responses elicited have proved very valuable in clarifying the work of the Collective.

The questionnaire had three main objectives: to elicit the views of human rights workers as to the extent that the notion of human responsibility has enhanced, or might enhance, their rights activism; to identify instances where such human rights proponents had experienced any barriers in linking rights with responsibilities, either conceptual or practical' and to elicit views on the desirability of a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities parallel to the existing Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Respondents were involved in one or more of the following areas of activity: Rights: general human or specifically women, children, elders or indigenous peoples; farmers and agricultural workers and rural problems including landlessness; civil and constitutional law; environment and ecology; education, research and training; Dalits; youth; media and communications; culture and the arts; development; electoral reform, democracy, local governance, justice and peace; urban issues; welfare schemes and services; labour; health; and religion.

The main findings were categorized as follows: 1. People's perceptions of Rights and Responsibilities; 2. Obstacles and constraints to their realization; 3. Dilemmas, cultural differences and areas of conflict; 4. Areas of convergence; and 5. Areas for/of responsible actions.

1. People's Perceptions of Rights and Responsibilities.

- 1.1.** The need for evolving a code of human responsibilities to be the moral basis for creating responsible citizens and to protect and safeguard individual and collective rights was articulated by many of the respondents. It was also widely maintained that responsibilities and rights are integral to each other. The often perceived dichotomy between rights and responsibilities that exists in a great deal of contemporary human rights discourse is antithetical to the desirable inter-connectivity and actual inter-dependence of all beings in the universe. This suggests the need for a sense of obligation to develop an outlook that is not egocentric and parochial or which simply reflects the interests of a particular community, and which challenges us to be truly responsible not only towards human kind but to all life forms on this planet. Indeed for some respondents responsibility is not merely responding to the material conditions of life, but represents the basic manifestation of our very being. Seen in this way, our responsibility is not just the outcome of the application of a rule, but is the free response of our being to the essential challenges that existence confronts us with. The sense of responsibility goes with being human: it is part of the feeling of wanting to be accountable, in a sense a privilege rather than a duty, or if a duty, one freely accepted. The ontological unity of the human race inspires and morally challenges us to assume universal responsibility, even if it does not yet universally exist in practice. Some respondents suggested that the universal dimension of the principle of responsibility is exactly rooted and grounded in that ontological (not political) unity of being and becoming in the world – being-in-the-world with others, embedded in networks of interpersonal relations, and sharing and inheriting spiritual ‘spaces’ that embrace common aspirations and beliefs.
- 1.2.** Some respondents took this argument even further, suggesting that every human being living on this earth is responsible not only for him/her self, but for everything that is happening. We stand on ground which is common to all humankind and so all of our actions affect others, through chains of causality of which we are largely unaware. It is this sense of responsibility that urges us to seek changes in a world full of violence and competitiveness, and which arises because to some extent we share the pain of others.
- 1.3.** For some of the respondents, their main emphasis was on the importance of responsibility in human relationships. As relationship is life and the foundation of any meaningful existence, it means responsible cooperation and implies the expression of our highest values – love, generosity and care.
- 1.4.** To be responsible meant for some, the assumption of the role of effective management of the various manifestations of our inter-connectedness to neighbors, society and the earth. This implies not just affirming, but actively seeking to restore rights to ancestral habitation, and restoration of ecology, landscape, culture, freedom, justice, peace, individual dignity and collective well-being.

- 1.5.** It was strongly emphasized that in “traditional” societies a form of the principle of responsibility is or was central to their way of living, defining attitudes, values and patterns of behavior, even as it defined moral codes of conduct and rights, duties and obligations towards others, the community and the planet (at least as understood as the local region) at large. Such norms were largely unwritten and individuals were bound to one another in webs of mutual interdependence that touched on all aspects of life, from family to work and to the few leisure activities that such societies enjoyed. Modern societies on the other hand have developed a framework of laws and other formal regulations that characterize large scale urban, industrial societies, and in that context social relationships become more distant, formalized and impersonal, individuals tend to depend relatively less on one another for mutual support and as a result are less morally obligated to one another in a “society of strangers”.
- 1.6.** Some respondents argued that in the context of Asian societies where a large number of people are deprived of their economic, social and cultural rights and the poor in particular are deprived even of the right to be human with dignity, it is imperative to protect such rights and simultaneously to challenge the socio-political systems that have brought this depravation about. If it is humans who create structures that reinforce and maintain poverty, oppression and injustice, then it is also the responsibility of humans to work for solutions to such problems.
- 1.7.** There was a general consensus that human responsibility plays an important role in defending human rights. The notion of responsibility goes in tandem with the feeling of not only being responsible, but also being entrusted with rights. It calls for intervention in situations of injustice and for bringing violations of human rights into public light. Responsibility is not a passive state, but one that implies the active support of other people in the struggle for justice and a joint effort towards the well-being of all. It is only through a feeling of responsibility to the community, through compassion for our fellow human beings, and through assistance rendered to those weaker than ourselves that the inter-personal relationships which form the basis of human community and conviviality can develop. Social responsibility suggests that building solidarity is the strongest force in the struggle against injustice in all its forms.
- 1.8.** According to many participants, every right has a corresponding responsibility, so a culture of responsibility can offset the negative fallout of a purely rights-based conception of society. Rights cannot be unlimited. For instance, government servants have the right to agitate for fair pay, but they also, having entered that profession, the responsibility and duty to carry out their functions in relation to the public. In all occupations there are duties to be performed that carry with them responsibilities. In exercising those responsibilities we may have to “play by the rules” most of the time to avoid unnecessary problems for other people, but it is also true that sometimes, on

humanitarian grounds, he may have to go beyond those rules to make exceptional compromises or even sacrifices when there are over-riding reasons to do so.

- 1.9.** Some respondents pointed out that the Rights discourse has gained more visibility and social and political weight than the discourse of Responsibility. Rights are (in principle) legally binding in so far as they allow individuals, groups and civil institutions to cite those rights when attempting to enforce them, especially against the state. In public discourse we hear far more about the violation of individual rights rather than about the abdication of individual responsibility, although it is the abdication of that very responsibility that leads to the violation of rights. It is intrinsic in the nature of responsibility that responsible individuals respect and honour the rights of others.
- 1.10.** Others observed that legal responsibility implies a prior contract, at least implicitly. Ethical responsibility demands at least a tacitly acknowledged moral code. An ethics of responsibility must be the moral basis of society, including its economics as well as its governance. In a modern capitalist society, many relationships are based on contract, for example a formal agreement that an employee will provide a certain quantity of labour in return for a certain quantity of wages from the employer. Everything is spelled out in the wage contract which is legally enforceable. Formally speaking, there are no traditional obligations attached to the exchange of money for labour time, and so a contract can only be broken or cancelled by previously set out procedures, usually defined in the contract itself, unlike in non-contract but socially approved relationships where the bond is a moral one and carries with it obligations and expectations of reciprocity.
- 1.11.** Ethics and morality are defining characteristics of responsibility, and human freedom is an essential ingredient of that responsibility, but within those ethical limits. Ethics for example restricts the “freedom” to make unlimited profit at the expense of others. No externally imposed guidelines will work to ‘manage’ behavior if an unjust basis of a society is not uprooted. To discard responsibilities simply means perpetuating injustice and the deprivation of rights.
- 1.12.** Only when we have built up people who practice responsibility as citizens, will it be possible to challenge a system that is corrupt. This requires an approach to social change in which the element of responsibility is integrated. This, it was suggested, has six stages or levels:
- a. Ethics and the inculcation of values and principles so that the seeds of responsibility are planted.
 - b. Human Rights: since when ethics are violated then human rights are also violated. Responsibility should consequently become integral to the process of completing the cycle of rights.

- c. Pedagogy: developing pedagogy of responsibility in which the learning process is designed to preserve, respect and advance both ethics and human rights.
- d. Psychological support: we are a wounded people in body, mind, emotions and spirit, and we need psychological help to be healed and start over again.
- e. Management: we need organizations and structures grounded on the principles of human responsibility, ethically based, respecting human rights and valuing the feelings of others, and styles of management and leadership that are based on such principles.
- f. Participatory Action Research: any search for answers needs to be participatory, open to new possibilities, and recording successes and building on them, while also learning the lessons of apparent failures. The promotion of responsibility then becomes a major dimension of the action-reflection-action cycle.

1.13. For some respondents the human responsibilities approach was sufficiently strong to prioritize the respecting of the rights of others before asking for our own rights. Human rights discourse enlightens us about our rights, but does not always stress that when exercising those rights, we need to be aware of the consequences of our actions. We cannot for example abuse our power to exercise our rights by blindly acquiring them at the expense of others. This is where the responsibility approach comes on the scene. A purely rights based approach can lead to conflict and confrontation when exclusively demanding one's own rights violates the rights of others.

1.14. Many respondents observed that the goals of the human rights approach and the human responsibilities approach are the same, but the route to achieving the goal is different in the two cases. It is actually only a difference in perception that makes them seem antagonistic. In fact, they should be combined: if all leaders, politicians, civil servants and members of the various professions and occupations fulfill their responsibilities, no one in society is deprived of their rights. Acting with responsibility does not dilute the essential character of human rights. The concept of responsibility is unlimited and unquantifiable. As Alyosha, the youngest of the Brothers Karamasov put it: "We are all responsible for everyone else. But I am more responsible than all others."

2. Obstacles and Constraints

2.1. Rights are recognized and accorded by institutions such as governments or judicial bodies, or through instruments such as contracts. Responsibilities on the other hand are not conferred in the same way, making them, in the view of some respondents, less visible and difficult to precisely define or quantify.

- 2.2.** Lack of compassion for other beings. Compassion is essentially the identification of the good of others as one's own, and is the well-spring from which responsibility flows. Where compassion is lacking, responsibility in turn is diminished.
- 2.3.** Lack of democratic spaces is one of the greatest obstacles to the realization of freedom and responsibility.
- 2.4.** The present educational system has largely moved away from providing the kind of value-based education that leads to personal responsibility. Rather it is techno-centered or directed towards subjects such as management and business. It does not feed the imagination and creativity of the younger generations, and stresses self-advancement rather than the common good, is utilitarian in nature, and globally there has been a retreat from the humanities and their role in helping students gain a holistic or integral view of the universe.
- 2.5.** Many felt that there was a serious lack of enlightened and selfless leadership in society, and as a result a lack of responsible governance designed to protect the welfare and wellbeing of all. Today's political class is commonly concerned primarily with the pursuit of their own personal and partisan interests rather than the genuine common good.
- 2.6.** Lack of positive support from the media to propagate the ideals of ethical responsibility. The media is now a powerful instrument, perhaps the most powerful, which shapes the opinions and world views of citizens. It could then, if it so desired, play an important role in balancing the human rights discourse with the responsibilities one, and in influencing governments to create appropriate legislation and policies to make those responsibilities legally binding and enforceable.
- 2.7.** Respondents pointed out that there are barriers to responsible action which include, at the individual level, ego-centricity, individualistic behavior, rigidity of thought and intellectual biases, and at the institutional level such factors as lack of collective vision and commitment, lack of openness to absorb new thinking, patriarchy, hierarchy and other vertical forms of social organization that resist empowerment of others, compartmentalization and bureaucratization of institutions and the consequent loss of their original social goals in favour of self-preservation, a common institutional cycle.
- 2.8.** Some suggested that it is the lack of legislation and awareness (or willingness to see) and the lack of whistleblower protection law that often prevents the initiation of responsible action, even when abuses are apparent. The lack of a formal Responsibility Code of Conduct obstructs the protection of the rights of others.
- 2.9.** Many felt that there has been a lack of understanding and dialogue between human rights defenders and the promoters of the Charter of Human Responsibilities, which has led to misunderstandings and in particular the fear of rights activists that an

emphasis on responsibility might dilute the significance of rights, and this has prevented the promotion of synergies and complementarities between the two sides of the same coin.

- 2.10.** The reluctance of the scientific community, researchers and students in various fields to promote the culture of responsibility in their specific fields.
- 2.11.** Many suggested that focusing exclusively on rights without linking them to responsible actions can create a dependency syndrome rather than self-reliance. Where civil society is weak, people may be either unaware of their rights or non-assertive in demanding them. Rights become apparent and are more fully guaranteed when citizens also carry out their responsibilities.
- 2.12.** Relative to the well developed theoretical and conceptual basis of human rights, the notion of responsibility still lacks such a firm foundation. It is easier to motivate people around rights than it is around the less-clear notion of responsibilities. This is not an insuperable problem, but arises from a lack of understanding of the role of responsibility in initiating human rights mechanisms.
- 2.13.** Barriers to the dissemination of both rights and responsibilities are numerous and often sociological – class, caste, religion, ethnicity, gender and even occupation – divide peoples and communities and militate against the acceptance of a universal code of human responsibility, and this can occur at either or both of the individual and institutional levels.
- 2.14.** Some respondents articulated the view that militarization is a major factor that distorts just and responsible governance. The bogey of national security, the idolization of the military and the glorification of the role of the armed forces all gnaw at the roots of responsible governance and democracy. The armed forces in some of the countries of South Asia act independently as a (non-elected) power superior to the other organs of the state and often openly or covertly run much of the country. The existence of ‘Special Power’ Acts, immunity from prosecution, the ability to declare whole regions as ‘disturbed areas’ and to impose ‘emergencies’ all vitiate both the concept and the practice of just governance. In many such areas controlled by military forces, social justice is almost non-existent.
- 2.15.** An aspect of this militarization is the way in which rich developed countries are promoting military competition and rivalries among poor ones. This scandalous irresponsibility has led to heavy and ever increasing expenditure on armaments (supplied of course by those rich countries) which diverts critical resources away from poverty eradication, education, provision of potable water, health services and other essential infrastructure.

2.16. The increased incidence of extreme climate changes is likely to be felt especially severely in the tropics. Already the peoples of the South, and particularly the peoples of South Asia, are witnessing increased natural disasters and shifts in weather patterns that are likely to have devastating impacts, particularly on the poor. This not only raises questions about local responsibilities in such conditions, but also wider ones for the international community, and in particular the responsibility of those who have created the problem in the first place and what their response will be in relation to poorer countries.

2.17. The powerlessness of the marginalized poor. South Asia contains many of the poorest people in the world. Yet the dominant economic system of corporate led globalization has intensified the problem, not solved it, in its quest for profit-maximization that over-rides human and ecological needs. Local livelihoods are consequently sacrificed for the sake of the endless search for natural resources that are transformed into commodities and later marketed (often back to those same poor people), and the wastes generated dumped into the South with predictable effects on health and the environment.

3. Dilemmas, Cultural Differences and Areas of Conflict.

3.1 The idea of “culture” is as social scientists well know, challenging to define. Perhaps nevertheless one can safely say that culture constitutes the collective or shared ideas that groups of humans live by, and that these ideas and values differ from community to community, place to place, and certainly change over time. While a necessary part of human life, culture can also take forms that condition and even manipulate that life. While much of humanity accepts these cultural patterns as givens, there are always more sensitive minorities who are aware of the potentiality of culture to become fetters, and accordingly question it critically and attempt to sort its negative from its positive characteristics.

3.2. Each world view offers the possibility of deriving from it a sense of universal responsibility, but each culture may have different visions and will interpret and justify this responsibility in diverse ways. We consequently find ourselves in the delicate situation of working towards a common consensus, while seeking to avoid the imposition of one culture’s views on others, a negative pattern that is rightly described by some as ‘cultural imperialism’.

3.3. Some respondents noted a concern with our understanding of universal responsibility in a world in which responsibilities sometimes conflict. This raises the question of the precise notion of ‘universalization’ that is involved here and suggests the need for further work on conceptual refinement, and of how one might actualize an ethic of universal

responsibility in a world or rampant irresponsibility? This is an urgent practical task as well as a theoretical one.

3.4. Some argued that while the possession of a moral consciousness is a universal phenomenon (everyone, even if they do not exercise it) possesses a sense of right and wrong, there can be disagreement about what actually constitutes these categories and so the question of whether there is or can be a universal morality becomes an issue.

3.5. In a number of Asian religions there is the idea of karma: the idea that each of us creates our own cycle of actions and their inevitable reactions through a kind of law of consequences. Thus our past thoughts, speech and behavior have shaped our present reality, and our actions, thought and speech today will in turn affect our future. The influence of karma according to this belief carries over from one lifetime to the next and accounts for the circumstances of one's birth, the qualities of one's individual nature and the differences among all living beings and their environments. The idea of karma then contains a strong element of determinism (although it does also allow that what makes a person noble or humble is not birth but individual actions). But it can have profound influence on the idea of responsibility and of action: should one intervene in a situation if that intervention may change someone else's karma?

3.6 This then is an aspect of the situation in which religion, culture or ideology can promote a passive acceptance of today's society. A fatalistic world-view of "it is my fate, this is how the world is, nothing can be done, we are powerless" prevents responsible action to change unjust structures.

3.7. There are political differences on the conception of rights between Eastern and Western world-views. For some, the entire framework of individual human rights is an artifact of Western liberalism and that any attempt to impose them on Asian cultures is yet another version of imperialism.

3.8. For the contemporary political system, ethics seems to be irrelevant. The "need" for pragmatic political behavior diverges strongly from acting according to a global ethic. This suggests the urgent need for a different conception of politics, one not just concerned with power, but with a truly global ethic that includes such seemingly non-political elements as cultural traditions and which includes all living beings, not only human ones.

3.9. The question of the caste system and its relationship to both human rights and responsibilities is a complex one. While the caste system is an ancient and deeply rooted cultural and sociological phenomenon, its divisiveness militates against the fundamental unity of human beings and the recognition that all are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Given that they are endowed with reason and conscience, they should be free to

act towards one another in a spirit of sisterhood/brotherhood, rather than arbitrarily divided by an imposed system of rankings.

3.10. The displacement of large numbers of people from their original habitats and homes without the right to resettlement elsewhere, especially when displaced by war or environmental factors beyond their control and not of their making, deprives them of the ability to exercise their individual and collective rights and often demonstrates the failure of states to protect, despite their obligations under UN treaties.

3.11. One of the conspicuous failures of responsible governance has been the inability of states to arrest and prevent individual and mass atrocities against religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and against ‘lower’ castes and women. These activities, which often take on the characteristic of pogroms, not only create deep divides between people, but also greatly restrict the space for the exercise of responsible action.

3.12. Women in many Asian societies are still far from free from patriarchal systems. Generally women labour under a dual burden of domestic and occupational toil and often can find only the lowest paid jobs as a result of traditional patriarchal images of feminine nature and capacities. Women are not only the worst sufferers of poverty, but are also victims of violence of a generalized nature – ethnic, communal and caste. Rape is still widely used as a weapon. The masculine response, if any, seems to be limited to the imposition of ever greater curbs and restrictive codes of dress and conduct. The status of women is an indicator of the deficiency of responsible governance and the failure to deliver gender justice. Human rights defenders are faced with a number of dilemmas on the gender question because women belong to diverse ethnic, religious, caste and other groups that make it difficult to develop a common platform for women’s emancipation.

3.13. In South Asian countries the family structures are highly hierarchical and patriarchal. There is usually little space for either expression of dissent, or for any consultation or discussion, which represents a considerable barrier to freedom. Where women are credited with wisdom, common sense or even basic intelligence, they will rarely be given any say in economic, political or social matters, even though they are equally affected by these. This condition creates a major deficiency in the democratic process, and in progress towards just governance on a society wide scale.

3.14. The current direction of modernity, propelled by capitalism and fueled by neo-liberal ideology seeks to establish hegemony by shaping popular consciousness in order to re-order the normative value structures, meaning systems, patterns of behavior and institutions to conform to its own requirements. The cultural manipulation that we experience today through the media, advertising and other means represents an attempt to establish cultural hegemony through domination of popular consciousness. Citizens in name only find themselves not only more and more alienated from the political process,

but increasingly transformed into individualistic consumers without larger or more emancipatory goals or ideals. The result is that the state as a space for the resolution of various forms of social conflict becomes fragile as political institutions are robbed of their relevance and so there is a real danger of the whole normative framework of democracy being undermined and so again the space for responsible action is further subverted.

3.15. Corruption now pervades all wings of the governance structures and institutions – legislative, executive and judicial. Apart from perverting just and responsible governance, this also saps belief in the efficacy of the system and so perpetuates a cynical attitude that leads to yet further corruption.

3.16. Part of this wider society wide decay is visible in the loss by many of the younger generation of the best qualities of being human, including concern for others. As life becomes more and more of a “rat race” so finer qualities are apt to be forgotten, and to some degree this does seem to be happening.

3.17. South Asian societies are characterized by their plurality of groups differing from each other in language, religion and ethnicity. Even in periods when there is no overt conflict, this plurality simultaneous “differences” without true integration or shared notions of equality or justice. Such societies can be plural without achieving true multiculturalism, the latter notion implying equality within difference – an equality that respects those differences and distinct cultural identities and practices. It rules out forced assimilation based on the destruction or abandonment of identities. The absence of such a genuine multiculturalism, of value in itself and also a democratic aspiration, has often led to the ethnicization of sections of these societies which leads on to ethnic nationalism and so to a conflict of rights.

3.18. A related feature of contemporary politics is the fragmented vision of the ideal of the common good due to the rise of identity politics. This of course is a two-edged phenomenon. Identity can become a path towards greater democratization, and a way to insist on rights and to protest against exclusion. Used in this way, it is a social means to attain individual and communal goals of betterment. On the other hand undue emphasis on identity can lead to a negative form of identity politics which prevents broader alliances and common actions of all oppressed groups for social, economic, political and cultural justice. There may be even more serious fallout in the form of inter-communal violence and efforts to dominate other groups. As the state becomes weaker, so there tends to be an increase in the incidence of identity politics, as evidenced by the situation in particular of the so-called “failed states”.

3.19. Ethnic, caste, religious, and communal conflicts totally jeopardize the efficient functioning of the democratic process and institutions. Ethnic based wars, the ‘anti-

insurgency' military operations that they trigger, including large scale ones such as the "war on terror" are incompatible with democracy. Both military and militant violent operations prevent democratic institutions from acting as they are intended. They also have the tendency to be anti-woman, anti-child and anti-environment. As suggested above, the militarization of society not only destroys childhoods, but more widely displace the vibrancy and humanitarian values of authentic cultures.

3.20. In an era of neo-liberal and corporate driven globalization, the international financial forces and institutions also assault and erode democratic processes and human rights and exert undue and powerful influence on a wide range of economic and political policies. This results in the erosion of sovereignty and render people powerless, conditions under which they also lose their rights and responsibilities and the ability to control their own resources and to determine their utilization.

4. Areas of Convergence.

Far from there being a conflict between the ideas of Rights and Responsibilities, the questionnaire respondents unanimously agreed that they are in fact entirely complimentary notions. This was stated in a number of ways: as the intimate linkage of rights and responsibilities, as being the two sides of the same coin, as complimentary aspects of the single reality of our common life on Earth, or as reflecting the interconnection between people and between people and nature. An important aspect of this was the idea that Rights, while vital, are not unlimited, and must be balanced by the reciprocal notion of Responsibilities. While some respondents suggested that in a sense Rights come first for the oppressed, as a necessary precondition for their being able to exercise Responsibilities, not all agreed, and some respondents specifically argued that Responsibilities are not only a requirement for everybody, but that their exercise is an important source of strength for the oppressed.

This balance between the two was nicely captured in the suggestion that "The Rights discourse helps you to have a firm grip on the ongoing situation, while the Responsibility approach energizes you towards your progressive path". An important aspect of this is the need to include the notion and practice of responsibility as part of everyday life, and not as something mainly associated with the political sphere. The goals of the human rights approach and that of the human responsibilities approach are in reality the same, while the means to achieve them may be different. As one respondent noted, it is mainly human perception that separates them, not objective differences.

While many were fully supportive of the idea of a Universal charter of Human Responsibilities, some suggested either that it was not necessary to attempt to codify responsibilities, or that the way forward was through combining the UN Declaration of

Human Rights with the proposed Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities into a single document. Others, while equally supportive of the idea of creating a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, suggested that the specific social and cultural conditions of South Asia with its highly complex social structure and variations of caste, religion, income and education, make it hard to generalize, suggesting that any Charter would need to be sensitive to cultural plurality and differential access to knowledge and information. One important and frequently mentioned area of convergence was that of gender sensitivity and the fact that no Declaration of Human Responsibilities could succeed unless it placed gender justice at its core. In summary, the majority opinion was that responsibilities in no way dilute rights, and that there is an urgent need for the formulation of a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities and its acceptance as the “Third Pillar” of the international community.

5. Areas of Responsible Action.

Sixteen main areas were widely mentioned and identified as spaces in which concrete action can be undertaken. These are:

- 5.1.** The need for a Charter for the Media. The media is double-edged given its immense power in contemporary society. On the one hand it is often used irresponsibly to promote consumerism, violence, and negative social and gender attitudes, and to glorify crime, conflict and greed. On the other, it has immense positive possibilities due to its high level of access as a primary means of promoting positive values and disseminating the notion of responsibilities across the spectrum of virtually the whole of society.
- 5.2.** The need for education to be oriented towards the inculcating of responsibility and for training in citizenship to stress responsibility as the core of all effective and sustainable civic action. Many respondents stressed the need for ethical and values based education to balance the tendency in existing educational systems solely towards technical and business based content.
- 5.3.** While the political and social realms are vital areas to be addressed by a Responsibility approach, the level of everyday life should not be neglected as it is the space in which any individual can exercise responsibility in small but significant ways such as energy and water saving, minimizing waste and disposing of what waste is generated in environmentally sound ways, and through courteous behavior.
- 5.4.** The need to combat corruption in all its pervasive forms, not only because it is such a common form of non-responsible behavior, but also because it undermines attempts to create honest and genuinely responsive political and civic action.

- 5.5.** Gender sensitivity training to ensure gender justice and mutual respect between the genders is a core value for any kind of responsible action at both individual and societal levels.
- 5.6.** The problem of neglected or abused children in South Asia is still a major one and there need to be urgent interventions to protect children against any such abuses and to positively promote their welfare. The plight of children is compounded by both the traditional social order and its intersection with dominant models of development.
- 5.7.** The need to create a culture of responsibility and to combat areas of culture that oppose or undermine responsible behavior, whether in such areas as popular culture, religion, gender stereotyping, in relation to children, or in any other cultural space.
- 5.8.** Consumer behavior was identified as a major area in which responsible behavior must be exercised, rampant consumerism being the source of many of our ecological, waste, resource exploitation and value crises that we are now experiencing on a planetary level.
- 5.9.** Averting tragedy in and of the atmospheric commons requires legally binding, equitable arrangements between countries, big and small, as well as a clear understanding of responsibility for the carbon ‘stock’ now clearly the basis for global warming and which are historical accumulations for which the developed countries are indeed responsible. A strong and universal climate deal is essential and while politicians dally, people’s movements need to seize the climate agenda and insist on action.
- 5.10.** The recommendation that governments should initiate a series of steps to build a responsible, transparent and accountable system of environmental governance. This might include measures such as strictly enforcing environmental laws relating to air, water and pollution; facilitating and not suppressing freedom of expression and assembly of people drawing attention to issues of environmental degradation; empowering local bodies to make decisions on environmental issues that concern them; put in place biodiversity management committees in all local bodies, etc. The environment must be recognized as a central focus of any Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities.
- 5.11.** Addressing the impact of climate change calls for urgent action by state and non-state actors that oppose the dominant growth model of development that assumes that the resources of the Earth are unlimited, and that humans can master and subjugate the planet through technology and enjoy unfettered consumption for ever without constraints.
- 5.12.** The agreed need to work towards both the creation of a Universal Charter and ones reflecting the situations of specific professions such as medicine and law.

- 5.13.** Responsive governance as the key role and responsibility of governments, and the recognition that, in the absence of this, corruption and mal-administration almost always flourish.
- 5.14.** That we should be much more sensitive to the role of technology in our lives and of our obligations to use it responsibly, and to work towards the creation of environmentally friendly technologies and the use of what has become known as “appropriate technology” in situations where they are socially, culturally and ecologically of value.
- 5.15.** A global parliament would hopefully make the world less prone to war and other forms of political violence. A functioning assembly of elected delegates from around the world might help to discredit belligerent and fundamentalist ideologies. The experience of existing multi-polity systems such as the European Union, or of states such as India and Belgium, show that national or regional delegations all too easily fragment along the lines of class, linguistic, ethnic or other interests. There is a need to seek an alternative model that replaces dangerously nationalistic models with far more fluid transnational parliamentary coalitions.
- 5.16.** That the Rights and Responsibilities Collective and other like-minded organizations and individuals should work actively to disseminate information on the concept of responsibilities,

As surprisingly the notion is not at well known widely discussed or accepted, especially in comparison with its sister conception of human rights.

Summary and Future Directions.

1. There is no single, universal conception of responsibilities, and while there is a dictionary definition of the term, in practice it is a dynamic concept and new aspects of its meaning emerge continuously as actors try it out in practice.
2. Some of the most significant of these emerging dimensions of responsibilities include: a. a move away from a purely anthropocentric approach to both rights and responsibilities towards a more inclusive one that recognizes human embeddedness in nature and human responsibility towards the biosphere on which all life is ultimately dependent; and b. that the notions of rights and responsibilities, and certainly discourse about them, have been largely the preserve of the privileged. Many respondents noted that deprivation of rights often leads to a situation where it is difficult for the deprived to exercise their responsibilities, leading to a double

- injustice – the original deprivation and the inability to respond to it. c. The re-emergence of ethics as a category rarely referred to in conventional political discourse; d. the new challenges of climate change and the issues that arise from this, including just allocation of resources; e. the role of the state and the problem of the corrupt state that does not fulfill its responsibilities; f. the important but still unclarified role of culture and religion.
3. There are levels of analysis and there is a complex and dialectical relationship between them. – for example the individual, community and structural levels, but any final “model” should as far as possible be holistic.
 4. A richer and less abstract notion of responsibilities emerges from the empirical diversity of the respondent’s answers, and so is derived inductively and as such recognizes the diversity of positions that are suppressed by a single externally imposed a priori definition.
 5. This suggests that the correct approach to researching responsibilities is “practice-theory-practice” one, which not only reflects the experience and knowledge of those “on the ground”, but also suggests models of action and pedagogical possibilities for teaching responsible values without that teaching process becoming merely propaganda.
 6. While societies have evolved mechanisms over the centuries for responsible management of their relationships with nature and each other, many of which have subsequently been destroyed by modernization, we should not fall into the trap of anthropological romanticism, as many of those mechanisms were hierarchical, patriarchal or authoritarian.
 7. Holism, as suggested above, is essential to strive for, even if hard to achieve in practice. If this is not constantly held up as a goal it is easy to create false or incomplete analyses and practices based on just one area, while neglecting others actually linked to it. For example, social justice and environmental concern do not exclude each other, but are actually related at many levels.
 8. Universal responsibility is a modern concept, and one quite naturally asks what ancient Indian term might come closest to it. In South Asian thought the notion of Dharma is highly significant. In Western languages terms close to that of ‘responsibility’ such as duty, ethics or legal obligations all correspond to some of the meanings of Dharma, but which is itself a multi-layered concept which embodies meanings not fully captured by those particular Western terms. This raises the issue of linguistic and cultural translation. Dharma can include ideas of law, duty and responsibility, but can also take on a Buddhist coloration including links between ethics, mind, rationality and the project of self-transformation. It involves both a

theory of enlightenment and a range of practices. It is in other words pregnant with meaning and its purpose is really practical – to drive home to us the fact that the ‘responsibility’ of a person seriously in search of freedom and happiness for both the self and others consists in her/his thinking, learning and understanding clearly and practicing accordingly and acting wisely.

9. Spontaneous responses arising from “objective” conditions (e.g. a tsunami) are often positive and unselfish. How to convert this into “continuous” response in non-crisis situations?
10. It is important to keep in mind the goal of the transformation of structures, and both rights and responsibilities approaches share this mission. Freedom from want and exploitation = freedom to Be.

The questionnaire approach proved to be a very useful instrument to draw out perceptions of responsibility. While naturally answers varied with respondent’s specific individual and social contexts, collectively the answers highlighted key issues in identifying the problems encountered in practicing responsibility including obstacles, constraints including cultural differences in understanding the notion of responsibility, areas of conflict and also of convergence and avenues of responsible actions.

The data acquired through the questionnaire survey and engagement with human rights defenders provides a wealth of information. For the Rights and Responsibilities Collective the investigation into the broad issue of the ‘culture of responsibility’ proved valuable in developing a conceptual understanding of the principle of responsibility. It affirmed the need for continuous dialogue with human rights defenders to remove misconceptions and evolve convergence around the principle of human responsibility as complimentary and supplementary to human rights activism. It demonstrated that there is an increasing willingness from the human rights ”side” to accept the idea that rights and responsibilities are complimentary and that a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities should be promoted as the “Third Pillar” of the international system, together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the United Nations.

One could discern from the dialogues and the responses to the questionnaire that there is a growing perception that excessive emphasis on purely the exercise of fundamental rights diminishes the performance of the parallel duties and responsibilities. The thinking that every right mirrors a corresponding duty is based on the premise that freedom without acceptance of responsibility can destroy that freedom itself, but when rights and responsibilities are balanced, freedom is enhanced.

In a culture of rampant irresponsibility, responsibility as such has become an almost forgotten ethical value and moral virtue. However, it is the responsible action that alone carries with it the requisite integrity that is the basis of real change. Unless we can transform the present culture of

irresponsibility into a culture of responsibility, social movements for a positive future and for peace will bear only bitter fruit, if any.

Appendix A

Draft of the UDHR (the Paris version circulated by Pierre etc, March 11, 2011)

Appendix B

Draft of Charter of Administrative Ethics and Responsibilities

Appendix C

Draft of Citizen's Charter of Responsibilities towards Protection of Children

Appendix D

Draft of for Universal Charter of Human Responsibilities (UCHRes), South Asia

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