

A history of the Alliance for Responsible and Sustainable Societies, the Charter of Human Responsibility and the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities and the Declaration of Interdependence

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Introduction /Summary

The Alliance for Responsible and Sustainable Societies has a history dating from its early development in the 1980's, with the Vezelay Think Tank which highlighted the great transition to sustainable societies and low carbon economies.

In 2001 the Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer brought together four thousand actors from around the world to Lille, France, to identify a norm, or an ethic to address this transition according to the priorities of the 21st Century. This was a time when climate change was being widely recognized – being nearly ten years after the Brundtland Commission, when the prospect of planetary destabilization, conflict and mounting social inequity called for a paradigm shift in economic systems, the distribution of wealth and the means of livelihoods.

Dialogues on achieving transitions led to identifying Responsibility as a principle which could serve as a universal norm, while respecting cultural differences and histories. Responsibility, duty and obligation in their varied forms, are embedded in every culture and foundational for all human societies.

Activities for transitions to sustainable societies is taking shape through community and organizational engagement, documentation with several renditions of the original Charter of Human Responsibility, and actions at local and global levels, and in different professional fields.

The Charter was the basis for a legally based Charter of Universal Responsibility for Rio+20, in 2010, and then a further legally developed text, A Declaration Universal Responsibility after Rio+20. In preparation for COP21, in 2015, the Declaration was synthesized with the Declaration of Interdependence to become the Declaration of Interdependence and Responsibility.

The Search for a common principle for a global community

In the mid nineteen eighties, the [Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer](#) launched an international think tank called the Vezelay group, to tackle major issues of our time.

President of the [Fondation](#) Pierre Calame, brought his leadership to the endeavor to identify a unifying reference for the globalized world which would uphold the diversity of cultures, and safeguard ecological integrity.

In 1987, the Vezelay group highlighted the idea of a great transition which would transform 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, recognizing that the major differences in levels 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.

Thus the [Fondation](#) launched the Alliance for a United and Responsible World in 1994. It gathered people from all the continents around common topics. One of the working groups was the inter-religious and inter-philosophical one 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 Rio Earth Summit and the Earth Charter

The work of this group met another approach, which emerged from the Rio Earth Summit under the guidance of Maurice Strong. Maurice had been the Secretary General of the Earth Summit. In 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 safeguarding the environment and the planet, which he called 'the Earth Charter'.

Maurice Strong expected that the heads of state would, at the Earth Summit, endorse such a Charter and many Charter drafts 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 was 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 attending to a third pillar for the international Community while the ECI was attending to a document which drew its main impetus from environmental issues and was developed mainly for educative purposes This dialog has however been useful, helping the Alliance and the inter-religious group towards better understanding of what the guidelines of such a third pillar should be: appealing to every culture; meaningful for individual; being able to found a future international law.

Responsibility: A Charter, Cultures and Social-Professional Interests

During this period the inter-religious group concluded that this pillar should be focused on responsibility. Therefore, the group drafted a Charter of Human Responsibilities (En), *une Charte de la responsabilité humaine (Fr)* (CHR). It was presented at the first ever World Citizens Assembly 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, the FPH supported the diffusion and discussion of the Charter, with the Forum on Ethics and Responsibility co-ordinated by Edith Sizoo, who engaged partners across the world, to interpret issues and challenges in each of the Alliance countries.

The initiative took two directions. The first one was geographical and would aim at checking that the Charter would really appeal to the heart of different cultures and people. Forum members engaged people in their countries in different socio-professional fields to identify and support the development of cultures of responsibility. The Charter served as a reference text to socialize an ethic of responsibility.

The Charter 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 Pacific and New Zealand. Further studies by Edith Sizoo led to the publication of *Responsibility and Cultures of the World*. (2010, Berlin: P.I.E. Peter Lang), which shows that the notions of responsibility and co-responsibility can be found in any society.

The second direction 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. For example in the Philippines, the solidarity economy network and education initiatives drew on the principles of the Charter of Responsibility in policy and professional development.

In Brazil, an environmental education initiative, 'Let's Take Care of Brasil' was developed as a program which was rolled out to schools and communities in a joint effort of the Ministry for Environment and the Ministry of Education. This national initiative developed in an international one leading to an extraordinary youth Conference in 2010, *Lets Take Care of the Planet*, that drew together participants from more than fifty countries. An example of its multiplier effect was the ongoing program 'Let's Take Care of the Planet in Europe', under the leadership of Forum members in France, and 'Monde Pluriel'. Further research led to the publication of Edith Sizoo and Sipko de Boer, *Societal Responsibility Today: governments, enterprises, citizens* (2015), which focuses on responsibility in cultural dimensions, and in government and private sector spheres.

The two approaches of cultural and socio-professional dimensions of responsibility proved productive and showed that the ethical concept of responsibility and co-responsibility was a real guide for individual, collective and economic behavior.

International level

The next step has been to bring the concept of responsibility at the international community level; the bottom up approach, which was the necessary, had to reach the top at a point in time.

Rio+20 was a 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 to achieve sufficient endorsement to establish a third pillar.

Edith Sizoo was commissioned by FPH to write a comparative analysis of all these drafts, which is documented in Edith Sizoo's 'Pourquoi une Charte des Responsabilités', Why Do We Need a Charter of Responsibilities. 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 (CUR) 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 until 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 basis of

universal principles. Michel Rocard and the [FPH](#) agreed with the Brazilian cabinet to join hands in order to create this group of like-minded countries.

Despite the promise of Rio+20, once again the effort to engage the international community, gathered at Rio de Janeiro, did not succeed in bringing a framework of responsibility to the outcome text, although, the notion of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities was a central feature of Rio+20 and continues to be in COP negotiations and texts. 'Common but Differentiated Responsibilities, and respective capabilities in the light of different national circumstances' has become enshrined as a means of recognizing differences in economic and technical means of states to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

At the time of Rio+20, in 2010, the *Universal Declaration of Human Responsibility* was prepared as a legal text that could serve in a preamble to an International agreement, such as the Rio+20 Declaration, or more recently the COP outcome documents. Again, this provided an articulation of core principles of responsibility.

In preparation for COP21, a the idea of a synthesis of two documents was proposed: the *Declaration of Human Responsibility* and the *Declaration of Interdependence*, initiated by Mireille Delmas Marty, Emeritus Professor of the Collège de France, and Michel Rocard, former Premier of France. Pierre Calame, Betsan Martin, and Yolanda Ziaka, of the Alliance for Responsible and Sustainable Societies, prepared a synthesis to pave the way for unifying these two closely aligned approaches which recognize the common destiny of humankind and the biosphere, and engages the imperative of accountability in transitions to sustainable societies.

The synthesis of these texts was to offer a framework in the preamble to the COP21 Paris Agreement as the *Declaration of Interdependence and Responsibility*. Again, the text was modified into a legal form to suit the requirements on international documents. The text is currently in draft form and in a process of textual development.

A parallel initiative with the Collège de France under the leadership of Mireille Delmas Marty, and Professor Alain Supiot, engaged doctoral students in studies of law and responsibility for COP21. Symposia on 'Taking Responsibility Seriously', were organized by Research Fellow Luca d'Ambrosio and held at the University of Nantes and at the Collège de France in Paris, in June 2015, for the presentations of the research. A document of Twelve Propositions was published to resource legal development of responsibility in political, economic and corporate spheres

An Alliance Resourcing Responsible and Sustainable Societies

From 2015 the Forum became organized independently of the [Fondation](#), becoming the Alliance for Responsible and Sustainable Societies, with continued funding support of the [Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer](#). The goal of the Alliance is to place responsibility at the core of transitions to sustainable societies.

In 2016, the Alliance is taking the form of a resource centre. A data base of resources will be accompanied by documentation of the activities of allies across fields of law, environmental governance, education, solidarity economy, ethics, and initiatives for sustainable societies. Resourcing responsibility will be a focus for the production of resources in a range of socio-professional fields. As an example, in Peru an online course is being hosted, in collaboration with allies in Brazil on 'Responsibility, Climate Change and COP'.

Currently the Alliance has 'assembly' members, a steering committee, and is Chaired by Dr Betsan Martin, New Zealand, with Dr Yolanda Ziaka, Greece, as Vice-Chair.

The Alliance continues the visionary dimensions of responsibility with the aspiration of strengthening the reference to public good in public and private organizations, in institutions, systems of governance and in economic spheres.