

# What Does it Mean to be a Global Citizen?

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At The Global Citizens' Initiative we say that a "global citizen is someone who identifies with being part of an emerging world community and whose actions contribute to building this community's values and practices."

To test the validity of this definition we examine its basic assumptions: (a) that there is such a thing as an emerging world community with which people can identify; and (b) that such a community has a nascent set of values and practices.

Historically, human beings have always formed communities based on shared identity. Such identity gets forged in response to a variety of human needs— economic, political, religious and social. As group identities grow stronger, those who hold them organize into communities, articulate their shared values, and build governance structures to support their beliefs.

Today, the forces of global engagement are helping some people identify as global citizens who have a sense of belonging to a world community. This growing global identity in large part is made possible by the forces of modern information, communications and transportation technologies. In increasing ways these technologies are strengthening our ability to connect to the rest of the world—through the Internet; through participation in the global economy; through the ways in which world-wide environmental factors play havoc with our lives; through the empathy we feel when we see pictures of humanitarian disasters in other countries; or through the ease with which we can travel and visit other parts of the world.

Those of us who see ourselves as global citizens are not abandoning other identities, such as allegiances to our countries, ethnicities and political beliefs. These traditional identities give meaning to our lives and will continue to help shape who we are. However, as a result of living in a globalized world, we understand that we have an added layer of responsibility; we also are responsible for being members of a world-wide community of people who share the same global identity that we have.

We may not yet be fully awakened to this new layer of responsibility, but it is there waiting to be grasped. The major challenge that we face in the new millennium is to embrace our global way of being and build a sustainable values-based world community.

What might our community's values be? They are the values that world leaders have been advocating for the past 70 years and include human rights, environmental protection, religious pluralism, gender equity, sustainable worldwide economic growth, poverty alleviation, prevention of conflicts between countries, elimination of weapons of mass destruction, humanitarian assistance and preservation of cultural diversity.

Since World War II, efforts have been undertaken to develop global policies and institutional structures that can support these enduring values. These efforts have been made by international organizations, sovereign states, transnational corporations, international professional associations and others. They have resulted in a growing body of international agreements, treaties, legal statutes and technical standards.

Yet despite these efforts we have a long way to go before there is a global policy and institutional infrastructure that can support the emerging world community and the values it stands for. There are significant gaps of policy in many domains, large questions about how to get countries and organizations to comply with existing policy frameworks, issues of accountability and transparency and, most important of all from a global citizenship perspective, an absence of mechanisms that enable greater citizen

participation in the institutions of global governance.

The Global Citizens' Initiative sees the need for a cadre of citizen leaders who can play activist roles in efforts to build our emerging world community. Such global citizenship activism can take many forms, including advocating, at the local and global level for policy and programmatic solutions that address global problems; participating in the decision-making processes of global governance organizations; adopting and promoting changes in behavior that help protect the earth's environment; contributing to world-wide humanitarian relief efforts; and organizing events that celebrate the diversity in world music and art, culture and spiritual traditions.

Most of us on the path to global citizenship are still somewhere at the beginning of our journey. Our eyes have been opened and our consciousness raised. Instinctively, we feel a connection with others around the world yet we lack the adequate tools, resources, and support to act on our vision. Our ways of thinking and being are still colored by the trapping of old allegiances and ways of seeing things that no longer are as valid as they used to be. There is a longing to pull back the veil that keeps us from more clearly seeing the world as a whole and finding more sustainable ways of connecting with those who share our common humanity.

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