

Global Citizenship

Today, global interdependence is a reality. Whether it's the clothes we wear or the technology we use, our daily lives are affected by what people on the other side of the planet are doing. It's important to know how our neighbours live, and what effect we have on them.

Citizenship is a term that dates back to the Ancient Greeks. Back then, a citizen was someone who played a role in advancing Greek society. Global citizenship is a new term, but it is based on an ancient concept - a global citizen is anyone who works to make the world a better place.

When asked where he came from, the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes replied, "I am a citizen of the world". Thomas Paine, author of *Common Sense*, wrote, "My country is the world. My countrymen are mankind", and Albert Einstein once wrote, "Nationalism is an infantile sickness. It is the measles of the human race." These men, all three of them great thinkers, were hugely aware of the need for global citizenship, and their message is more relevant than ever to us today.

Global citizenship is a moral and ethical disposition which we must use, both as individuals and as a community, to guide our understanding of local and global environments — and our responsibilities within them. We as global citizens should be motivated, by a goal of universal equality and by care for human beings and the world, to take responsibility for the inequality, suffering and conflict in all areas of our global society. Officially, most if not all of the people at our school are British citizens, European citizens, but we are all also unofficial global citizens. Our passports might not say it, but everyone here is part of something bigger – a global community, with global problems that we need to face together.

If any of us have any doubt that we are all global citizens, we need only look at the media coverage of events around the world today being beamed into our homes 24 hours a day and seven days a week. The broadcasts take us as viewers into the hearts of communities all over the world, bringing us face to face with the predicament of our often less fortunate fellow global citizens. But within these sometimes harrowing broadcasts lie the seeds of hope in the face of adversity - provided we recognise, and act upon, our interconnectedness with the whole world.

One of the main forces for global citizenship in our world today is the United Nations, or UN. The United Nations is central to global efforts to solve problems that challenge humanity, not just the citizens of a single country or state. Cooperating in this effort are more than 30 affiliated organisations, known together as the UN system. Day in and day out, the UN and its family of organisations work to promote respect for human rights, protect the environment, fight disease and reduce poverty on a global scale. UN agencies define the standards for safe and efficient air travel and help improve telecommunications and enhance consumer protection. The United Nations leads the international campaigns against drug trafficking and terrorism. Throughout the world, the UN and its agencies assist refugees, set up programmes to clear landmines, help expand food production and lead the fight against AIDS.

The most recent move made by the UN to combat the problems facing our global society has been the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals. These eight goals— which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS

and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015, form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions. They have galvanised unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said of the MDGs:

"We will have time to reach the Millennium Development Goals – worldwide and in most, or even all, individual countries – but only if we break with business as usual.

We cannot win overnight. Success will require sustained action across the entire decade between now and the deadline. It takes time to train the teachers, nurses and engineers; to build the roads, schools and hospitals; to grow the small and large businesses able to create the jobs and income needed. So we must start now. And we must more than double global development assistance over the next few years. Nothing less will help to achieve the Goals."

Kofi Annan's message here is one of encouragement, and an appeal to each and every one of us, as a global citizen, to take responsibility for humanity's problems, not just our own. He is appealing to all global citizens to make the sacrifices necessary to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

We might feel that we, as individuals, have too small an influence to make much of a difference, that we are not important or powerful enough to change anything. But in fact, global citizenship is much less about who we are than about what we do and our outlook on the world.

Global citizenship means, for example, being concerned about the human rights of our fellow human beings. It means being concerned about the fact that, this morning, 150 million children did not go to school, because they have no school to go to and that, tonight, one out of five people will go to bed with an empty stomach.

Being a "global citizen" also means being aware of the fact that our decisions as consumers can sometimes have an important impact on the lives and livelihoods of people in other parts of the world.

It means asking questions about the food we eat and the clothes we buy: Where were they made? Under what conditions? Are the workers getting their fair share of the profits?

We must, in this modern day and age, be particularly aware of the impacts of globalisation – or international integration – that has been happening at an ever-increasing rate over recent years. Our world has experienced globalisation in the areas of trade, finance, communications, and even, to some extent, culture. But we have yet to develop a sense of global identity that matches this new global environment.

This is not to say that local, regional or national forms of identity should be abandoned. But globalisation will only bring peace and shared wealth if, alongside the globalisation of trade and markets, we develop a sense of global solidarity. This is what being a global citizen is about.

The Jamaicans have a saying: "your life is long, but you're careless". This is a very apt description of the world we live in today.

Over the past decades, we have witnessed extraordinary progress in science, technology and medicine. To our eyes, sending someone to the Moon is no big deal anymore, and we are getting used to the idea of living until we are 100 years old.

But we are careless. Careless with this very valuable planet of ours. Our world is technologically advanced, but it seems we have lost our moral compass – we need to think about the consequences of this advancement, for the environment and each other. Through real commitment, strong partnerships and a determination to change the future, we can help create a better life for everyone on the planet.

We must see each other as equals. We must work together as equals. Some of us may have to give something up. You will not see a peaceful world when people are starving.

Global citizenship, in short, means being aware, in everything that we do, of the impact that our actions can and will have on a global scale, and taking responsibility for the consequences.

Even within our own school community, which seems so small next to the UN, and in relation to the rest of the world, there are things that we can do to take responsibility for our own global citizenship. We can help to raise money for areas of our world in which people are suffering, such as Darfur and Pakistan, to raise awareness for the plight of women who face abuse in countries where gender inequality is out of control. We can get involved with Amnesty International, or the Model United Nations, or the Environmental Awareness Group. It doesn't take a lot, just a little of our time as a dedication to the global society of which we are all inextricably a part.