

# Global Citizenship

*"Before you finish eating breakfast this morning, you've depended on half the world."* --  
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Did an alarm clock wake you up this morning? It was probably made in China. If you drank tea for breakfast, it probably came from India via Britain. The shirt you put on this morning might be made of Egyptian cotton, designed in Germany, and manufactured in Israel.

We live in a world that seems much smaller than it did even ten years ago. Travel and communications between far away places is simpler than ever before. People around the world are interconnected in many ways --through culture, politics, economics, technology, and the environment. What do these connections mean in terms of the way we relate to the rest of the world? In this document, you will explore what it means to be a member of a global community and how you can take action as a global citizen.

## What is Global Citizenship?

*"Welcome to the global village."* Not only are you a citizen of your municipality, your province, and your country, but you are also a global citizen.

Communities -- whether they are families, clans, towns, provinces, or nations -- have always passed on to the next generation what it means to be a responsible community member. Now we need to extend our ideas of responsible citizenship to include the world. We are all connected and interdependent citizens with global rights and responsibilities. No matter where we live, we share the Earth and its resources. What happens in one part of the world affects us all.

## Conditions That Affect Us

Many events shape what happens around the world. There are, however, some fairly constant factors. We know, for example, that the quality of life varies greatly from one nation to another. When we understand some of the factors that create these differences, we are in a better position to make decisions about how we can participate in the global community. This is one of the reasons why the United Nations monitors quality of life in different countries. The UN looks at factors such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP, the total wealth or value of goods and services produced in a country), life expectancy, pollution, and education.

Although we often think that people in poorer countries have a lower quality of life, there is much that we, in Canada, can learn from them. At the same time, we enjoy many advantages that would benefit people in other countries, too.

# What It Means to Be a Global Citizen

What are our responsibilities in a world where quality of life varies greatly from one place to another? What are our roles as global citizens?

People have different opinions about what it means to be a global citizen. For some, global citizenship means international trade and investment. Large corporations sell their products around the world, use resources from many parts of the globe, and benefit from trade agreements between nations.

For other people, global citizenship means being responsible for our Earth, its resources, and our fellow citizens. They are concerned, for example, that technology and industry around the world threaten the environment of the Earth as a whole. They see harmful developments, such as global warming and destruction of the rainforest, as a threat to us all. They argue that global citizenship means being active in order to save the world from ecological disaster.

Still others see global citizenship as the responsibility to ensure that all peoples of the world can live in peace, enjoying an adequate quality of life. The people involved with Oxfam, an international relief agency working to put an end to worldwide poverty, have written a description of what it means to be a global citizen from their perspective.

Oxfam sees the Global Citizen as someone who:

- is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen
- respects and values diversity
- has an understanding of how the world works
- is outraged by social injustice
- participates in the community at a range of levels, from the local to the global
- is willing to act to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place
- takes responsibility for their actions.

There are also people who believe that, as global citizens, we have the responsibility to protect the human rights of people around the world. In 1960, British lawyer Peter Benenson read about two Portuguese students who were imprisoned. The students had been arrested and sentenced to seven years in jail for publicly raising their glasses in a toast to freedom. Benenson was deeply concerned that the basic rights of these two students were violated. He started a letter-writing campaign to put pressure on the Portuguese government to release the students. His efforts were the beginning of a human rights organization called Amnesty International.

Amnesty International has identified thousands of other cases of human rights abuses around the world. In many instances, people have been imprisoned, or even tortured and killed, for their opposition to parties in power. Amnesty International is devoted to defending people whose freedom of expression has been taken away. It works to free prisoners of conscience, people who have been imprisoned for their beliefs. Its activities range from letter writing to public demonstrations, from human rights education to fundraising concerts, from individual appeals on a particular case to global campaigns on a specific issue.

## **David Suzuki:** Environmental Activist, Scientist, Broadcaster



David Suzuki might be considered a model global citizen. As a leading environmentalist, he is the bearer of news -- both good and bad. The bad news is that the Earth's resources are finite. They will run out if we continue to use them at the current rate. The good news is that we still have time to alter our ways and become more environmentally responsible. Suzuki works to educate people about the threats to our environment and to inspire them to do something about it.

A third-generation Canadian of Japanese descent, Suzuki was born in Vancouver in 1936. During World War II, his family was forced to live in a Japanese internment camp established by the Canadian government. The camp was located in a deserted mining town in the Slocan Valley amidst British Columbia's Rocky Mountains, and it was while living there that Suzuki discovered his love of nature and wildlife.

After earning a Ph.D. in zoology, Suzuki went on to explore the impact of science on nature and society. He then turned his talents to broadcasting and writing for the general public. Well-known as the host of the long running CBC television science series "The Nature of Things," he became a leading spokesperson on environmental issues.

Suzuki and his wife, Dr. Tara Cullis, have created the David Suzuki Foundation, to study the environment. The Foundation aims to find solutions to environmental problems by educating the public and supporting change in the ways people interact with the environment. Suzuki dedicates himself to sounding the alarm about environmental hazards such as global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer, and the disappearance of plant and animal species. David Suzuki has received UNESCO's Kalinga Prize for the popularization of science, the United Nations Environment Medal, and the Global 500 Award for Environmental Achievement.

## **Other Model Global Citizens**

**Eva Olsson** - Holocaust survivor who shares her life story and inspires us to not be bystanders when bullying occurs (messages also include the importance of tolerance, respect, and compassion...)

**Mother Teresa** - Devoted her life to helping the poorest people (sick and destitute) in Calcutta India (one of the kindest people in the world).

**Mahatma Gandhi** - Devoted life to preaching for peace and tolerance (never resorted to violence), helped India gain independence from Britain

**Terry Fox** - Devoted life to fundraising for cancer and increasing awareness of the disease with the Marathon of Hope

**Nelson Mandela** - Devoted to winning equal rights for Black people in South Africa (voting, education...)

**Martin Luther King Jr.** - A symbol for the Black-American struggle for equality and an end to segregation in the U.S.; arrested several times; famous for his speech "I have a dream"; youngest person to ever win the Nobel Peace prize; organized peaceful protests in order to end discriminatory laws; assassinated March 28, 1968; third Monday every January is a national holiday in his honour.