

A Global Contract: The Case for World Citizenship

By [Greg Guma](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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By Garry Davis and Greg Guma

Bold proposals to prevent war and enlarge the scope of human freedom have been advanced for centuries. Even before the industrial revolution transformed aggression from a regional tragedy into a global threat, philosophers and politicians began to look and think beyond the borders of their nations.

For the French revolutionist Jean Baptiste du Val-De-Grace, the answer, in 1792, was a World Republic that would place human rights above the rights of individual states. All peoples would have cultural autonomy, he imagined. Three years later, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant proposed a more modest plan: a confederation of nations. Urging world citizenship and freedom of movement, Kant hoped that a “covenant of peace” would ultimately make national conflict obsolete.

Throughout the next hundred years, diplomats and statesmen struggled with formulas for transnational order. Finally, in 1899, on the initiative of Czar Nicholas, an agreement – The Hague Treaty – was reached between 24 states. Recognizing that modern warfare and weapons posed a threat to all humanity, these nation-states pledged at least to attempt settling their differences through “pacific methods” rather than force and violence.

Ten million people died during World War I anyway.

The massive violence of that conflict was a sign that few nations could ignore. In the aftermath, treaties outlawing war were signed, and the League of Nations was established. Like confederal plans before it, however, the League was complex and largely ineffective, both burdened with responsibilities and deprived on real authority. Despite human rights declarations dating from 1789 in France, the League still represented only states, with no allusion in its charter to the sovereignty of ordinary people much less humanity. Within four years after its creation, it inevitably began to split into hostile alliances.

During the next World War, at least 60 million people died, more than half of them civilians, and in 1945 the “nuclear age” crashed into existence when atomic bombs were dropped on two Japanese cities. The very nature of war had become global. The survival of humanity was now at stake. The nation-state war game, however, continued unabated. By this time, the concept of world government could no longer be shrugged off as some utopian novelty. The possibility of nuclear warfare made the choice all too clear: global order or oblivion. But what kind of order?

The United Nations, launched within that same fateful year, 1945, was more like a forum than a government. It could not legislate on worldwide problems, nor enforce its views

through any means but military action. Its members, all nation-states, still remained absolutely sovereign, free to make treaties or declare war without a nod to the UN.

National citizenship had become a collective suicide pact.

Over the next four decades, whenever UN decisions or Charter provisions stood in the way of some “national” desire, they were routinely ignored. As the Cold War gave birth to the nuclear arms race, as more than 50 armed conflicts between nations “great” and “small” created millions more victims, it became all too clear that this latest attempt to create peace through a confederation of nation-states was no more than a sterile exercise in futility. War, deprivation and torture gave grim daily testimony to the fact that the UN was virtually powerless to protect and promote peace or human rights. Could it be any other way? Was it even possible for sovereign nations to surrender the right to “defend” themselves through war?

Writing as the United National Charter was being designed in 1945, Emory Reves provided an answer: war was avoidable only if some “higher” legal order was imposed. In *Anatomy of Peace*, he explained:

“The real cause of war has always been the same. They have occurred with a mathematical regularity of a natural law at clearly determined moments as a result of clearly definable conditions... 1. Wars between groups of men forming social units always take place when these units – tribes, dynasties, churches, cities, nations – exercise unrestricted sovereign power. 2. Wars between social units cease the moment sovereign power is transferred from them to a larger or higher unit...In other words, wars always ceased when a higher unit established its own sovereignty, absorbing the sovereignty of the conflicting smaller social units.”

So long as the nation-state’s self-imposed amnesia persists, wars are inevitable. Like previous attempts to “rationalize” conflict without a fundamental transfer of sovereign power, the UN can only succeed in isolated cases, when armed conflict no longer serves the selfish interest of the belligerents. Mainly, it is a hostage, politically and financially, of the system it is expected to transform.

But if the confederal approach is not the form of “higher authority” that can break nationalism’s spell, moving us to a workable and democratic world order, what is?

Responsible Global Citizenship

We live in a geocentric world of nation-states, preoccupied mainly by “national” problems of the economy, society and politics. No matter where we live, for most of us the “nation” is the center of our political universe – the immovable point around which revolve other nations and, supposedly, the rest of the world.

Our attachment to our nation is not merely legal; it is profoundly emotional. Yet when nations deal with other nations, these attachments are given no weight. In the usual “international” context, the individual is nowhere to be found. Still, all nations claim to represent the very people they so often ignore. Ironically, most nations actually claim to derive their very legitimacy from their citizens. But if individuals, the people themselves, are truly the source of each nation’s authority, it follows that humanity as a whole rather than any nation is the highest source of authority.

The accumulated power of nation-states does not make them the only legitimate participants in global decision-making. In a world threatened by war and injustice, “responsible citizenship” can only mean a powerful assertion of humanity’s ultimate sovereignty. As Thomas Paine explained it, “individual human beings, each in his or her own personal and sovereign right, enter into a compact with each other to produce any government.”

For a higher authority to come into being, therefore, a new compact is needed, a global civic contract that transcends the national paradigm. The good news is that such a contract already exists, both naturally and legally.

The World Government of World Citizens, which was established in 1953, is both an extension of the individual and an expression of humanity as a whole. It grows from your sovereignty and mine as world citizens, and from our commitment to each other’s protection and survival. It is a horizontal network based on natural rights and the human rights affirmed by both national constitutions and international agreements like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also “vertical” as the political expression of a world community by those who recognize only the geographic limits of the planet itself.

In 1945, while observing delegates at the founding of the UN in San Francisco, E.B. White wrote: “Whether we wish it or not, we may soon have to make a clear choice between the special nation to which we pledge our allegiance and the broad humanity of which we are born a part.” World Citizens are those who make the latter choice.

In a more practical sense, World Government is an outgrowth of the world citizenship movement that began in the late 1940s. As the start, it was simply a tool, a way to embody the transnational civic identity that was being adopted by the many people who registered as world citizens beginning in 1949. Gradually, however, it became more: an embryonic structure for the evolution of a global civism. Once its administrative arm, the World Service Authority, was established in 1954, the first full phase of work began. The WSA began identifying people from all corners of the planetary community, issuing documents to those who pledged allegiance to this global government.

In the years since that beginning, WSA and World Government have aimed to overcome the psychological barriers imposed by the polarized, dualistic nation-state system. In one sense, its very existence and the documents used by its citizens expose the anti-democratic core of most nation-states. But for many people – refugees and other outcasts of the system – its value is more basic. For them, World Government means global political asylum.

Elements of various religious teachings and democratic theories converge in the conceptual framework of World Government. It represents a holistic way of thinking about oneself and the planet. The deeper one goes, the more profound the potential transformation can be.

Today our world remains deafened by the roar of chaos and conflicting loyalties. But once the possibility of an alternative can be envisioned, it becomes clear that the primary causes of the chaos are the nation-states themselves. National governments cannot solve our problems. They are the problem.

How World Citizenship Works

It does not demand the surrender of any freedom, the renouncing of “national” citizenship,

or any disloyalty whatsoever to the nation of one's birth. Rather, world citizenship replaces the anachronistic political system that emerged in the 18th century with a global contract that recognizes the dynamic interdependence of our time.

We are already linked across artificial frontiers; neither mass communication, science, commerce nor ecology recognizes national borders. In these areas and more, we already have one world. All types of barriers are crumbling. World Government makes our politics more consistent with reality.

As it has evolved, the World Government of World Citizens has responded to the needs of its citizens not only by issuing documents such as birth and marriage certificates, visas and passports. It has also begun to establish other basic organs of government: study commissions, a court, political party, police force and monetary system. The World Court of Human Rights, for example, was established in France by a General assembly of World Citizen in 1972. A provisional statute for the court was subsequently drafted, and still later the World Judicial Commission was set up to handle preliminary complaints filed by world citizens. The International Court of the Hague, we discovered, only handled cases between sovereign states, and only if both parties agree to the litigation. The UN Commission on Human Rights is powerless to help individuals when their freedom and the arbitrary will of a nation-state collide.

World citizens, whose exercise of human rights can contravene "national laws," need a new kind of court, one both grounded on the legal defense of global rights and accessible to all. As the first Chief Justice of the World Court, Dr. Luis Kutner explained upon accepting the post, "The international community has come to realize that human rights are not an issue to be left solely to the national jurisdiction of individual states. These rights obviously need protection at a higher level within the framework of international law."

Over the years, a variety of study commissions have also been formed to deal with specific global problems. Experts, all advocates of a just and democratic world order, have been recruited to pursue research in areas such as health, space, culture, economics, women, education, forestry, political asylum, communication and cybernetics.

Unlike most governments, which are heavily in debt, World Government is self-financing. Citizens who request services pay modest fees to cover the operating expenses. The World Refugee Fund and World Citizens Legal Fund have assisted many refugees, displaced persons and political prisoners, and helped to finance legal cases for world citizens whose rights have been violated, or who face prosecution under national laws.

The World Passport remains the most widely used document, a practical symbol and a useful tool for travelers. Contributors to the Refugee Fund have made it possible to issue passports for free to many refugees and war victims, half of them women and children.

In essence, World Government is a sustainable and self-sufficient community of sovereign individuals who have given their prime allegiance to an emerging body of "common world law," including various human rights covenants, the Stockholm Environmental Declaration and the Nuremberg Principles. It is neither a parallel government nor a supra-national federation. It is a meta-government of individual human beings.

Garry Davis founded the world citizen movement in 1948. Greg Guma and Davis co-authored two books, including these excerpts from Passport to Freedom: A Guide for World

Citizens. A memorial service for Davis will be held at Burlington City Arts in Burlington, Vermont on January 5, 2014 at 3 p.m.

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