

## **An Invitation to Build A Better World**

Ron Moffatt, 2007 President

NAFSA: Association of International Educators

I enjoy the good fortune of spending most days helping students cross borders to learn about the world beyond their comfort zones, and in the process, seek better ways to guide them through transformative journeys that will prepare them to shape a more just, peaceful and sustainable global future. The search often takes the form of questions:

- What kind of knowledge, skills and perspectives must students acquire to succeed in a global civil society that will only grow increasingly interconnected and cross-cultural; and what steps are we taking to insure their acquisition?
- How can we create more collaborative synergies, both in and out of the classroom, that will optimize global learning and facilitate the acquisition of global competencies?
- What kind of innovative partnerships can we build that will facilitate student mobility in ways that will more effectively prepare global citizens engaged in addressing global issues?
- As emerging technologies impact our lives by further shrinking time and space, what kind of new learning communities can we create to integrate e-learning processes with global competency outcomes?

Because we live in a world so inextricably connected to the relentless advance of globalization, change is our constant companion, and coping with change becomes our collective challenge. As those changes grow increasingly interconnected across cultures, they become increasingly confounding, and the issues that ensue can assume staggering proportions that soon boggle the mind, jar the soul, and turn our hearts to stone. And from an ever growing menu of global issues that imperil our collective future, three "synapse rattlers" top my richter scale of moral conundrums that we, as cohabitants of our Earth community, can no longer afford to avoid:

First, what hope for justice can we find in a world where half our human family, over three billion people, live on less than two dollars a day, and half of those live on less than \$1 a day? What does justice mean when the combined wealth of the world's 712 billionaires exceeds the combined gross domestic product of the world's 150 poorest countries? Imagine a world where 100 families have 100 bags of rice to share for their survival - in terms of global economic distribution in 2006, two families got to share 50 bags while 50 families got to share one bag. Now imagine what a more just world might look like and what path we need to take to get there.

Second, what hope for peace can we find in a world where global military spending exceeds \$1.2 trillion annually? What does peace mean when the world's largest arms dealer accounts for more than half of that amount by operating 702 bases in 131 countries, plus another 6,000+ installations in a land called home? Imagine a world where just one day of US military spending could provide 60,000 Fulbright fellowships a year, 10 times the current number. One day in 2006 = \$1.5 billion. Now imagine what a more non-violent world might look like and what path we need to take to get there!

And third, what hope for sustainability can we find in a world where the race to the bottom is driven by economic policies that champion unlimited growth, induce hyper consumption, generate obscene waste, and accelerate environmental devastation? What does sustainability mean when the triumph of entrenched greed over empirical truth allows the world's most powerful politicians to debunk global warming in favor of energy policies that ensure the advent of Apocalypse now? Imagine a world where everyone consumed as much as the average American in 2006; we would need three additional Earth size planets to supply the necessary resources and accommodate the residual wastes. Now imagine what a less materialistic, more sustainable world might look like and what path we need to take to get there!

These are the conundrums that frame the three moral imperatives of our times – reducing economic disparities, resolving conflicts non-violently, and adopting sustainable life-styles - and how well we respond as a global community to these challenges in the next five-to-ten years could change the future of our planet more profoundly than any other period in history.

The hopeful promise of such a global community is its capacity to connect people and institutions in collaborations that transcend the myopic legacies of competing forces advancing short-term self-interests. Imagine for a moment, a transnational civil society that prepares and inspires a whole new generation of global citizens who look at global issues systemically and envision new paradigms that foster synergistic and holistic approaches to creating sustainable environments and human security for all.

As international educators shaping our global future, we share a compelling responsibility and a unique power to envision possibilities commensurate with the challenges we face. We must act now to foster and connect learning communities that will create a more just, compassionate and sustainable world for all. We must prepare tomorrow's leaders to create a global civil society wherein perspectives are exchanged in pursuit of understanding, aspirations are transformed into deeds that enrich the human spirit, borders become invisible, nations become people, common ground is nurtured, partnerships flourish and goodwill prevails.

If and when we should ever find such hope, holding on to it and acting on it will mean the stone in our breast dissolves, and we can take heart once more.

I recently rediscovered the power of such hope. The gift came in the form of a lesson taught by a kind and scholarly couple who befriended me and showed me what true heart space is capable of achieving. I am forever grateful to Peter and Grace Wang for providing so many wise answers to my core questions and for helping me see where I must invest my energies. The stone dissolved when I took the first step. Their vision of poverty alleviation through education has been a profound source of inspiration for me personally, and their boundless commitment to improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of people has driven much of my professional focus for the past two years.

The Wang Foundation offers a way forward and we're just getting started. Why not join the journey and build a better world?