

**Towards A World of Harmony, Dialogue of Civilisations and Globalisation for the  
Common Good**

By

Kamran Mofid PhD (ECON)\*

A revised version of a Paper presented at:

“Harmonization of international relations and dialogue of civilizations”

International Forum

Co-sponsored by World Public Forum, Dialogue of Civilizations and China

Foundation for International Studies

July 11-13, 2010

Beijing, China

"Greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come".

**-victor Hugo**

**Introduction**

Can ideas change the world? The history of humanity is the history of ideas. We need good ideas to heal our troubled world, and rise to the challenges of the economic globalisation. The problems we're facing could not be greater. Over the next 40 years, we will witness the largest and fastest transformation that has occurred in the history of humanity, whether we like it or not. The population will increase by one-third and our ecosystems decline by 60%. What we need is good ideas. In this regard, we just may be in luck, because we are higher primates, capable of dazzlingly complex thought. However, we're not individuals; we're a species, at our best when we work together for the common good. Our collective intelligence is both extraordinary and infinite. We must unite; have dialogue of ideas, peoples, civilisations, philosophies and initiatives, if we truly wish to change the world for better.

"And Now the Good News": in this paper I wish to highlight three of these good ideas, whose time has come. The paper briefly summerises the tenets of the idea of a Harmonious World as proposed by China. It will then compare them with those of the Dialogue of Civilisations (as defined by the World Public Forum) and the Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative (as defined by the present author). The paper will then proposes that by bringing the Harmonious World, Dialogue of Civilisations and Globalisation for the Common Good together, a perfect path will be created for the realisation of a world of justice, peace and prosperity for all.

**I. A Bird's-eye Introduction to Harmonious World**

On April 22, 2005, at the Summit of Asian and African Leaders in Jakarta, Indonesia, Chinese President Hu Jintao proposed that Asian and African countries should, “Promote friendly co-existence of various different civilizations, equal conversation, development and prosperity and jointly to build up a harmonious world.” It was the first time the term “harmonious world” presented to international community. Then, on July 1, 2005, President Hu Jintao visited Russia; “harmonious world” was written into the “Joint Declaration of China and Russia On the International Order in 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” It was the first time the “harmonious world” was recognized by two nations

as common understanding, and gained highly political significance in international affairs. Furthermore, on September 15, 2005, President Hu Jintao made a speech at the UN summit in New York, and proposed, “to strive hard to establish a lasting peace and a joint prosperous harmonious world”. To this effect, China proposes politically’ to uphold multilateralism and realize joint security; economically’ to uphold mutual benefit cooperation and realize joint prosperity; culturally’ to uphold the spirit of tolerance and jointly establish a harmonious world; and institutionally, to uphold active and prudent guidelines and promote the UN reform.

The proposal of “harmonious world” represents the favourable view of world situation by the Chinese leadership. Just like President Hu comments, “Despite the regional conflicts, poverty and non-conventional security risks, peace, development and cooperation are still main strands of the times.” The proposal reflects Chinese new approach towards international affairs. China insists on multilateralism, joint security, joint prosperity, and jointly establishing harmonious world and accordingly emphasizes the role of the UN in international affairs. The proposal also indicates that China may change from a passive participant to an active actor and may promote Chinese culture which is notion of harmony in the world affairs. China will insist on peaceful development and is a responsible country in the world. The idea of “harmonious world” as Chinese new conception of world order is increasingly gaining ascendancy around world.

Certainly, the notion of “harmony” as substance is not new. Indeed, it has its deep root in traditional Chinese philosophies, either Confucianism or Taoism or others. For instance, Confucius said, “A gentleman seeks harmony but keep with its own distinctiveness” (*he er bu tong*), and “Never do to other persons what you would not like them to do to you” (*ji suo bu yu, wu shi yu ren*). You Zi (one student of Confucius’s) also noted, “In conducting the rites, seeking harmony is the most valuable principle.” Moreover, Taoists advocated the integration of Man and Heaven (*tian ren he yi*). They viewed the sphere of man and nature was inextricably interwoven to form an unbroken continuum. The Way of Man (*ren dao*) was ultimately predicated on the Way of Heaven (*tian dao*). In a word, the notion of Great Harmony (*da tong*) had a long history in China. Yet, despite its traditional Chinese philosophical origin, the modern concept of “harmonious world” is an innovation and the new development to the traditional notion of harmony.

The modern concept of harmonious world is built upon fundamental principles of sovereignty, equality, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The concept is, on the one hand, based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence (FPPC), which includes mutual respect, sovereign and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. In short, “harmonious world” seeks not only mutual peaceful coexistence but also cooperation and joint prosperity and development through a harmonious way. Where there is a dispute or a conflict, it should be settled through harmonious means rather than the forces, through multilateral mechanism rather than unilateral way. Substantively, the world should pay much attention to distributive fairness, and make everyone to be able to enjoy the fruits of development. “Harmonious world” further promotes conversation between different civilizations and respect each other rather than conflict each other.

In all, Chinese notions such as *gong cun* (co-existence), *gong sheng* (co-development), *he er bu tong* (seeking harmony but keeping with its own distinctiveness), or *qiu tong cun yi* (seeking what in common, leaving aside what in difference) and others have their universal values. These notions provide rich resources of thinking to deal with international affairs. The concept of harmonious world is originated from those notions and also an innovation to them. It will produce an enduring interpretive power in the world.

## **II. World Public Forum, Dialogue of Civilisation: A Bird's-eye Introduction**

In November 1998, the General Assembly of the United Nations in a unanimous resolution proclaimed 2001 as the "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations". In doing so the assembly rejected the concept of a "Clash of Civilizations" which is based on the notion that inter-civilizational understanding is impossible. The General Assembly expressed its firm determination to facilitate just such a dialogue, which is aimed at increasing mutual understanding and tolerance among peoples of different cultural backgrounds, through an active exchange of ideas, visions and aspirations.

### **In its declaration, UNESCO eloquently highlights the importance of the dialogue of civilisations:**

“In a world where no country is entirely homogenous, demands for recognition of different ethnicities, religions, languages and values are increasingly arising. There is an urgency of developing a sense of respect for the Other that will provide a basis for mutual understanding, friendship and learning. Cultural diversity and heritage are vectors of identity and tools for reconciliation.

Based on UNESCO's Constitution and the various resolutions adopted by the Executive Board and General Conference, the promotion of dialogue in the service of peace – in order to build “peace in the minds of men” – is one of the main themes of UNESCO's mission. Globalization and the emergence of new contemporary challenges and threats to humankind make the need for dialogue among peoples ever more topical.

A principal objective of a dialogue is to bridge the gap in knowledge about other civilizations, cultures and societies, to lay the foundations for dialogue based on universally shared values and to undertake concrete activities, inspired and driven by dialogue, especially in the areas of education, cultural diversity and heritage, the sciences and communication and media”.

What are the key issues that dialogue of civilisations attempts to address:

Why is it necessary to engage in a Dialogue of Civilizations? What can we learn from past dialogues? What effect could an increased dialogue have on the substance and process of international relations? In which ways does multicultural society contribute to - or obstruct - dialogue among civilizations? What are the contributions of the dialogue of civilisations to a better understanding of the globalisation era? Could there be any such thing as a global ethos, a common overarching human value system that transcends cultural and civilizational differences? These questions and more are the issues of concern since its inauguration in 2001.

The World Public Forum, Dialogue of Civilizations (WPFDC), has been at the forefront of organisations, promoting a global dialogue, mutual respect and a harmonious world order. Its Mission Statement makes this very clear:

“The World Public Forum (WPF) «Dialogue of Civilizations» is a deliberative-consultative body that unites into single network various international and national nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), representatives of regional public and national institutions, members of civil society organizations and faith-based groups, representatives of intellectual, cultural, spiritual, business and media spheres from different countries, representatives of various civilizations and cultural traditions, and individuals who share the principles of mutual openness, accessibility and respect, which form the basis of the contemporary dialogue of civilizations.

The main goals of the Forum are to unite the efforts of the world community to protect spiritual and cultural values of humankind, and to organize space for constructive dialogue among the major civilizations of the modern world. The work of the Forum is aimed at defining, developing and spreading dialogue standards, and introducing the spirit of cooperation and understanding into everyday life.

The World Public Forum is aimed at creating effective and democratic instruments to solve global problems and implement evolutionary changes in the structure of modern society. Implementation of the «Dialogue of Civilizations» program is closely connected with interconfessional dialogue that brings together representatives of world religions to face current global challenges of extremism and terrorism, the side-effect of globalization. Among the Forum’s tasks are reaching a consensus as the state of consistent co-existence of different ideas and combining liberal standards and humanitarian values”.

The history of the World Public Forum dates back to 2002 when civil society representatives from Russia, India and Greece organized the International Program «Dialogue of Civilizations». WPF «Dialogue of Civilizations» has become a practical realization of the UNGA resolution «Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations» accepted on November 9th, 2001, on the initiative of former President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Mohammad Khatami.

The «Dialogue of Civilizations» program started on May 19th, 2002, at the Cathedral Square of the Moscow Kremlin. In July of the same year the «Kronstadt Initiative» was adopted at a conference in St. Petersburg. The initiative calls the Russian and international community to create and regularly convene the World Public Forum «Dialogue of Civilizations» with the aim of strengthening peace and international security.

The first annual session of the Forum took place in September 2003 in the Greek island of Rhodes. It was held amid a complicated international situation and thus confirmed the necessity for a broad international discussion devoted to reaching mutual understanding among representatives of different civilizations. In 2003 the Rhodes Forum became the most representative among public forums, and since then it has been held annually.

At the first session of the Forum the delegates accepted the Rhodes declaration «Dialogue of civilizations for a humane order." The Declaration called for continued discussion on the destiny of mankind and declared the goal to make the Forum a dynamic force in the international arena: «So much damage has already been done to the human system, and it is being backed by so much military power that this state of affairs cannot be transformed instantly. We have first to mediate, seek peaceful, non-violent and orderly solutions, which will fire the imaginations of vast society of people worldwide, to direct a trend towards a humane future for all».

Joint efforts of the dialogue advocates allowed the first session of the World Public Forum «Dialogue of civilizations» to become a high-profile event in the international community. The «Rhodes declaration» accepted by the participants of the conference has become a milestone in organizing an international network of those who support the dialogue of civilizations and laid the foundation for their further cooperation.

Drawing upon its unique characteristic rooted in dialogue and engagement, the WPFDC, in cooperation with many global partners, has organized a series of workshops, conferences and other events that has and will contribute to the Dialogue among Civilizations, with particular emphasis on a scientific exploration of the dialogue itself.

Reflecting the global perspective of the WPFDC, the conferences and workshops have brought together persons from diverse cultural backgrounds for in-depth discussions aimed at developing a better understanding of what is necessary to realize a meaningful dialogue among civilizations.

Every autumn since 2003 the ancient Greek island of Rhodes hosts a session of the World Public Forum «Dialogue of Civilizations» called the Rhodes Forum that brings together public figures and statesmen, academics, religious figures and representatives of the arts, mass media and business spheres from all over the world. The sessions of the WPF «Dialogue of Civilizations» proved the urgency and efficacy of the Forum by bringing the focus of world public opinion to the problems of intercultural dialogue and the need to work out instruments to make interaction among cultures and civilizations possible. The results achieved by the Forum give a hope for further harmonization of international relations and strengthening of stability in the world.

As well as the annual Rhodes Forum, the WPFDC in cooperation with local partners has also held many other forums, meetings and workshops in other parts of the world, including Europe, North and Latin Americas, Middle East, India and China, to name but a few, furthering the positive outcome of dialogue, engagement and cooperation, facilitating the possibilities of creating a harmonious world.

### **III. The Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative (GCGI): A Bird's-eye Introduction**

In order to achieve the noble goals and objectives of the “Harmonious World” and the “Dialogue of Civilisations” as highlighted and noted above, we submit that, it is greatly desired that we should have a globalisation for the common good, giving us a compassionate world of mutual respect, dialogue, peace, justice and harmony.

## **GCGI- A Summary**

It is amazing to me that nearly ten years have gone by so quickly. What began as a simple idea to share the practical wisdom of the common good, dialogue, generosity, kindness, and more has blossomed into an internationally recognized nonprofit organization that has become the leading resource “inspiring people to do great things for the common good”.

From the very beginning, I knew that we will succeed, if we can reach-out to many around the world and be an all volunteer network of individuals, while approaching our growth organically and focusing on our vision and mission.

As you might imagine, in the initial days when we began sharing our vision of doing things for the common good, we were met with a great deal of skepticism, apprehension, and thankfully, some warm embraces and love too. We were energized by all of those early experiences and continued to find ways to build ideas, programmes and initiatives around our main message and theme of Globalisation for the Common Good.

Perhaps our greatest accomplishment has been our ability to bring Globalisation for the Common Good into the common vocabulary and awareness of a greater population along with initiating the necessary discussion as to its meaning and potential in our personal and collective lives.

Over the past nine years, The Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative has become a global family of friends, a place of hope, kindness, generosity, harmony, dialogue and the common good. We have reached this level of success and recognition because of you and are grateful every day for your support whether as direct volunteers, occasional admirers, through your inspirational ideas and sponsorship of our conferences and more. Mostly, we are humbled by your courage to be the example and inspire us for what we are and what we do.

The Globalization for the Common Good Initiative (GCGI) first came into being at an international conference held in Oxford, United Kingdom in 2002. An extraordinarily diverse group of scholars, academics, policy experts, entrepreneurs, and activists, from multiple nations and faiths came together at that time to implement our vision to rekindle the human spirit in order to make globalization compassionate. We recognized the multitude of crises faced by humanity and the need to provide a multi-cultural/multi-ethnic and inter-faith framework to address the global issues raised by globalization- a framework to both analyze the problems and to propose solutions. Ever since, these annual conferences have been held in many countries on different continents providing a gathering place for those committed to our vision to build community, encourage dialogue and openness, while developing rewarding and fruitful relationships.

In our work and research, since the early days of 2002, we have offered a vision that positions the quest for economic and social justice, peace and ecological sustainability, ethical and corporate social responsibility within the framework of a spiritual consciousness grounded in the practice of open-heartedness, generosity, and caring for others. The GCGI concept is inclusive, mindful of environment and the

human connection to nature. Our vision encourages us to believe that real, viable, sustainable, ethical, and profitable capitalism is possible. What is needed to realize our vision is a more inclusive holistic view of “the bottom line.” Success needs to be redefined in a manner that leads to dramatic transformation of people and societies spiritually, economically, socially, and environmentally, if we desire to pass on a better world to our children and grand-children.

We combine empirical, theoretical and applied research with sustained engagement at international, regional, national and local levels to analyse many different facets of globalisation and the common good, empowering us to seek and suggest humane solutions to the challenges of globalisation. We aim for an enabling environment for international research excellence involving diverse and critical approaches.

We propose a comprehensive examination of the major attempts to integrate economics with ethics and spirituality, along with an exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of these activities. Our central focus is on solutions to the global economic crisis. In considering the need for bold economic initiatives, we will keep in mind the deeper questions that rarely find their way into political debate or public discourse. We explore the emerging economic issues as well matters that are deeply ethical and spiritual: What is the source of true happiness and well-being? What is the good life? What is the purpose of economic life? What does it mean to be a human being living on a spaceship with finite resources?

These questions and more need to be reflected upon, debated and ultimately be answered and put into policy formation, guiding us to a more humane globalisation, enabling us all to live a fulfilling life, in peace and harmony.

GCGI is now recognised as an initiative that has succeeded in establishing a large, vigorous, interdisciplinary, inter-faith and spiritual team of researchers to focus on issues of globalisation, the common good and other related subjects. The expertise of those who have supported the GCGI includes economics, business studies, political science, international relations, history, philosophy, sociology, social anthropology, psychology, media studies, geography, environmental studies, mathematics, physics, chemistry, education, development studies, peace and conflict resolution, law, ethics and theology.

It should be noted that, given the GCGI inclusive and pluralistic orientation, the Initiative neither emphasises nor excludes the perspective of any particular World Religion or spiritual point of view and it endorses no specific political party or political affiliation.

In conclusion, since its establishment at a major Conference in Oxford in 2002, the GCGI International Conference Series has become an annual event growing as it has traveled across the globe through Saint Petersburg (2003), Dubai(2004), Kenya(2005), Honolulu(2006), and Istanbul(2007). The 2008 conference was held at Trinity College, University of Melbourne, and the 2009 conference was hosted at Loyola University, Chicago, whilst the 2010 conference was hosted at the California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, California.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference of the GCGI will be hosted at Bibliotheca Alexandria during 12-16, June 2011, with the main theme of "**Globalisation for the Common Good and the Dialogue of Civilisations: Building Peace, Justice, and Prosperity Together**".

This major global conference is being Co-convened by Ms. Heba El-Rafey, Director, Dialogue Forum, Bibliotheca Alexandria and I.

In these times characterized by the spread of violence, terrorism, wars and xenophobia, the commitment to dialogue among civilisations is a welcome antidote to the looming clash of civilisations and to various forms of hegemonic domination and cultural standardization. The place of civilisations in the contemporary globalised world has become increasingly a matter of sociopolitical and economic debate in this era of globalisation. Civilisations are, in fact, a major component of human development. Indeed, the history of humankind can be thought of as the unfolding of interactions and exchanges among civilizations.

The question of the scope and potential of dialogue among cultures and civilisations is achieving unprecedented significance, especially in the present international context. More than ever before, dialogue poses a fundamental challenge and must be based on the unity of humankind and commonly shared values, the recognition of the world's cultural diversity and the equal dignity of each civilisation, culture and individual. Why is it necessary to engage in a Dialogue of Civilisations? What can we learn from past dialogues? What effect could an increased dialogue have on the substance and process of international relations? Could there be any such thing as a global ethos, a common overarching human value system, a globalisation for the common good that transcends cultural and civilisational differences, directing us towards a world of harmony?

At the dawn of the third millennium, dialogue of civilisations is confronted by many challenges, particularly the challenge of dialogue between peoples from the Islamic, European, Asian and American civilizations, to name but a few. A further serious challenge is fear of the other, or more aptly the fear of Muslims or what is known today as Islamophobia. We need also to face up to the main cultural challenges of modern times in order to achieve positive results that would give humanity a chance to live in peace, safety, prosperity and harmony.

All peoples of the world, including Arab and Muslim people, must combine their efforts in order to face up to the tough challenges born out of globalisation. Muslims have to immediately close ranks with the West in a fruitful and efficient intellectual and cultural alliance. Through this alliance, they will be able to draw up reference criteria for dealing with one another, provide correct information about Islamic concepts, precepts and teachings that Muslims apply in their daily life not only as a matter of faith, but as the set of unwavering ethics adhered to by all Muslim communities wherever they maybe.

By bringing the Harmonious World, Dialogue of Civilisations and Globalisation for the Common Good together, we can become a bridge of reconciliation, hope and harmony, bringing down the walls of hatred, fear, selfishness, greed, individualism

and poverty that separate us from dialogue and understanding. Good dialogue needs good globalisation and vice versa.

**Notes:** For further reading please see:

1- The speech made by President Hu Jintao at the UN Summit on 60 anniversary of the United Nations, September 15, 2006, New York, USA.

2-Nie Jianqiang, “Towards a World of Harmony: A Historical Chinese Conception of the World Order”, in [www.nus.edu.sg](http://www.nus.edu.sg). Nie Jianqiang has written extensively on the concept of the Harmonious World, and my own observations in this paper on this topic rely on his insight.

3-World Public Forum, “Dialogue of Civilizations” website: <http://www.wpfdc.org/>

4- “Dialogue among civilisations”, UNESCO website  
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/>

5-“Dialogue among civilisations”, United Nations University website:  
<http://www.unu.edu/dialogue/>

6- Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative website:  
[www.globalisationforthecommongood.info](http://www.globalisationforthecommongood.info)  
[www.gcgi.info](http://www.gcgi.info)

**\*Kamran Mofid** is the Founder of the Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative (Oxford, 2002) and Co- founder/Editor, Journal of Globalisation for the Common Good, and member of the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) of the World Public Forum, Dialogue of Civilisations. In 1986 he was awarded his doctorate in economics from the University of Birmingham, UK. In 2001 he received a Certificate in Education in Pastoral Studies at Plater College, Oxford. From 1980 to 2000 he was Economic Tutor, Lecturer and Senior Lecturer at Universities of Windsor (Canada), Birmingham, Bristol, Wolverhampton, and Coventry (UK). Mofid's work is highly interdisciplinary, drawing on Economics, Politics, International Relations, Theology, Culture, Ecology, Ethics and Spirituality. Mofid's writings have appeared in leading scholarly journals, popular magazines and newspapers. His books include Development Planning in Iran: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic , The Economic Consequences of the Gulf war, Globalisation for the Common Good, Business Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility and Globalisation for the Common Good , Promoting the Common Good (with Rev. Marcus Braybrooke, 2005), and A non-Violent Path to Conflict Resolution and Peace Building (Co-authored).

[www.globalisationforthecommongood.info](http://www.globalisationforthecommongood.info)  
[www.gcgi.info](http://www.gcgi.info)