Towards a Global Parliament: Principles and Pathways

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Abstract

To deal effectively with the urgent global challenges which confront us, we need a more effective system of global governance, i.e. some form of global parliament. This has been the aim of the world federalist movement (WFM-IGP) ever since World War II. The goal is hardly going to be reached overnight, and will require a stage-by-stage evolutionary process, following the European example. Hence we prefer to discuss the basic principles which should underpin the global parliament, rather than the specific form it might take.

Next we discuss the possible routes to a global parliament. The world federalist movement has always concentrated on reform of the United Nations, only to be stymied by the rigidity of the UN Charter. The most lively initiative in this direction at present is the Campaign for a UN Parliamentary Assembly.

Recommendation 1. The Global Challenges Foundation should support the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly.

The UN Commission on Global Security, Justice and Governance has called for a World Conference on Global Institutions in 2020.


We believe that the easiest and most likely route towards a global parliament is actually that of uniting the democracies, emphasizing the principle of democracy over that of universality. A detailed discussion of a possible first step along this route, consisting of a World Security Community of Democratic Nations, is given in an accompanying paper. Attempting to promote this idea, we have formed a Coalition for a World Community of Democratic Nations.

Recommendation 3. We recommend that the Global Challenges Foundation should partner with and support the Coalition for a World Community of Democratic Nations.

In order to promote this idea more widely, we envisage a high-level international conference, organised in collaboration with other influential organisations and think-tanks.
**Recommendation 4.** We recommend that the Global Challenges Foundation should support a high-level international conference on the idea of a world community of democratic nations.

1. **Introduction**

A little over ten years ago, the World Citizens Association of Australia (WCAA) [1] was founded, motivated by ideas which are almost identical with those of the Global Challenges Foundation (GCF). The first page of the WCA brochure reads as follows:

"Why do we need democratic global governance?"

All human beings, regardless of nationality, have many fundamental interests in common, and face some enormous common problems.

- **Global warming** and other forms of damage to the environment have become an alarming new threat to our children’s heritage. This could be humanity’s greatest challenge.
- Seventy years after World War II, mankind still faces a looming threat from the proliferation of **nuclear weapons** and other weapons of mass destruction. There are still many thousands of nuclear warheads in existence.
- Billions of the world’s poor still face the ever-present dangers of **famine, disease and war.** Every day, to our shame, 25,000 children still die needlessly.
- The basic **human rights** of many thousands of people are horribly violated every day, without means of redress.

These difficult problems can only be solved if the peoples of the world **work together** to construct a system of **democratic global governance and binding international law.** The present United Nations is not adequate to the task.”

This list of global problems matches closely with the list of global risks listed by the GCF. The conclusion we draw is also identical with the GCF. Global problems require global solutions. We need a more effective system of global governance to deal with them. Our mission at the WCA is to promote the idea of democratic global governance, or in short, a global parliament. This is also the aim of the world federalist movement (WFM-IGP) in general [2]. So far we appear to be very much in tune with the ideas set forth by the GCF.

We do not specify exactly what form this global parliament should take. Apparently there have been more than 50 different structures proposed in the literature, including for example the model proposed by the World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA) [3]. It is premature, however, to predict the exact form a global parliament might eventually take. That can only be determined at the end of the day.
by an eventual constitutional convention. In the Schuman Declaration [4], the founding document of the European Union, it is stated for example that “Europe will not be built in a day, or according to a single plan.” The same applies to the global system of governance.

Instead, we believe it is more useful to identify the basic principles on which a global parliament should be based [5]. These are easier to identify, and should receive broad general agreement. Some principles like the rule of law, for example, are basic to any government. Others have been thrown up by the European example, such as ‘subsidiarity’ and ‘solidarity’. These principles are discussed in more detail in section 2.

The European Union does in fact provide the great example of international integration. In order to put an end to the disastrous sequence of wars between the European powers, the founding fathers led by Jean Monnet began a process of gradual evolution, treaty by treaty. Starting from the original ‘Six’ members in the European Coal and Steel Community, they proceeded via the Treaties of Paris, Rome, and Maastricht, and others in between, to build the European Union as we see it today, with 28 member states.

The European Union is going through a rough patch at the moment, with Great Britain in the process of exiting the union, and countries like Greece in financial crisis. But already there is a sufficient structure of governance in Europe that one can predict with some confidence that there will never again be a major war within the region.

We believe that the European strategy applies also at the global level. A global parliament or world federation, uniting nearly 200 nation states and more than 7 billion people, is very unlikely to be achieved in one giant leap. It will have to evolve over a period of time. Nations are always extremely reluctant to surrender any part of their sovereignty to an international institution, as was only emphasized by the recent Brexit phenomenon.

The really crucial issue therefore, and the most difficult to answer, is the question how do we get there from here? How can we finally achieve the goal of a global parliament?

The Democratic World Federalists (DWF) website [6] lists four possible routes:

1) Create a World Constitution;
2) Transform the United Nations;
3) Unite the Democracies;
4) Integrate the Regions.

We discuss these different routes in section 3, leading to the conclusion that the easiest and most likely route is the third one, uniting the democracies. In an accompanying submission [24], we discuss a specific example of the first step in
such a strategy, a reform of NATO to become a World Security Community of Democratic Nations. We argue that this creation of a ‘global NATO’ would have great advantages from several different points of view, and could indeed be the first big step on the road to a global parliament.

In section 4, we lay out arguments that a global parliament founded upon the principles given in section 2 would satisfy all the criteria announced in the GCF prize competition. Section 5 summarizes our conclusions, and mentions some of the ways in which the WCAA and GCF might collaborate. We hope that we may be able to form such a collaboration, regardless of the outcome of the prize competition.

2. Principles of a Global Parliament

As outlined in the Introduction, we believe it is more useful to set out the principles upon which a global parliament should be based [5], rather than try to specify the detailed form or structure it might take. For these principles we rely heavily on the lessons learnt in the construction of the European Union. The preamble to the Maastricht Treaty mentions some important principles, although it gives no detailed exposition of them. According to the Treaty [7] the member states declare that:

“CONFIRMING their attachment to the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and of the rule of law,

DESIRING to deepen the solidarity between their peoples while respecting their history, their culture and their traditions ..

RESOLVED to continue the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity ..

HAVE DECIDED to establish a European Union ..”

Let us then consider these principles in a little more detail.

Rule of Law. The global parliament must have the power to make binding laws and regulations within its defined sphere of responsibility, in order to deal effectively with global problems and risks such as those identified by the GCF.

Human Rights. The global parliament must respect and defend the rights and freedoms of the individual citizen, as set out for instance in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [8], and already endorsed by the United Nations.

Democracy. To guard against autocracy and abuse of power, and to preserve the liberty and equality of all its citizens, the government must be chosen by means of free and fair elections, with guaranteed freedom of organized groups to stand in opposition to the government in power. The elements usually required of a democratic system of government include:

• free and open debate;
• mass media free of government control;
• access for citizens to office holders and bureaucrats;
• review of the executive by the legislature;
• an independent judiciary;
• multiple political parties competing at periodic elections, held by secret ballot on the basis of universal and equal adult suffrage.

These must be guaranteed by the founding treaty or constitution of the federation. Democracy is the only form of government with a ‘safety valve’, whereby the people can replace the government if it is doing a bad job.

**Solidarity.** Equity demands that all global citizens be accorded equal rights and equal opportunities under the law, regardless of race, religion, gender or ethnicity. Accordingly, structural adjustment funds should be allocated to help economically more backward regions to attain parity with the more advanced regions, as occurs within the European Union.

**Subsidiarity.** Decisions must be made as closely as possible to the individual citizens, to allow them to participate fully in the political process. This means that the global parliament will only have jurisdiction over those matters that concern all nations in common, such as the global problems and risks identified by the GCF. It implies a multi-layered system of government in which local councils look after local affairs, and national governments retain sovereignty over their own internal affairs very much as they do at present. Only those matters which cannot be dealt with by a single nation acting alone become the province of the global parliament. In other words, this implies a federal structure of government, wherein the global parliament consists of a federation of nation states (or possibly regions).

We note that the European Union has tended to forget this principle at times, and has been accused of adopting unnecessary and pettifogging regulations. For example, the EU has apparently issued an edict forbidding discarded teabags in garden waste bins. Such a decision, if it is necessary at all, clearly lies in the province of local councils, rather than the regional European government. Mistakes like this played a large part in the recent Brexit vote.

**Universality.** Finally, if the global parliament is to deal successfully with global problems, it must include all of the world’s nations, as the United Nations in essence already does. Universality was announced as the first principle of world federation at the great Montreux Congress of 1947 [9].

All of these principles, except the last, have already been adopted by the European Union, and should be generally acceptable to the public.

There is a major difficulty here, however, in that the principles of democracy and universality are not mutually compatible at present. Not all nations are democratic. The Freedom House group in the United States carries out a yearly rating of countries around the globe, based on a combination of political factors and civil liberties. They
estimated in 2015 that 89 states were “free”, 55 states were “partly free”, and 51 states were “not free” [10]. In other words, less than half of all nations are fully democratic at present. There was a period of about thirty years up until around 2001 where an average of two new nations became ‘fully free’ every year, but in the decade just past things have gone backwards, and a number of nations have slipped into autocracy.

Could a global parliament include non-democratic states, putting the principle of universality first, or do we have to wait until all states become democratic, putting democracy first? We address this question in the next section. Suffice it to say that a fully-functioning global parliament including non-democratic states would involve intolerable anomalies, such as the violation of human rights under autocratic governments.

3. Pathways to a Global Parliament

Given that we need a global parliament to deal with the urgent global problems which confront us, the great question is, how do we get there?

There are some enormous obstacles in the way [11], foremost among them being national sovereignty, the fear of tyranny, and the lack of global community. The political scientist Hans Morgenthau, for instance, wrote [12] that:

“No society exists coextensive with the presumed range of a world state. The nation is the recipient of man’s highest secular loyalties. Beyond it there are other nations, but no community for which man would be willing to act regardless of what he understands the interests of his own nation to be. In other words, the peoples of the world are not ready to accept world government, and their overriding loyalty to the nation erects an insurmountable obstacle to its establishment… There can be no world state without a world community willing and able to support it.”

There are valid theoretical answers to all these objections [11], which can be summarized as follows;

**National Sovereignty.** According to the principle of *subsidarity*, each nation would still retain sovereignty over its own internal affairs under a global parliament, just as it does at present. As regards international affairs, no nation has sovereignty over another in any case. A world federation would simply allow a resolution of those grave global problems which confront all of us in common. This argument was made more than three hundred years ago by William Penn in his “*Essay towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe*” [13].

**Fear of Tyranny.** At a rough guess, around one third of the world’s people would reject the idea of world government outright, fearing a jack-booted tyranny as depicted in novels like ‘Brave New World’, ‘1984’, or ‘Animal Farm’. The principles of democracy and separation of powers are essential to answer this fear. Furthermore, powerful nations such as the United States would never tolerate any autocracy at the
global level. The real problem at the moment is that our system of global governance is too weak, rather than too strong.

**Lack of Global Community.** Modern technical developments such as the internet and social media have brought us closer together, so that now it is possible to see and talk to somebody on the far side of the globe at any time. Globalisation has meant that the world’s economies are now heavily dependent on each other. And furthermore, there is growing appreciation of those global risks and challenges that confront all of us in common. Our common interests should clearly prevail over our national differences.

Nevertheless at the emotional level, those obstacles to global integration still loom large, as emphasized by the recent wave of populism sweeping the globe, the reaction against globalisation, the Brexit phenomenon and the election of Donald Trump in the US.

How then can we achieve our goal of a global parliament? As mentioned in the introduction, the website of the democratic World Federalists in California [6] identifies four general strategies (Figure 1). Let us first remark that nobody can know in advance which strategy will eventually succeed, and so we should continue to collectively press forward along all these routes until the goal is reached. Nevertheless, it is important to identify which strategy is most likely to succeed, and concentrate our efforts on that where possible. Let us then consider each strategy in turn.

![Figure 1. Paths to a World Federation (from the DWF website).](image)

**3.1. Create a World Constitution.**

According to this idea, we should immediately hold an international Convention to hammer out a Constitution for the proposed world federation, and then put it into practice, as at the founding of the United States. This is the strategy espoused by the World Constitution and Parliamentary Association [3], among many others.
The problem here is that the strategy presupposes general agreement that a world federation is necessary and desirable. That is unfortunately not the case, and a referendum would most likely show that only a few percent of the general public would say that we are ready for a world federation at present. Even in the heyday of the world federalist movement before the Cold War began, UNESCO polls showed opinion split almost evenly on the desirability of world government [14]. In recent decades, membership of the world federalist movement has sadly declined by 80 to 90% [15]. A Constitutional Convention should be the last step in the integration process, not the first, and is hardly feasible at present.

### 3.2. Integrate the Regions

According to this strategy, we should first concentrate on integrating the regions, following the European example, and then integrate the regions to form a world federation. The European federalists [16] decided to concentrate on their own integration after the great Montreux Congress in 1947 [9], and since then the evolution of the European Union has been emulated by organisations such as the African Union and the South American union UNASUR, although the latter still remains largely on the drawing-board.

This strategy would probably succeed eventually, but it would be a long and difficult route, very hard to predict in detail. There are many fledging regional organisations around the globe, but they are not developing very rapidly. The European Union itself is in some danger of unravelling at present, following Brexit. It would probably be better to work on parallel strategies which might reach the goal more quickly.

### 3.3. Transform the United Nations

The strategy here is to reform the United Nations, the peak global organisation we have at present, to become a genuine world federation. The present United Nations is far too weak to deal effectively with the global problems that beset us. We shall not enter here into the manifold shortcomings of the organisation [11]. In essence, it follows a pattern dating back to the Congress of Vienna after Waterloo: an alliance of the great powers (the P5 in the Security Council) to keep the peace.

This is the most obvious strategy to follow, and it is the one which the world federalist movement (WFM-IGP) has concentrated on for seventy years, ever since World War II. But always the campaign has run up against the great obstacle of the UN Charter. It is very difficult to amend, similar to a national constitution. It requires two-thirds of the member states and all five permanent members of the Security Council to approve any amendment. This is so hard to achieve, in fact, that no meaningful change has ever been made to the Charter. No Charter Review Conference has even been convened.

In these circumstances, the WFM-IGP has lowered its sights in recent years, and concentrated on reforms which do not require any change in the Charter. There they
have had some very important successes. They have convened Coalitions of non-government organisations to campaign firstly, for an International Criminal Court, and secondly, for the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect. Both those campaigns have succeeded, and bolstered the structure of international law very significantly. But they do not address the structural problems of the UN organisation itself.

The most lively new initiative along this route is the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) [17], which aims to inject at least an element of democratically elected parliamentary representation into the UN system. This campaign is led by its Global Coordinator, Andreas Bummel, and is run on the proverbial ‘smell of an oily rag’. The campaign is currently engaged in changing its name to ‘Democracy Without Borders’. It could benefit enormously from some input from the GCF.

Recommendation 1. The GCF should support the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly.

The WFM-IGP has also been heavily involved in the United Nations Commission on Global Security, Justice and Governance [18], chaired by Madeleine Albright and Ibrahim Gambari, which has called for a World Conference on Global Institutions in 2020. Lloyd Axworthy, the President of the WFM-IGP, is one of the commissioners. The Commission has also recommended the establishment of a ‘UN Parliamentary Network’, as a step towards a UNPA. The GCF is presumably planning to promote and participate in this Conference.

Recommendation 2. THE GCF should partner with WFM-IGP, and support the World Conference on Global Institutions in 2020.

Nevertheless, the UN Charter presents a very daunting obstacle along this route. William Pace, the Executive Director of the WFM-IGP, has given a pessimistic assessment of the chances of meaningful reform of the UN Charter [15]:

“to the WFM call for Charter reform or a Charter Review Conference, let me observe that there appears to be very, very little support for this by governments.”

Broadly speaking, everybody agrees that the UN needs reform, but no two nations can agree on what those reforms should be. We should keep pushing along this route, but the prospects appear rather dim at present.

3.4. Unite the Democracies

This brings us to the final strategy, which is to begin by integrating the democratic nations first, and then bring in other nations later, as they adopt more democratic forms of government. This strategy emphasizes the principle of democracy before that of universality. This approach also dates from the time of World War II. An early proponent was Clarence Streit. In the final postwar edition of his book ‘Union Now!’
[19], he advocated a union of democracies as a first step towards an eventual world federation:

“This Union would be designed

a. To provide effective common government in our democratic world in those fields where such common government will clearly serve man’s freedom better than separate governments,
b. To maintain independent national governments in all other fields where such government will best serve man’s freedom, and
c. To create by its constitution a nucleus world government capable of growing into universal world government peacefully and as rapidly as such growth will best serve man’s freedom.”

The Streit Council [20] continues to advocate a union of democratic nations today. This is the strategy most likely to succeed, in our opinion. There is no rigid Charter in the way, so change can proceed in an evolutionary fashion following the European example. It could start with a smaller group of member nations and evolve through successive stages, treaty by treaty, taking in new members along the way, until we eventually reach the goal of a global parliament with universal membership.

The obvious first stage would be some form of World Community of Democratic Nations, analogous to the European Economic Community established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. We set forth one possible scheme of this sort in the accompanying submission [24], involving a reform of NATO to form a world security community of democratic nations.

4. Compliance with criteria

We are presenting here a scheme for the first step along the ‘Uniting the democracies’ path, which is one of the recognized possible routes to a global parliament. We believe this is the easiest and best route.

This scheme does not fully satisfy all the guidelines for the Global Challenges Prize, but we believe that it follows a realistic analysis of the problem, and we ask for it to receive serious consideration. We have not specified the exact structure of a global parliament, but something along the lines of the European Union would certainly be capable of effectively addressing the global problems and risks to humanity.

Can it be implemented within the foreseeable future? The first step that we have outlined could be implemented almost immediately. We do not believe the final goal can be reached overnight, unfortunately, but one would hope that it could be attained via an evolutionary path over several decades.
The guidelines state that “models that postulate that all states should be democratic” must be eliminated. Here we disagree. We have discussed the basic principles that must underlie a global parliament, and democracy must be one of them. Some of the GCF’s own criteria become highly problematic in a non-democratic system. As mentioned before, democracy is the only form of government with a safety-valve, whereby the people can replace the government if it is doing a bad job.

Does that mean we have to wait until all states become democracies before we reach the final goal? Probably yes. At least we must wait for Russia and China to become fully democratic before we can have a fully-functioning global parliament. This might hopefully occur within fifty years. We could start the journey right away, however, with a smaller group of existing democracies, and co-operation measures with non-democracies could surely be found along the way.

Bearing in mind the principles which we have already discussed, it can readily be seen that a global parliament would satisfy all the given criteria.

**Core Values.** Under the principle of solidarity, the welfare and rights of all human beings would be respected equally.

**Decision-making Capacity.** Under the rule of law, the global parliament would have the power to make binding laws and regulations within its defined sphere of responsibility.

**Effectiveness.** By the same token, under the rule of law a global parliament would have the power to deal with the global challenges and risks effectively. It would be able to put an end to the ancient and primitive plague of warfare that has afflicted our planet. It would be able to implement measures allowing us to live in a sustainable balance with our environment. It would work to raise the standard of living of the economically more backward regions. Indeed, as foreseen long ago by H.G. Wells [21], it would open a whole new chapter in human history.

**Resources and Financing.** We have not attempted to specify how financing might be arranged. Once again, the European Union provides a possible model. Another option would be a ‘Tobin tax’ [22], whereby a very small tax on every international financial transaction would provide more than sufficient funds for the global parliament.

**Trust and Insight.** Here the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity and democracy would be important, to ensure that everybody is treated equally under the law, and the people are involved as far as possible in making decisions, with guaranteed insight into the operations of government. Here is one area where democracy is crucial. Autocratic regimes are always liable to corruption and disregard of human rights.

**Flexibility.** This is one area where the path of UN reform falls down, because the UN system is so inflexible. The evolutionary path followed by Europe is much more
flexible, involving continuous reviews and alterations by means of treaties. Mistakes have been undoubtedly been made along the way: for instance, the attempt to introduce a Constitution for Europe was at least premature, and would indeed have removed flexibility from the system. The path of uniting the democracies by stages would allow similar flexibility.

**Protection against the Abuse of Power.** Here is another area where the principle of democracy is crucial. Under a democratic system, the people have the means of remedying any abuse of power. This is a principle that our forefathers have fought and died for in the past.

**Accountability.** Again, democracy is a crucial element here. Democratic systems may be crude and inefficient, but they allow the people, or their representatives, to demand accountability from the governing administration.

**Human Rights.** This is not listed in the guidelines, but it should be an important criterion as well. This is one more reason why democracy is important, to make sure human rights are respected and observed. Some autocratic regimes apparently do not acknowledge any concept of individual human rights at all.

A global parliament established under the correct principles would satisfy all the required criteria, and represent a huge step forwards in global governance, allowing us to tackle those looming global challenges in a much more effective way than we can do at present. It would open an era of new hope for humankind.

5. **Summary and Conclusions**

In summary, our current international system is no longer fit for purpose in the 21st century. We need a more effective system of global governance to deal with the enormous global risks and challenges confronting us. In other words, we need some form of world federation or global parliament. This has been the aim of the world federalist movement ever since World War II, focussed particularly on the problem of eliminating nuclear weapons and ensuring world peace. It is a huge undertaking, but nothing less will fit the purpose.

Uniting nearly 200 nations and more than 7 billion people is a herculean task. It is not going to be accomplished in one giant leap, unfortunately. The world federalist movement has been trying to reform the UN for seventy years, but remains blocked by the rigid UN Charter.

An eventual global parliament is only going to be reached by an evolutionary process, we contend, such as that pioneered in Europe, leading to the present European Union. Rather than specifying the exact form a global parliament might take, we therefore believe it is more useful to rehearse the basic *principles* upon which it should be based. For the most part, they were announced in the Maastricht Treaty. They include the rule of law, human rights, democracy, solidarity and subsidiarity. Clearly, a global government should also be universal.
This raises a difficult problem, in that the principles of democracy and universality are not mutually consistent in today's world. The GCF proposes to set aside the requirement of democracy, but we believe it remains essential, if only to fulfil the criteria laid down by the GCF itself.

We have examined the various possible routes to a global parliament: the constitutional route, the regional route, reform of the UN, and uniting the democracies. We have argued that the easiest and most likely route is the last, beginning with a smaller group of democratic nations, which can evolve and expand over a period of time until the final goal is reached, following the European example. In an accompanying submission [24], we have given a detailed examination of a possible first step along this path, a reform of NATO to become a World Security Community of Democratic Nations.

What are we doing at the World Citizens Association of Australia to promote these ideas? We have formed a Coalition for a World Community of Democratic Nations [23], copying the successful strategy of WFM-IGP. I moved a resolution at the Council meeting of WFM-IGP in 2015 that the World Federalist Movement should officially support the Coalition, but the resolution was narrowly lost on a vote of 16-18. The Coalition remains something of a shell organisation at present, consisting of little more than a website. It would benefit enormously from any participation by the GCF.

**Recommendation 3.** We recommend that the GCF should join, and support, the Coalition for a World Community of Democratic Nations.

Given resources, we would like to organise a high-level international conference, or series of conferences, to discuss ideas of this sort. Hopefully it could be done in collaboration with other influential organisations such as the Brookings Institution, the Centre for International Governance Innovation in Canada, or the Atlantic Council. If the GCF was willing to provide support, we could probably get this idea off the ground.

**Recommendation 4.** We recommend that the GCF should support a high-level international conference on the idea of a world community of democratic nations.

In conclusion, we would like to applaud the magnificent initiative of the GCF in setting up the ‘Grand Challenges Prize 2017: A New Shape’ competition, and we hope it is a huge success. Regardless of the outcome of the Prize competition, we hope to be able to forge links between the GCF and the WCAA, so as to reinforce each other’s efforts into the future.

**References**

3. World Constitution and Parliament Association,


