

A Golden Rule for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

***Treat the lives and well being of future generations as we wish to be treated.***

Respectfully submitted,  
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Ethical Foundation

There is already a universal ethical norm of equity and justice found in some iteration in every major religion and civilized culture.<sup>i</sup> Whether as a principle to guide our conduct toward the good; “Treat others as you wish to be treated,” (Luke 6:31); or, as an ethical admonition of restraint; “Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.” (Confucius Analects 15:23); this rule, over many different cultures and over long periods of time, has brought both measurable and immeasurable benefits to nations, communities, families and individuals.

Reasonable people of good will everywhere recognize its value. For some it is understood as a majestic gift from God. People of both faith and reason strive to achieve its realization.

This ancient insight directs our attention to our conduct toward our contemporaries. When it was expressed in the past, human conduct could not adversely impact the lives and well being of future generations as it can today. There is now an ethical imperative that

compels us that did not exist before and that imperative can guide us now:

“Treat the lives and well being of future generations as we wish to be treated.”

This Golden Rule for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century resonates in these words:

“Intergenerational solidarity is not optional but rather a basic question of justice since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.” (Laudato Si, Section 159, Pope Francis)

convergence of the practical and the moral, action can be stimulated effectively.

## Meeting the Challenge

Modern science, technology and social organization compel a “new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of the planet.” (Id, Section 14) and the “rights of future generations.” (Id. Section 109). To successfully and wisely guide enough people and institutions this dialogue must include the world’s leaders, scientific, political, technical, cultural, religious and ethical. This dialogue is needed now “so that future generations will not have to suffer the effects of our ill advised delays.” (Id. Section 169)

In the [Spring of 2023 the General Assembly requested an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice](#) which includes a request to articulate the law regarding the responsibility of present generations to ensure a sustainable environment for future generations.

A clear articulation of the ethical principle of the Golden Rule for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will help the Court and the court of public opinion address the ethical imperative related to protecting the natural world and eliminating weapons of existential mass destruction, practices adverse to a sustainable environment and intergenerational concerns.

Stating the principle and then utilizing it as a means of stimulating moral inquiry and policy analysis could lead to new coalitions of actors who would perceive that people wishing to protect the climate and people working to eliminate nuclear weapons share a common ethical dynamic. Moreover, emphasizing this ethical norm will provide an avenue for many religiously motivated and secular ethically sensitive people to work together. That in itself is a good of enormous value.

But of far greater significance than any utilitarian benefit is the truth that we do have a duty to the well-being and lives of future generations and stating the truth is in itself a necessary good. Fortissima veritas.

We join with a group of distinguished Nobel Peace Laureates, below,