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Visioning and Creating Our Shared Future – Engaging Everyone

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Creating a vision of our shared future is not only the work of creative people from various fields of research and discovery; it is also the responsibility of each one of us to contribute to shaping, sharing and living the vision of a just, sustainable and peaceful world.

One approach, possibly a central element to any approach, is to reclaim our spiritual heritage and gifts that give deep meaning to life and that are a source of motivation and energy to work for the common good, not only locally but globally. This can inspire hope that “a different world is possible” and definitely within our reach. Spiritual and moral values are not a separate department of life. They are an integral part of every phase and aspect of our lives. They can help people create a world that is less grasping and fearful, less hateful and polarized, less power-hungry and revengeful, and more caring, compassionate, just and peaceful. People of all ages and cultures are searching for hope, meaning and purpose in life. Choosing an integral path that draws from their rich traditions and perspectives can offer opportunities for everyone to get involved in creating such a future.

However, there are additional aspects of visioning and creating a desired future:

1. Engaging the wisdom of elders. There is a growing population of older adults who can offer their perspectives on balance and harmony, as well as a concern for the common good to a world often sharply divided by power and greed and lacking hope, meaning and purpose. At a recent Global Conference on Aging, participants heard a strong call from Irene Hoskins, president of the International Federation on Aging, to policy makers to think in terms of building a society that allows elders to participate in all aspects of life and to offer their wisdom and experience in a variety of ways. Such an approach would give the older population a new understanding of themselves and enable them to live safe, happy and productive lives.

2. Involving youth. Involving young people is another very important aspect of studying and shaping the future. Success in this depends largely on how the youth are approached. Are they seen and approached as people who have ideas and gifts to offer, or are they viewed as problems to be solved? Do we listen to their agenda, their hopes and longing, and then find ways in which they can share across generations, in various aspects of life? All across the country and in other nations, large crowds of youth are gathering to find a meaningful spirituality as well as ways to get involved in serving the most vulnerable populations and improving their lives. Engaging youth in this way can include them in a

growing movement to make the world more respectful, compassionate and just. In addition, the younger people will themselves benefit by gaining a sense of purpose and by inspiring hope. The arts – poetry, music and art – are vehicles by which they can express the future and engage people of all generations.

3. Including vulnerable populations. An additional need is to include the vulnerable populations in our society and encourage their contributions to the shaping of a positive future for all people. These people are often marginalized and excluded from positive participation in society. In some cases they are labeled as cheaters, loafers, or a societal burden. Including the vulnerable populations will call all of us to be people of a second chance, create a space for gifts and talents of young people, and help everyone transcend limiting notions of self-identity. All have a vital role to play.

4. Including people of all cultures. Connecting across cultures and creeds will lead to a broadening of our perspectives and enable all to share various rich cultural heritages. Such an effort will require us to transcend ethnocentrism in its many forms, both personal and institutional. By growing in understanding, we can begin to look at new approaches to solving problems in peaceful ways. In addition, women need to be involved in all aspects of futuring. In some cultures, they are viewed as second class citizens and given subordinate roles to play. Both feminine and masculine gifts are needed to bring balance and wholeness to our world and to grow beyond the model of domination to one of partnership.

5. Including all of Creation. Mapping a future for study and implementation must also include the whole of creation. The possibility of environmental destruction looms large, in part because of present styles of living, value systems, and manners of relating. Care for earth and responsible stewardship of the earth's resources is essential to the very survival of humankind. Appreciating the beauty and wonder of nature can add to joy and peace in our world.

In conclusion, we have the ability to change the tide of the time. The question is: "Do we have the individual and political will to bring about a future that is whole and hope-filled for all people?" Let us begin today with courageous, outside-the-box steps, inspired by the vision that "another world is indeed possible."