

Implementing Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a Basic Income

by Share the World's Resources (STWR)
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STWR is a campaigning group based in London, founded by Mohammed Mesbahi in 2003, with consultative status at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). Through our research and activities, we make a case for integrating the principle of sharing into world affairs as a pragmatic solution to a broad range of interconnected crises that governments are currently failing to address – including hunger, poverty, climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict over the world's natural resources. We also advocate for an international programme of emergency relief to prevent life-threatening deprivation and end poverty-related deaths as a foremost global priority.

The subject of our presentation is specifically about implementing *Article 25* of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in order to pave the way for a Basic Income, which we see as a fundamental right for all people in all nations, to ensure nobody lives in poverty. Our approach is therefore from a global perspective, concerning how we can address the deeply complex and interrelated crises listed above, all of which are essentially caused by the structural injustice built into our economic systems. We are going to talk about how we need to change the way we look at the world as individuals and collectively, and how we will need massive civic engagement and participation in order to make the changes we need in the world. Our governments have failed us again and again, all the problems are worsening, so any lasting solution must come from all of us, the ordinary men and women of goodwill. We don't see any alternative.

We want to address the state of the world against the backdrop of knowing that life is inherently One, that humanity is one indivisible Whole, despite the fragmentation and disconnection we may feel from others, both near and far. This concept of 'Oneness' is backed up by numerous fields of scientific investigation, from the complex and intricate web of life presented by the field of ecology, to biological research and the conclusions reached by quantum physics. For those who resonate with spiritual ideas, many spiritual teachings down the ages also point to the Oneness, indivisibility and interconnectedness of all life.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, consisting of 30 articles, was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, and was signed up to by all governments, but it is still not fully guaranteed for the majority of citizens worldwide. *Article 25* states that:

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical

care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Before reading any further, you may like to take a few moments to imagine a just and sustainable world in which *Article 25* has been truly implemented, with sharing and cooperation at the heart of how we live as a united human race. Imagine that all the basic needs of everyone are met, with everyone having enough to eat, somewhere to live, free healthcare, and freedom from having to worry about money. Think about how that might look, how people might be spending their time differently and so on. Imagine the hope that millions of people who are currently in dire poverty would be feeling for the first time. Imagine how that could change how we relate to one another.

Unfortunately, the current reality in the world today is very different from this hopeful vision. So, how did we get here? How have we come to feel so complacent and indifferent to the suffering of others, thereby allowing their suffering to continue? Because rather than recognising our Oneness and instituting that recognition in our social and economic structures, we have been living with an illusory sense of separation from one another for countless generations, fuelled by our collective selfishness, greed, competition and nationalism – themes that can be seen running through all the structures we have created, which are further exacerbated by the sense of separation that is reflected in our different religions, political parties, racial identities and so on. In addition, the process of rampant commercialisation over recent decades, which we are all complicit in to some degree, is ever deepening the divide between us all, and deepening the stark wealth inequalities within and among countries. There are many divisions and conflicts going on around the world, all of which have the potential to escalate into a third world war - although this time such a war is likely to be nuclear, and could destroy all life on Earth.

From this holistic perspective, our narrow education systems have effectively turned us into an assembly line of ‘good consumers’, and almost every aspect of our lives, it seems, has become commodified and commercialised, with everything geared towards profit-making. This psychologically engrained and systemic process of commercialisation is leading to an ever-worsening overuse and waste of precious resources, destruction of the environment, climate change, droughts and other natural disasters, as well as growing inequalities and heart-breaking poverty and destitution which sees 795 million people suffering from chronic hunger [1], and around 40,000 people a day dying of starvation, malnutrition or other poverty-related causes [2].

Indeed, we are living through the biggest food security crises the world has ever known, with unprecedented levels of hunger and the prospect of famine looming in many

countries like Yemen, South Sudan, Nigeria and Somalia, whilst in other parts of the world food rots away in storehouses.

The world is also witnessing the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War, with over 65 million people displaced due to droughts, conflicts and poverty. Officially, 1 in 113 people in the world are now displaced [3]. The sheer level and magnitude of this suffering is difficult to conceive in our awareness. We don't seem to realise how little help people around the world receive for lessening their poverty and suffering. At least 70% of the global population don't have access to any form of welfare or social protection [4]. It is hard to imagine the anguish which must be experienced watching your children suffering from acute malnutrition, or even starving to death. Stories such as those of impoverished mothers in Mexico, who boil stones in a pan in order to calm their hungry children who think this means food must be coming, conjure up a desperate picture of the plight of many in the world.

Suffering in the richest countries is also increasing, with widening inequality evidenced by the growing use of food banks, and a rise in homelessness despite numerous reports that empty properties outnumber each homeless person many times over. The post-war welfare systems that were established to care for the poor, unemployed, sick or disabled are often becoming more stringent and cruel, and in many developed countries their running has been handed over to private companies.

Successive governments the world over have not only failed to deal with our growing crises, but they have increasingly allowed market forces to become a rampant influence in social, economic and political affairs. So-called 'well educated' people in positions of power are either directly or indirectly destroying the planet and people's lives, deepening all of our converging crises. It seems that humanity is at a crossroads, and faced with a stark choice – either for our governments to cooperate to share the world's resources (of which there are enough for everyone if more equitably distributed, despite our current overpopulation), or we continue along the same path of division and destruction to the point of no return, which if our climate scientists are to be believed, will be within a very short time frame. Given that it is evident that our governments are not going to suddenly wake up to reality, what options does this leave us with? How can we get from where we are now, to that just and sustainable world we were imagining at the beginning?

In the context of these critical global issues, the call for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) is one of the most important social movements of our time, and is being discussed by an increasing number of groups around the world as a potential way of providing financial security for all individuals. This proposal has become very popular as a potential policy tool to help address social welfare issues, poverty and inequality.

At STWR, we argue that before genuine UBI schemes can be implemented throughout the world, governments must first commit to a massive redistribution of global resources, something akin to the vision of the 1980 Brandt report, entitled '*North-South: A programme for survival*', [5] which advocated for an international emergency programme and a major restructuring of the global economic architecture. Without firstly sharing the

world's resources in this way, it would be impossible to eventually realise genuine and full UBI schemes across the world, in every country. (By this, we are not implying a world government that disperses money to every person – each national government will have to implement its own form of UBI - although there may be rules agreed through the UN and a global solidarity fund to help poorer countries). With *Article 25* in place, each nation would be compelled to make an inventory of the surplus resources they have at their disposal, including technology, knowledge, manpower and institutional capacity, as well as food, medicines, manufactured products, and any other basic materials or essential goods. A large-scale transfer of these resources to the poorest countries and regions would have to be organised through the United Nations and its global network of aid agencies, or through a new United Nations agency that is set up for the express purpose of overseeing an emergency programme which may have to continue for several years. In line with Brandt's vision, this could go a long way to abolishing hunger and paving the way for longer term structural changes to the global economy.

Unfortunately, such a vision is far from the preoccupations of world leaders today who remain beholden to powerful corporate and financial interests, and show no sign of representing all people's needs through genuine international cooperation and economic sharing. Sadly, at the present most governments are not truly representing their people but are merely acting as 'political accountants'. Hence only through galvanizing the ordinary people of the world with a united demand will governments be persuaded to come together and shift their priorities to work towards this goal. No longer, then, would they be able to think solely in terms of what is best for their own national elite interests, but they would have to think of the common good of the world as a whole.

We are not suggesting that a global call for implementing *Article 25* through an emergency programme is a substitute for demanding a UBI - they are both equally important. But a partial Basic Income on its own, implemented within only certain countries that can afford to, is unlikely to have the lasting effect we aim for. Many countries have already adopted small pilot schemes with generally successful results, but so far, no government has committed itself to establish a full UBI scheme as a constitutional right for all its citizens – let alone the prospect of organising a truly universal basic income on a multilateral basis.

Perhaps a UBI policy could be realized in a more stable world where commercialisation is no longer dictating global policies and where countries work together for the common good, but that is clearly far from reality when the state of our world is increasingly uncertain and volatile. Anything could happen at any time and the financial sector is particularly unstable. Recently, two banks in Italy had to be bailed out and there are most likely many others awaiting the same fate. Some well-known economists around the world have said it's not a matter of IF but of WHEN the next financial crash will happen. If they are right, it will be much larger than the last one and will cripple many countries. Do we really think that governments would still consider a genuine Basic Income if that happens? Surely, the idea would be wiped off the table at a stroke, and the plight of the people would be forgotten once more. But if a global movement calling for *Article 25* had already influenced governments to genuinely work together and to agree to an emergency

programme as outlined above, it would be a very different situation.

The implications of successfully implementing *Article 25* would be manifold as governments would be obliged to meet the needs of their people before the profit-interests of major corporations. Some examples of likely social and economic transformations are highlighted by Mohammed Mesbahi in his book 'Heralding Article 25 – A people's strategy for world transformation' [6], which include:

- an end to life-threatening poverty and hunger – if our first priority is to redistribute food and essential resources to the most impoverished world regions
- an end to land grabs
- an end to food speculation and the hoarding and destroying of food to affect market prices;
- an end to the commercialisation of public services
- de-escalation of military activity alongside steep cuts in armaments budgets as resources are redirected to the people
- population levels may eventually decrease and stabilise, as it is well known that poverty is an underlying factor in the rapid population growth of the past 60 or 70 years.
- trade rules would become fairer
- debt would be cancelled
- tax havens would be ended
- increased North-South cooperation through an emergency programme, with further manifold implications.

Having outlined the logical case for implementing *Article 25*, which will address the causes of poverty in the world, the remaining question is how we are going to persuade all the governments of the world to finally guarantee *Article 25*. After so many years of inaction on the part of governments, we suggest it is only the massed goodwill of ordinary people calling for *Article 25* that can bring about an end to poverty in a world of plenty through enormous, peaceful and continuous protests around the world.

We have heard the term “They are few, yet we are many” or “Not for the few but for the many” from various groups. People like Bernie Sanders in America and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK, who appear to hear and represent the call for a more just and sustainable world, could not have got as far as they have done were it not for the ordinary people who support them. So, can we imagine what an impact millions of people around the globe would have if they gathered and stood behind one single idea? *Article 25* is that unifying idea. It is such a simple statement of basic socioeconomic rights, so easily understood, that it could appeal to broad swathes of the general public who may feel themselves to be disconnected from politics, or feel overwhelmed about the complexity

and number of issues at stake.

As a unifying slogan, goal and vision, *Article 25* could bring together rich and poor alike. Who could argue that we shouldn't all have access to these basics, no matter where we live in the world, and in what circumstances? People living in abject poverty in the most neglected slums and villages could understand the principles of *Article 25* in a way that they might not understand about what the Occupy Movement was about, or the Arab Spring. *Article 25* is the key to resolving so many problems. It is the path of least resistance. In fact, embedded within it is all the demands of bygone global activists throughout history up to the present day. It is the surest route we have for impelling our governments to redistribute the world's resources and restructure the global economy.

But is it possible? We have seen recent activist movements, like Occupy or Nuit Debut, which quickly spread to different countries. Although they were not sustained for a long enough period of time and therefore did not achieve the desired results, we have seen historically that ongoing protest can work if it is sustained for long enough, for example the suffragette movement winning women the vote in the UK and the civil rights movement in America. A 2014 film entitled 'We Are Many' [7] explored the 2003 worldwide demonstrations against the war in Iraq, with many of the commentators pointing to the necessity for the protests to have been continual, rather than for just one day, in order to have been successful.

STWR produced the aforementioned book, 'Heralding Article 25', to give readers a clearer understanding of why only continuous mass demonstrations will achieve the end goal. The book argues that **only through uniting ordinary people on a global level, with an informed mind and a compassionate heart that asks, "What about the others?" can we shift the priorities of our governments. Lobbying politicians on domestic issues alone will never be enough.** We need millions upon millions of people to march for *Article 25*, without cessation – and just one spark could set off many similar demonstrations around the globe, until it becomes like a wildfire that cannot be extinguished. We envision that such protests would be truly global like nothing that has gone before, based on one simple and benevolent cause that anyone in the world can understand. They would have to continue indefinitely and in massive numbers, representing a new approach to activism and movement building that is built upon the involvement of countless millions of ordinary people, simultaneously in all countries.

In conclusion, we are facing many global challenges today and they equally need global solutions. We have all the technology at our fingertips to rapidly change the world, for better or worse. We are relying on our governments to do the right thing, which has made us complacent to the suffering that is all around us. But if we could really and truly understand that the suffering of one person is also our suffering, that we cannot separate ourselves from the other, then maybe we would act differently.

The world is an interconnected living being and if one part of it is sick, then it will eventually spread to the rest of the world. We can see this very clearly in the mass

movements both of impoverished economic migrants of poor countries and the recent mass migration of refugees to Europe. What happens to the poorest of our citizens also affects us, as we are one human family, and we must start to *act* as one humanity - we cannot limit our actions to just local ones alone. So, let us not just fight for our privileged rights in the West but let us fight together for all our brothers and sisters, the forgotten ones that are dying of hunger daily, and end their plight once and for all. Let's give them hope for the first time in their lives.

[Www.sharing.org](http://www.sharing.org)

Available on Amazon or free online here:

<http://www.sharing.org/information-centre/reports/heralding-article-25-peoples-strategy-world-transformation#part iii>

Notes and References:

[1] The Hunger Project - <http://www.thp.org/issues/hunger/>

[2] For relevant figures see: Share the World's Resources, [Beyond the Sustainable Development Goals: Uncovering the truth about global poverty and demanding the universal realisation of Article 25, September 2015](#)

[3] World Economic Forum statistic.

[4] World Social Protection Report in 2014/15 from International Labour Organisation

[5] Brandt, Willy. 1980. 'North-South: A Program for Survival: A Program for

Survival' (The Brandt Report)

[6] Mesbahi, Mohammed 2016. 'Heralding *Article 25*. A people's strategy for world transformation.' It is also available in different languages: German, Spanish, Japanese and Slovenian – please check our Website <http://www.sharing.org/information-centre/articles/studies-principle-sharing>

[7] We Are Many - www.wearemany.com/