



OPEN LETTER: Circles of Compassion + World Day – 2 November 2005

Creating compassionate societies - a world that works for all.

*“Compassion is a mental attitude based on the wish for others to be free of their suffering and is associated with a sense of commitment, responsibility and respect towards others.”
- HH Dalai Lama*

Dear Friends around the world,

WWSF Women's World Summit Foundation is happy to inform you of the evolution of its program “Circles of Compassion” and the World Day – 2 November which is a rallying call to action for the creation of compassionate families, societies and nations. In 2003, WWSF (based in Geneva, Switzerland), launched on its website (www.woman.ch) the concept of Circles of Compassion and the world day <http://www.woman.ch/women/3-introduction.asp> in partnership with the Millionth Circle initiative <http://www.millionthcircle.org>. The response was immediate, and in the first year close to 100 Circles of compassion were spontaneously launched around the world, mostly in Third World countries, on themes like *Fighting Aids; SOS children and women; Support for rural women; Women and development; Freeing Africa; Keep your promises; Circles for change*, to name a few.

We live in a world where true, meaningful communication seems more and more rare, as opposed to the explosion of new communication technologies. This lack of authentic, empowering communication is a major issue, both in the private and family sphere as in the field of business, international relations and society in general. Terrorism is the ultimate illustration not only of a total lack of communication, but of the belief that there no longer exists even the hope or possibility for normal communication. Too often, Third World countries are not even « heard » in debates on international issues and communication is frequently one-way.

Originally inspired by the Millionth Circle Initiative, Circles of Compassion (CC), conceptualized and launched by WWSF, hope to become a tool for much needed improvement of authentic communication in families, schools, business, organizations, politics and movements of all sorts. WWSF also hopes that with time, CC will become building blocks towards building compassionate societies and help implement the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>. WWSF also invites to read *“Toward a Compassionate Society”* by Mahbub ul Haq, an expert on international development for the past 30 years and initiator of the UN Human Development Report <http://www.woman.ch/women/5-links.asp>

In Geneva, City of Peace (350'000 inhabitants), headquarters of WWSF and home to some of the first Circles of Compassion, two such circles meet on a monthly basis and a third one will start soon. Pierre, a member of the first Geneva CC, has this to say about his experience. *« I doubt that in my close to 70 years, I have ever experienced such a quality of deep, loving, authentic communication. In our circle, everyone knows that they can share their deepest concerns and that they will be listened to with complete respect and deep caring ».*

Among the many themes so far discussed by the two Geneva Circle groups we can mention *forgiveness, the family, handling anger, what does it mean to be a world citizen, letting go, among others*. Circles are a space of non-hierarchical communication and complete absence of any judgement. All members share the circle facilitation and there is no circle leader per se. Complete confidentiality and mutual trust characterise communication in the circle and each one speaks and listens from the heart, never telling others how they should behave, but simply sharing their own experience in solving problems or facing specific issues. A powerful tool for authentic listening is the American Indian « talking stick » which participants hold while speaking in the circles. No one can be interrupted them while holding the stick. See CC guidelines <http://www.woman.ch/women/3-guidelines.asp>

In support of the UN Development Agenda and in particular with the Millennium Development Goals, a collection is made at the end of each CC meeting. Funds collected go to support projects for poor rural women in the Mopti region of Mali. At each meeting enough money is collected to purchase one or two sheep, which will be given to a rural woman to enable her to improve life for her family by sheep raising, and providing her with a steady source of income. Circle members feel that their solidarity constitutes a concrete illustration of compassion by reaching out globally, thereby going beyond their personal problems.

WWSF regularly gives **Circle training workshops in Geneva** (and other places in Europe) in collaboration with *Vivre Autrement* <http://www.life.int.ch/>. However, these trainings are not a precondition to launch or take part in a CC. To register for the next training workshop **in French** (5-6 November 2005) and **in English** (10-11 December 2005) at the Centre John Knox, Geneva, fill in the registration form via Internet <http://www.woman.ch/women/3-introduction.asp> or E-mail **WWSF directly**,
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