



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

A Talk on Leadership

Geneva, 16 March 2023

Farewell address by Ignacio Packer, outgoing ICVA Executive Director, to the ICVA members and other guests

With the Correct Mix of Voices, Ambition, Leadership, and Spirituality Nothing is Impossible.

The valley of Consolation is in France, 180 km from Geneva.

Eight years ago, I had the privilege of being with a group of 20 people for 5 days to discuss environmental leadership. We shared different experiences and views of how leaders should promote environmental sustainability and infuse our desire to protect the natural environment into our decision-making and actions.

A priest, a rabbi, a pujari, an imam, an oshō, a pastor, other ministers, a shaman from a traditional indigenous society of the Amazon.... All leaders, keepers of the sacred law and tradition of their religions. There were some experts on environmental issues and a hand full of “other leaders”, neither religious leaders nor environment experts. I was in “others”. Very privileged of living this experience. These five days turned out to be key in my understanding of leadership.

This is back in 2015 and the experts in this group did not wait for the 2021 IPCC report to say that there is no chance of undoing the damage already caused by global warming. They guaranteed that it was to get worse. Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. There can't be peace and prosperity in one-third of the world if two-thirds are under siege and facing calamitous threats to their wellbeing.

This experience, however, filled me with hope and new energy. It got clearer to me that with the correct mix of voices, ambition, leadership, and spirituality nothing is impossible.

We all have our own individual consciousness, our awareness of internal and external existence. We all share a solidarity with one another. We work together in many ways and our collective consciousness is what allows this to happen. Collective consciousness is all about understanding and making what seems impossible, possible. The starting point is beyond our “technical work”, our “technical collaboration”, it is consciousness.

A Rewarding Experience

It has been a great privilege to have been given the opportunity to lead ICVA. The achievements are those of a team, a network with a governance structure. The achievements are a continuation of work of predecessors.

The years at ICVA have been a most eventful period throughout, at times challenging but overall, a rewarding experience.

The power of kindness and empathy to change our ways of relating to others.

Today, it is not my intention to list out all that we have accomplished together but to take this opportunity to say a few words about leadership.

All of us in this room have privileges and influence and, in different ways, we are all in leadership positions.

I was taught at Business school that leadership was about being assertive and strong.

I believe there are other important qualities to leadership.

I don't follow the rule of "boys don't" cry I was brought up with. I can show emotions.

I am not always assertive. I manage to express doubts (sometimes), I say when I don't know (sometimes), I like being openly on a learning curve (sometimes), I also believe that only fools don't change their minds. I still find it difficult to admit when I am wrong, but I am working on that one.

I wear colorful running shoes in all circumstances, including at funerals and meetings with high level officials. I am comfortable in them and they send the message that change is possible.

I let my hair grow for it to curl. Denise likes the curls.

I hardly ever wear a tie.

I refuse to go to high standard hotels.

I don't have a car and enjoy public transport, bicycle and walking/running.

I work on a laptop and made the choice of not having an executive office.

One of my recent inspirational public figures is Jacinda Ardern. She became the youngest female head of government in the world when she was elected prime minister of New Zealand in 2017, aged 37. She gave birth while in office. She steered New Zealand through the Covid-19 pandemic, recession, the Christchurch mosque shootings, and a volcanic eruption. She stepped down in February declaring she no longer had "enough in the tank" to lead.

She said, “We’ve placed over time so much emphasis on notions of assertiveness and strength that we have assumed it means you can’t have those other qualities of kindness and empathy.”

As leaders, we have to consistently act for the power of kindness and empathy to change our ways of relating to others.

I try my best to show empathy and compassion and to be genuine. I feel people then gravitate to the results we’re working towards.

Some have the idea of being nice or likeable means that people won’t respect you as much.

The Future of the Next Generations

The future of the next generations, the future of my children, of Gaël, of Alicia and Line will be filled with ample challenges and inspiring goals. I am so proud of them. They have found their ways of contributing to a new social contract in different sectors and in different ways. All hands-on deck for peace and prosperity for people and the planet now and into the future

The future of our youth will be a good future. A future of good people. I am confident of this, deeply confident.

The future will not be filled with commitments, promises and dreams, but with something better: surprises.

Being confident in our plans is one thing. Being confident in ourselves is the backbone for action. Believing in our own ability to take a long view and act accordingly. It means knowing that we are prepared, that we have a maneuvering room no matter what happens. Knowing that we can make meaningful choices and not have to be complete prisoners of circumstances. Agility, agility, agility of our minds and of our organizations.

Priorities, priorities, priorities.... With increasing needs and challenges on resources, we are to make meaningful choices, consistently. We are not able to escape to a frontier: there aren’t any left. We are on the same ark. Besides ourselves, we need to have confidence in others.

Act with a Long View

We should confidently presume that more and more people in the world will act with a long view. Not everyone, but enough to preserve and enhance life. Whether on funding humanitarian action as we will be discussing tomorrow at the ICVA Annual Conference or on the values of democracy or the importance of multilateralism, our work has to be more entwined with the global community. More and more people have to begin to take everyone’s interest to heart.

The Aspirations of our Leadership

We need leadership that fosters collective consciousness.

We need leadership of kindness and empathy.

We need leadership with the long view.

We need leadership that is transformative.

Your leadership, our leadership has to meet these aspirations.

My tank is not empty, but it is more than time for ICVA to be led by a different profile than mine for ICVA to better live the ambition of championing diversity, equity, and inclusion as the global network of humanitarian NGOs. We need to enter different dimensions to achieve what success looks like of the ICVA2030 strategy. A strategy ICVA members developed and adopted in May 2021.

Combine shared Passions and Strengths

I have had and have a truly exciting professional period at ICVA.

I have been able to combine passions and strengths. Working with the ICVA members, the ICVA board but in particular my colleagues of the ICVA secretariat has led to overall satisfaction and happiness from my job.

In a couple of weeks', the day before April fool's day, I will hand over the ED position to Mirela for the interim period. She will be sharing ED duties with Susan. Jeremy, Keya and Eman will reinforce the Senior Management Team as part of the extended leadership team. You have a very solid team at the ICVA Secretariat. 30 people all with high commitments, highly qualified and with a DNA of collaboration and camaraderie. Mirela and team thank you.

It is difficult to part from such a team, but I know it is the right thing to do.

I wish to thank the current board and previous board of ICVA for its guidance and support. Members, partners, I have made so many friends.

Promotion of Trust, Ethical Leadership, Sustainable Living and Human Security

And where can you find me? If you want to find me 😊

As some of you know, I will be taking the [position of Executive Director of the Initiatives of Change Switzerland Foundation](#), starting 1 May 2023 after a short break.

Established in 1946, Initiatives of Change Switzerland organizes and coordinates [international and local conferences](#), seminars and training in Switzerland, primarily in its conference centre, [the former Caux-Palace](#), bringing together a true diversity of people. With its main office in Geneva, IofC engages effectively and innovatively in the promotion of trust, ethical leadership, sustainable living and human security.

I trust we can keep in touch and continue joining the dots with others, so no-one is left behind, poverty is ended, climate change is addressed urgently, inequality is addressed, lives are saved, people in humanitarian crises are protected.

I want to close in going back to thank ICVA members for the time and effort you put to enhance collective action. To our partners invited today. I really appreciate you being here and for our dialogue and your support in being part of this broad family that believes in principled humanitarian action and on the power of collective action, putting aside egos and logos.



Be happy and take care.

Ignacio

Tel/whatsapp (no change) : + 41 79 278 44 29

Until 31st March 2023



Mr. Ignacio Packer
Executive Director
International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
E: ignacio.packer@icvanetwork.org
T: +41 (0)22 950 96 00
M: +41 (0)79 278 44 29
A: NGO Humanitarian Hub, La Voie-Creuse 16, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland
A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN ACTION



www.icvanetwork.org – [Subscribe to ICVA's monthly Bulletin](#)

As from 1st May

Ignacio Packer

Executive Director

INITIATIVES OF CHANGE SWITZERLAND

La Loge - Route de Ferney 106 - 1202, Genève

M: +41 (0) 79 278 44 29 | P: +41 (0)21 962 92 50 | E-Mail: ignacio.packer@caux.ch | www.iofc.ch





A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Regional Hubs

Africa

Nairobi, Kenya
Dakar, Senegal

Asia-Pacific

Bangkok, Thailand
Islamabad, Pakistan

MENA

Amman, Jordan

Latin America

Guadalajara, Mexico
(Representation)

Geneva Office

Humanitarian Hub, La Voie-Creuse 16, 1202 Geneva
secretariat@icvanetwork.org
www.icvanetwork.org