We are the first generation making ethical decisions that will determine whether we will be the last generation. Science, technology, and sophisticated social organizational skills have provided us with unprecedented capacities for both enrichment and destruction. I believe that there is an ethical responsibility to future generations to ensure we are not passing on a future of horrific wars or ecological catastrophe. As individuals and organizations that have received the Nobel Peace Prize, we, particularly, have a human-centered responsibility to encourage and empower ethically informed policies.

Our individual life is precious and fragile. We are now reminded that our collective existence is fragile. This compels us to address, among other issues, ensuring bio-diversity and ending the destruction of thousands of species; reversing the depletion of fishing stocks; controlling ocean dumping; preventing beach depletion; halting global warming; controlling and eliminating nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction; ending terrorism whatever by States or non-State actors; fighting pandemic diseases; ending the tragedy of crushing poverty and lack of clean drinking water; and addressing crises arising from States in chaos. No nation or even small group of nations can succeed in addressing these issues alone.

Some solutions must be universal. Chlorofluorocarbon from a refrigerant in the United States or China can harm the ozone in Chile, New Zealand or anywhere. Others will follow. Visions do not recognize nations, races or borders. Our futures are interconnected in unprecedented ways.

We have been instructing us for millennia to recognize our deeper human unity. But now necessity alerts us: the galvanizing power of moral leadership cannot be ignored in deference to short-term parochial interests. Our collective challenges require principles that are unifying, inspiring, affirming of our highest potential and universally beloved. What is needed is moral leadership.

The twin of ignoring, generating a false reality, Nicolo Machiavelli stated in The Prince: “Where the safety of the country depends upon resolutions to be taken, no consideration of justice or injustice, humanity or cruelty, or glory or shame, should be allowed to prevail.” This policy of “emergency” can hardly make sense as a norm if we are to be ethical beings living in a community. Such so-called “realists” invariably assert broadly that power in their own hands is necessary to ensure the security of their individual State.

They also rely on a rigid world view in which the pursuit of the good and the pursuit of the real are divisible. They say that only what can be measured, predicted and controlled is within their policy decision. What gives our lives meaning, what makes us human, what exists our lives, is thus not considered. They have little room in the making of policy for conscience, love, or other irrepressible, formless, human treasures. Not the least of these treasures that give our lives meaning is compassion, the twin of wisdom.

Compassion is essential to our ethical nature and has universally guided every successful culture. It is upon the foundation of ethical principles that policies must be based. Without compassion, law cannot attain justice, and without justice, there is no peace.

This principle is the ethical and moral foundation of all the world’s major religions. Multilateralism is the logical political and policy outgrowth of this principle. An international order based on cooperation, equity and the rule of law is its needed expression. Where this rule of reciprocity is violated, instability follows. The failure of the nuclear weapons states to abide by that principle, contained in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons is the single greatest stimulus to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. For some to lay nuclear weapons aside is good for them but for others, this is simply not sustainable.

We would like to add two more reasons: First, the Rule of Nations: Treat all men as you wish your nation to be treated. Second, the Rule of the Powerful: As one does to shall others do.

We are faced with a moment of collective truth: the ethical, spiritually based insight of the wise coincide with material physical imperatives for survival. The value of the love of peace operates to give way to the power of love. In today’s world, leadership must be guided by the duty to love one’s neighbor as oneself. This includes the duty to protect the weakest. We all are neighbors. And today, the whole world is one neighborhood — a moral location, not a physical one. What was once an admission

Buddhism: Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. (Udana-Varga, 5:11)

Christianity: All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. (Matthew 7:12)

Confucianism: Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you. (Analects 15:23)

Hinduism: This is the sum of duty: do not unto others which would cause you pain if done to you. (Maitreya S. 5:117)

Islam: No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself. (Hadith)

Jainism: A man should treat every living creatures as himself would be treated.

Judahism: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (Leviticus 19:18)

Native American: Respect for all life is the foundation of The Great Law of Peace

Shinto: The heart of the person before you is a mirror.

Sikhism: I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all.

Taoism: Regard your neighbour’s gain as your own gain, and your neighbour’s loss as your own loss.

Jonathan Granoff is CEO of the Global Security Institute, an organization that works with citizens and policy makers to achieve that enhances security and lead to elimination of nuclear weapons. He is also Vice President of the Lawyers Alliance for World Security, Vice President of the Institute for International Non-proliferation and a member of the United Nations, and he serves on numerous governing boards, such as the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, the Temple of Understanding, and the Middle Powers Initiative. He is also Co-Chair of the American Bar Association’s Committee on Arms Control. Mr. Granoff is an attorney, author, award-winning screenwriter (“The Constitution: The Document that Created a Nation”) and public advocate for the legal, ethical and spiritual dimension of human development and peace.