

Daisaku Ikeda's Recollections of World Figures
Ricardo Díez-Hochleitner
President of The Club of Rome, Gathering of World Intellectuals

TIME is life. There's never a moment wasted in Dr. Ricardo Díez-Hochleitner's day. He is always on the move. As the third president of The Club of Rome, he constantly travels the globe. Viewing his role as building bridges, he has created a network for peace.

Jet lag never seems to bother him, and each time I see him I tell him to take care of his health as he races around discharging his heavy workload. Once he said to me that tomorrow is too late; we must act today. He is motivated by a sense of crisis. The problems that humanity faces are altogether too large and too grave, requiring urgent action, he says, and his own contribution, too small. He always feels that he must do more for the sake of humanity, and that is what drives him.

A sense of responsibility—for me, that sums up what is great about human beings. Responsibility is not a passive sense of duty. Responsibility means deciding for ourselves what we should be doing now. It is a matter of self-awareness, of our commitment and our state of life. A slave has no responsibility, it is said. A person who has been robbed of liberty and forced to do someone else's bidding cannot be made to take responsibility for those actions. Only a free person can feel a sense of responsibility. And the depth and breadth of a person's sense of responsibility are measures of how free they are inside.

The Club of Rome itself was born from the sense of responsibility for the future on the part of Aurelio Peccei (1908–84), one of the club's pivotal founders. No one asked him to found such an association. Dr. Peccei stood up alone because of an urgent sense that the human race was heading for destruction if the single-minded worship of materialism continued.

President Díez-Hochleitner declares himself a disciple of Dr. Peccei, and voiced his desire to carry on the friendship that began between his mentor and myself. Clearly he holds the Club's founder in high esteem and always bears his founding spirit in mind.

A dialogue between myself and Dr. Peccei has been published under the title *Before It Is Too Late*—a title that was chosen by The Club of Rome founding president himself. Dr. Peccei asserts:

Only the human revolution can unearth our inner potential and make us feel fully what we really are and behave accordingly; only it can show us how to utilize our computers and satellites, our engines and instruments, and our nuclear reactors and electronic gadgetry to commune better with our fellow humans and our entire Universe. It is this revolution alone that can make us see how important it is to survive in order to have a life worth living both for its own sake and as a means to prepare responsibly and compassionately a way of life for the generations of those who will follow us.¹

Learning Is Limitless

THE publication of a report titled "The Limits to Growth" made The Club of Rome instantly famous [in 1972]. It warned of the limited nature of the Earth and sounded the alarm on such issues as the population explosion, depletion of natural resources and

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environmental problems. The report concluded that the basic solution to this group of complex problems was to change the selfish behavior patterns of human beings, and it proposed a new humanism and a human revolution.

Dr. Peccei stressed: Growth is limited, but learning is not; our external resources are limited, but our inner human resources are unlimited. He advocated the development of wisdom in order to make the best use of available knowledge.

In his “Agenda for the End of the Century,” which he continued dictating up until about twelve hours before his death in 1984, The Club of Rome founding president concludes by saying:

Another reason why human development is so imperative is that, to get out of its predicament, humankind must realize where it is at present, where it is going and where it could go instead.²

Where is humanity today? Where is it going? Unless we observe the drama of tremendous change unfolding on Earth from a macroscopic view, he maintains, we won’t know where to start. This represents true wisdom.

President Díez-Hochleitner shares his predecessor’s conviction. First, he insists, we must know where we came from and where we are going. He also notes that though we say the Earth is sick, the real problem lies in the fact that human beings are sick.

A Statement on Human Responsibility

DR. Díez-Hochleitner was inaugurated as the third president of The Club of Rome in January 1991, succeeding the second president, Dr. Alexander King.

That same month, I joined with five internationally respected intellectuals in sending an emergency appeal for peace to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein at the height of the Persian Gulf crisis. President Díez-Hochleitner was one of those intellectuals.

At its annual meeting in November of that year, The Club of Rome issued its “Statement of Human Responsibility.” It identified the lack of a sense of responsibility as a source of many of the world’s problems—corruption, destruction, terrorism, drugs, state exploitation, human rights’ violations, military intervention and environmental degradation. The statement’s content was truly on the mark.

Leaders who sacrifice the people solely for personal gain and self-preservation; wasteful societies that sacrifice the future for the present — all these things can be summed up by the word *irresponsible*.

Learning Is the Foundation of Leaders

DR. Díez-Hochleitner was born in Spain in 1928, the same year as I was. Both of his parents were educators. When he started elementary school, his father was the principal. In junior high school, his mother was one of his teachers. When he went to high school, both his parents had become teachers there. And when he obtained a professorship at a university in Colombia, his parents also took teaching positions in the South American country.

His family was very studious. His father was fluent in fourteen languages and his mother, seven; while he himself has mastered six. From his parents he learned to think about what he could do for others, how he could serve.

Once when Dr. Díez-Hochleitner was eight, his father scolded him. On a walk with his father, he found a coin in his pocket, and without thinking, he tossed it away. His father, who had caught sight of this, looked at him with great sadness and lightly slapped his face. Dr. Díez-Hochleitner confided that he has still not forgotten his father's expression at that time. I have the impression that his father taught him a solid sense of values and the basics of right and wrong.

During his long, distinguished career, Dr. Díez-Hochleitner has served in a number of important posts both in his native Spain and internationally. These include serving as senior advisor in educational planning and administration to the Organization of American States (OAS); the first head of investments in the education sector at the World Bank; Spanish state secretary for Education and Science; member of the UNESCO Executive Board; and first president of the National Education Research Center in Madrid.

In his twenties, he was supervising others in their forties and fifties. He has admitted that often in those days he wished he looked older than he did. The spirit to keep on learning lies at the heart of his philosophy of leadership.

He says that he would rather be thought of as a servant working for the people than a boss. He is happier in that role. He describes his colleagues in The Club of Rome as brilliant intellects, and he says he thinks of himself as no more than their disciple. He finds the meaning of life in the motto: "Always learning."

This humility is undoubtedly the secret of Dr. Díez-Hochleitner's energy.

We live in rapidly changing times. If we stop learning, we will soon be left behind. Failing or refusing to learn is a form of irresponsibility.

In the introduction to the report titled "The First Global Revolution," published by the Club the year he became president, Dr. Díez-Hochleitner writes:

The human being both creates the problematique and suffers its consequences.... [W]e shall, no doubt, be accused as before of being harbingers of doom and gloom. This may well be our role and our glory. Doomsaying is, however, by no means our sole or even central role and intention. It is but a necessary prelude to "doombreaking."³

Buddhism teaches: A wise person, while dwelling in security, anticipates danger; a foolish person, while dwelling amid danger, takes security for granted. We can see that the members of The Club of Rome have the sense of responsibility of the wise. Everything will depend on the degree to which the leaders and ordinary people of the world can manifest such wisdom.

Vision, Capacity for Innovation, and Ethical Perception

THE First Global Revolution" offers a list of qualities for the new leaders of a new world:

- a strategic vision and a global approach to the priority elements of the problematique;
- a capacity for innovation and adjustment to change;

- an ethical perspective, making no concessions to expediency;
- effectiveness in taking [sic] decisions after due dialogue with colleagues and advisers, in ensuring the implementation of the decisions and, in due time, in assessing the results;
- capacity to learn and to encourage others to learn;
- courage to change his or her mind as perceptions of situations and problems deepen;
- ability to inform the public clearly of the general direction of policy in a way which encourages them to identify;
- capacity to relegate strategy and tactics to their proper place as means and not as ends;
- willingness to set up systems through which one can listen in to the needs of the citizens, their fears, demands and suggestions.⁴

The Club of Rome president is himself a perfect example of this type of leader, the type of person needed in the twenty-first century.

Time Will Not Wait

I FIRST met Dr. Díez-Hochleitner at the opening of the Victor Hugo House of Literature in France [in June 1991]. He kindly traveled all the way from Spain especially for the occasion.

The French literary giant Victor Hugo (1802–85) asserted that the successive revolutions in France were not merely revolutions of a local or regional nature but were in fact “human revolutions.”

In that sense, there could have been no more fitting place for Dr. Díez-Hochleitner and I to meet, both of us being staunch believers in human revolution as a necessary requirement for the success of a “global revolution.”

There are just some 2,200 days [from December 1994] until the year 2001. Time will not wait for us. Determining what kind of century the twenty-first century will be is a race between ourselves and time. □

1. Aurelio Peccei and Daisaku Ikeda, *Before It Is Too Late* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1984), p. 129.
2. Aurelio Peccei, “The Club of Rome: Agenda for the End of the Century” (March 1992), p. 42. A pamphlet published to commemorate the holding of The Club of Rome’s Fukuoka Conference in Japan in May 1992.
3. Alexander King and Bertrand Schneider, “The First Global Revolution: A Report by the Council of The Club of Rome” (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), p. xiii.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 205.