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February 13, 2011

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

As an international school educator of thirty-five years and as a developer of the Global Issues Network (GIN) since 2006, it is clear that GIN inspires and empowers our students to create positive and lasting change.

This call for action and positive change was outlined in J.F. Rischard's book, *High Noon: Twenty Global Problems and Twenty Years to Solve Them*. Clayton Lewis, Director of the International School of Luxembourg, immediately read *High Noon* and recognized the potential of Rischard's Global Issues Network concept as applied to our international student community. Lewis understood that GIN provided a forum for an already interconnected community of international students to solve socio-environmental problems. This vision would also lead to the creation of innovative student conferences that have since formed a community of active members of the growing Global Issues Network. Currently, annual student led GIN conferences are taking place in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and are in the works for both North and South America.

How does the Global Issues Network empower students?

As responsible global citizens, students can and must make a difference, in agreement with Rischard who affirms that the "global citizen first" mindset must be an initial step towards toward empowerment. As a member of GIN, students are encouraged to have a voice and are supported in their actions which enable them to empathize, to think critically, to problem solve, to communicate, to learn, to teach, and to lead. All of these skill sets empower. Students learn to use the tools of empathy and the many modes of communication in order to identify a problem and rise to the challenges they encounter with the distinct perspective of global citizenship. It is empowering as well as comforting to recognize our shared global citizenry, "we are in this together."

GIN recommends that each school begins with a team effort wherein a dedicated group of students and mentors collaboratively work with the local community to identify an area of concern and to jointly develop and implement viable solutions. GIN challenges students and teachers to be innovative in their thinking, act with purpose, to be creative and inclusive in developing solutions. Students utilize the Network as a resource for problem-solving, support, and sharing knowledge all the while creating stronger bonds and an atmosphere of connectivity. GIN encourages students to realize

themselves as agents of change, committed to taking action in the world now with an eye on the future, creating a lasting global ripple effect.

A GIN member's experience of empowerment and the journey to make a difference as a "global citizen" can be seen in the video on this website:

<http://www.global-issuesnetwork.org/video/elicia-cousins-participates>

It is the students, ages 13-18, who give each conference a unique life through dynamic and divergent dialogue. Each year, members of the Network look forward to taking part in their regional student led GIN conference. Involved schools are invited to send a GIN team (or two) to the Conference. In preparation, the student teams (two to six participants) are asked to create an interactive workshop based on their collaborative efforts and actions to address a global issue.

These student led workshops are the crux of GIN conferences as they provide an opportunity for students to practice equity as a community. As a result of student experience and work in their respective fields of service, all participants at the conference are recognized equally as peers and advocates for change. As peers, students hold each other accountable and take on more responsibility as individuals and a collective. This is evident in the various ways that students participate and take on leadership roles in the GIN community as members both in real time and virtually.

Students are given many responsibilities and expected to weigh in as valued members of the Conference Planning Committee. Among these responsibilities is the ability to select keynote speakers, bring together a Student Alumni Panel, participate in Global Village Group discussions, and create a film based on their project to be shown at the GIN Conference Film Festival as a means of reaching the whole GIN audience and later the world, as they are posted on the website. All of these forums, committees, and modes of expression allow the students to take the reins and lay the groundwork for a more conscientious future. We are already seeing that the seeds of empowerment nurtured through the experience of GIN create lasting responsible global citizens committed to growing positive change, as evidenced by GIN Alumni.

We now have Global Issues Networks with members from around the world. We welcome the participation of students and activists to join with us and become a member of the Global Issues Network webpage: <http://www.global-issues-network.org>. I look forward to discussing your participation in the Global Issues Network and future conferences.

Sincerely,

Linda Sills
Global Issues Network
Director Program Development