



# Liberal Manifesto 2017

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## Preamble

In 1947 a group of Liberals from around the world published the Oxford Manifesto, the first international declaration of liberal principles. They did so in response to the horrors of World War II with its unprecedented physical destruction, millions of people killed, and the horrifying dehumanization represented by the Holocaust in particular. After the victory over Nazism and Fascism and in face of Communist authoritarianism, Liberals were determined to reassert human rights and values, and the Oxford Manifesto was to become a predecessor of another monumental document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights agreed by the United Nations in December 1948.

In the free world, these liberal principles paved the way for peace, the rule of law, human rights and prosperity for many people in the following decades. Individual rights were defined and developed; personal freedom was increasingly guaranteed by the fair and independent administration of law and justice; there was widening freedom of worship and liberty of conscience; freedom of speech and of the press was protected; people had freedom to associate and not to associate as they chose; there was increasing opportunity for a full and varied education according to ability and irrespective of their family of birth or the means to pay; this made a free choice of occupation a much greater possibility for many people; increasing prosperity resulted in greater opportunities to exercise the right to private ownership of property and the right to embark on individual enterprise; freedom of choice was expanded for consumers and there were greater opportunities to reap the benefit of the productivity of the land and the industry of humankind; there was more security from the hazards of sickness, unemployment, disability and old age and greater equality of rights between women and men. The success of these principles not only benefitted people in free countries but also helped to overcome communist dictatorships and the division of Europe, as well as many authoritarian and populist regimes in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

In the 70 years since the publication of the Oxford Manifesto these principles have been restated by Liberal International in seven further declarations, manifestos and appeals. They constitute a major body of liberal thought from which we continue to draw inspiration and strength.

Today, united in the family of Liberal International, we Liberals again fully endorse the principles set out in the Oxford Manifesto and its successors, but we do so recognizing that Liberalism is under renewed attack as a philosophy with universal application both in theory and in political practice. The attacks come from those on the left who give the state absolute priority as well as conservatives and nationalists on the right, but also from populists on both sides of the political spectrum who want an explicitly “illiberal” autocratic state that will enforce their perspectives. In addition to those who want to use the system to create illiberal societies, there are others, anarchists and violent Islamist extremists, who do not want to take over the system, but to burn the system in radical and destructive revolutions. These attacks on Liberalism and global peace and stability are not only being conducted in traditional ways, but through the new medium of cyber-space. We are living in very dangerous times and no part of the world is safe from these threats.

However there are also new opportunities. The world has seen the arrival of a technological revolution and enormously increased opportunities to trade, to travel and to communicate with each other across the globe. This creates vast opportunities for humankind, lifting millions out of poverty and helping many countries liberate themselves from authoritarian leaderships.

While we recognize that these opportunities bring new challenges – among them climate change, mass migration and concerns about the degree of inequality in income and wealth – Liberals embrace all opportunities and accept all challenges. During times of stability, Liberalism can evolve and grow, but during times of instability there is an opportunity for radical steps forward in our thinking. It is our task to demonstrate that Liberalism can provide the best new ideas and policies for dealing with these challenges and make the best of the new opportunities without abandoning our values and beliefs. We will fight against Illiberalism and strive for the further spread of liberal values, in the spirit of liberal universalism. This is a time to reflect, renew and reclaim our liberal aspirations and to address the current threats to freedom with liberal responses. This is what we do with the Liberal Manifesto 2017.

Now Therefore We, Liberals of the World Assembled in Congress of Liberal International this Twentieth of May of Two Thousand and Seventeen in Andorra, Have Adopted the Following Manifesto:

#### **A. Our Vision: Human Progress in a Free World**

The freedom of every human being is an essential principle in achieving human progress and a better world. As a global movement, Liberalism strongly believes in human reason as the foundation of progress towards that better world. Liberalism is dedicated to the inalienable right of all people to a life in which each can determine how they wish to live.

Each of us is different, and Liberalism embraces and cultivates this diversity among all the members of the human family. We see people as self-governing agents, independent authors of their own lives. Society is the arena where these authors come together, exchange ideas and opinions, learn from and come to understand each other with all our differences of interest. Society is where people develop themselves, first with parents and carers, then in whatever family group they find themselves, and then in increasingly wide community circles. Our very selves develop in social relationships. A comprehensive set of rights, freedoms, and responsibilities allows for the pluralism of beliefs and ideas, as well as the diversity in backgrounds, that nourish this richness of difference without distinction based on gender, race, age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, disability, or any other personal or social condition. A liberal society is based not only on human rights, but on human relationships.

We aim to protect liberal constitutions which operate under the rule of law and promote equal opportunities for everyone. No society can be free without freedom of expression, assembly and association. We want institutions that are democratic, accountable and capable, and that provide equal rights and freedoms for all. Under these conditions, human creativity can flourish and fuel

human progress towards a peaceful, prosperous and open global society. In economic, social and environmental terms, this global society must be sustainable both now and in the long run. This requires an integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.

## **B. Our Challenge: New Rising Threats to Freedom**

Until the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we saw a liberal age in the making. Since then, that growing global liberal consensus has come under attack from different sides. A wave of authoritarianism, populism and fundamentalism threatens to undermine and dismantle our liberal achievements. These anti-liberal developments often feed on the suspicion that rising inequalities of power and wealth are preventing the liberal social contract from delivering fair opportunities for those who are most disadvantaged. The ability and effectiveness of the institutions of the liberal world order to meet the challenges of climate change, a growing world population and increasing migration are equally being questioned. The growing heterogeneity of many societies is cause for insecurity for many people, exacerbating their attachment to what they perceive as their core identity, and fueling suspicion and hostility towards people they perceive as different from themselves. At the same time, many people see Liberalism merely as a Western excuse for economic selfishness and irresponsibility. These trends pose a challenge to Liberalism, promoting anti-liberal norms and institutions, threatening to divide the world into warring factions, and stopping human progress.

## **C. Our Response: Opportunities for Everyone, Progress for All**

The best response of Liberalism to these challenges is to promote equality of opportunity for all, strengthen liberal institutions and the rule of law across the globe, promote general and civic education, health care, free and fair trade and sustainable opportunities for every human being, and to cultivate responsibility and accountability across all borders. We Liberals believe in human progress based on new knowledge gained and applied as locally as possible through deliberation, cooperation and learning in the arenas of democracy, education and research, the market economy and civil society.

The strength of Liberalism has always been its innate flexibility to adapt to changing environments and thus to tackle new challenges as they emerge. Liberalism builds on human ingenuity and creativity rather than merely clinging to the received wisdom of the past. In this spirit, the main challenges for Liberals are to make human progress as dynamic as possible, to ensure that it becomes more equitable, encompassing and inclusive for everyone, to help individuals to embrace the complexity of today's world and to find strength in the realization that their identities are complex and multilayered, and to make the progress of our human family sustainable so that not only the present, but also future generations can take full advantage of it.

Liberals recognize that human rights are individual, not collective. Given the natural diversity of human aspirations, characters and talents, as well as religious beliefs and convictions, the pursuit of happiness is and remains a fundamentally individual concern. It is about the freedom you can use to live a life you value, without limiting the freedom of others. That is not to say that

Liberalism is mere individualism. Community is also important. Liberalism is about liberty – the freedom of the individual – but it is also about liberality – generosity of spirit to ‘the Other’, not just our close friends and family, but to the whole family of humankind. We Liberals embrace institutions and policies that open the maximum opportunity for all people in the present and in the future. We must overcome rigid social divides in our societies. Governments all over the world can and must create institutions and pursue policies that are more inclusive and strive to empower their citizens in freedom.

In view of these principles and the challenges of today and the future, we Liberals call on others to work with us as we strive to:

## **1. Promote equal rights for all, and defend human rights worldwide**

All members of our societies can be authors of their own lives and should enjoy the same human rights. This is a core value of liberal democracies, which stand for individual freedom and the rule of law and against unfair discrimination. Liberals defend these rights both at home and abroad.

As Liberals, we strive to allow everyone to be who they are, to love who they wish, and to live as they choose, in the clear knowledge that those freedoms will be defended as long as they do not compromise the rights of anyone else. Liberals intrinsically believe that rights for members of minority groups of all kinds must have a secure and safe place in our values and we particularly support those who are vulnerable to discrimination whether as members of ethnic minorities or indigenous groups, people with visible and non-visible disabilities, children, the elderly, and LGBT+ people (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex a.o.). Individuals who believe in a religious or another faith or in atheism must be protected in the practice of their beliefs so long as they are within the existing law and constitutional rights.

While the 20th century saw significant progress on the rights of women, inequalities for women, who represent more than half of the world’s population, still remain, especially in the uneven distribution of property and political representation, as well as the widespread use of violence against women and the denial of their sexual and reproductive rights. Some countries even retain these inequalities by law, denying women the right to vote, own property, benefit from education and enjoy personal freedom. We will therefore continue to fight fiercely for the rights of women.

It is the task of democratic states to ensure that freedom for all can be enjoyed in safe conditions and that those who violate human rights and encroach on freedom are properly challenged and effectively dealt with. This requires an adequate public investment in safety and security. Where a state violates these human rights, liberal democracies must stand ready to offer refuge to those fleeing such violations, as enshrined in the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. It is clear to us that asylum is the responsibility of the international community as a whole. At the same time, liberal societies also recognize their responsibility to help identify and fight the root causes of people fleeing their home countries whether those causes are economic, political or violent conflicts.

## **2. Strengthen democratic institutions, the rule of law and civil society**

Only liberal democracy can make sure that individuals and their freedoms are properly protected but we must not allow the abuse of our freedoms by those who oppose those very freedoms. With strong democracies that are able to defend themselves, we will actively protect our liberal values and democratic institutions against those who want to undermine and destroy them. As a form of government, democracy makes it possible to hold those in power accountable for what they do. Accountability, in turn, is a key for a better government, and so are transparency and a sufficient decentralization of decision-making, which guarantee more direct participation and control of government by citizens. Many people in the world suffer from a dismal level of professional governance in their respective countries and poor governance is often associated with corruption which is one of the most destructive elements in community life. At all levels of government from the local to the global, we must strengthen our efforts to fight corruption, fraud and organized crime, and to generally improve the quality of governance through the implementation of our liberal principles of accountability, transparency, separation of powers, decentralization of decision-making, respect for the rule of law and an active civil society.

Free individuals form the basis of any liberal democracy, and an open dialogue between citizens in which all arguments are heard and considered leads to better and more durable solutions for all. In a free and dynamic civil society people can come together in various fora and exchange ideas, pursue common interests and activities, develop their opinions, agree and disagree about values, spiritual matters and politics, independent of the state and the market. Government efforts to use civil society for its own purposes or to suppress unwanted legitimate civil society groups must be rejected in an open liberal society. Instead, governments should stimulate an active dialogue between civil society actors and relevant authorities with the objective of extending inclusiveness in society. Religions and other beliefs have a natural place in civil society but Liberals advocate the separation of organized religions and state institutions in order to avoid the centralizing of power and maintain the diversity of our communities.

## **3. Defend freedom of information, expression, and the media and the right to privacy**

Freedom of expression is critical for a liberal democracy. We support unencumbered access to, and circulation of, information for all citizens, and freedom of discourse unhindered by the state and protected by a framework of rules that promote freedom. With the exponential increase in information-gathering and storage made possible with new technologies, we are determined to ensure that a rules-based framework guarantees the integrity of individual private data, online privacy and freedom from surveillance, and the right to redress where citizens are harmed by breaches of privacy or targeted misinformation, regardless of the medium of communication. In order to provide the media and general public with the ability to control public authorities, it is crucial to ensure access to information regarding the affairs of public and democratic institutions at all levels. Liberals believe that such freedoms and protections for individuals are vital underpinnings for a free society built on freedom of opinion and freedom of assembly.

#### **4. Foster, extend and promote education**

Providing a high-quality education to all irrespective of social or economic background is the best guarantor of equality of opportunity. Education is essential for human progress and finding the answer to our global challenges. It is a prime liberal goal to work for equal access to education and the acquisition of skills and critical thinking from early childhood and throughout the rest of a person's life, allowing people to live in dignity and prosperity. Citizens must be enabled to govern themselves and to live with their fellow citizens in a respectful way and this means an education that promotes tolerance, human rights and the appreciation of differences in perspective.

Equal access to education is also required to enable children, adolescents, adults and older people to make the best use of their talents, independent of their family background. The aim is to achieve a maximum of empowerment, inclusion and skills to meet the challenges of digitalization, globalization and technological advances as well as the building of personal and social relationships. This can only be accomplished if additional support is provided for those who are economically and socially disadvantaged to enable them to work their way into active participation in society so that they can make a full contribution to the communities in which they live.

Individual freedoms and the diversity of our communities require freedom and diversity in education. We Liberals always strive to promote freedom of education to empower individuals by ensuring that they are able to choose the best possible education and teaching for themselves and their children. Throughout life we want every human being to have access to a good education, regardless of race, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, disability or any other personal or social condition.

#### **5. Deliver best access to health care for illness and disability**

Despite substantial improvements in life expectancy and health standards, people in many parts of the world continue to suffer from malnutrition and lack of access to medical and health care. This is an evil that we must combat on humanitarian grounds and, as good health is a precondition for better education at all ages, it is a major obstacle to economic development. The world is also faced with an increasing number of people suffering from mental illness, which is detrimental to the individual and his/her family. Mental illness, like many physical illnesses and disabilities, has substantial consequences in terms of medical costs and the loss of the ability to work.

All national governments and the international community must make improving health standards and providing access to health care for everyone an ambition and primary objective. 'E-health' and telemedicine are important tools for that. However in these times of expanding technology we must not forget that many people still do not even have access to drinkable water and sanitation. These are absolutely primary requirements that should be made available to everybody and not only should access to, protection and use of natural resources and ecosystems be made sustainable now and for the future, but the conscious destruction of resources as an act of terrorism or war should be declared a crime against humanity.

## **6. Secure sustainability of global growth**

Global economic growth is only beneficial to all if it is sustainable and inclusive in the long run and raises the living standards of all the world's citizens. It must not come at the expense of future generations or benefit only people in some parts of the world at the cost of others.

Liberals believe that economic growth and progress must be sustainable environmentally, fiscally and socially. These are the three key attributes of the quality of growth. Economic progress must not be based on local or global environmental degradation, on excessive borrowing and largesse, on elite capture, tax evasion or the domination of one group over another.

Climate change is the greatest environmental threat humanity knows. Its consequences jeopardize freedom and prosperity for many generations to come. Therefore, Liberals believe that wealth has to be created with respect for the limits of a finite planet and by observing the precautionary principle. Avoiding irreversible ecological damage as well as disastrous climate change as a consequence of high greenhouse gas emissions is one of the preconditions for sustainable economic progress. This requires an appropriate international rules-based framework for protecting and making responsible use of the 'global commons'. We must recognize that this presents both great opportunities and significant costs, which are much more difficult for poor countries to bear than for rich countries. This means that on economic as well as moral grounds, global support is necessary for poor countries to adjust to more sustainable growth.

Similarly, Liberals support rules-based frameworks for fiscal responsibility so that governments cannot rely on future generations to pay for current growth and cannot degrade democracy via excessive debt-based public spending. Liberals support local, national, regional and global legal frameworks that prevent exploitation of individuals and groups by others as well as the emergence of monopolies, whether of the state or of the private sector.

## **7. Promote technological advances and fight abuses**

The exponential growth of human knowledge is a key to global prosperity and sustainable development. We Liberals regard the creativity of humankind as potentially unlimited. Governments must establish a fertile ground for this creativity by ensuring the provision of good schooling, supporting research in universities without government constraints, and securing business opportunities for turning inventions into innovations that expand human knowledge and create markets for new viable products and services. The structural change that brings innovation needs to be supported and managed by all parts of society in order to reduce disparities and to create new opportunities, and this means that education is for all ages and stages in life.

Rapid scientific discoveries, digitalization, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence will create vast opportunities and challenges for humanity. These technological advances must never be used for war or armament. Curing illness, achieving food security and development and fostering the expansion of freedoms should be their main goals. Governments, international institutions and civil society should prevent well-defined abuses through transparent supervision that does not unduly hinder the process of scientific discovery, research and individual development.



## **8. Support trade and investment**

As history shows, the flow of goods and services as well as capital and people across national borders is a boon for the spread of prosperity. With ever more countries integrating into the world economy, free and fair trade as well as investment across borders are major instruments for the alleviation of poverty and the promotion of peace. However, with a reappearance of protectionist attitudes in various states and regions, some countries are being left out of the benefits from a liberalized world economy. Therefore, there is a need for us to argue the case for maintaining and extending a strong and well-functioning global trade regime to ensure a level playing field for all. Free trade agreements between countries on a bilateral or limited multilateral basis have in the past been successful tools to promote regional trade integration and investment partnerships. They should be encouraged as long as they respect the rules of the World Trade Organization and remain open for further members.

Resistance to economic protectionism remains a key liberal commitment as is our obligation to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from a liberalized global economy. In the long term, this is the only way we can sustain an open liberal society. While we recognize that the market system by itself does not guarantee a fair distribution of wealth, we will fight to provide equitable access to markets, property, capital, infrastructure, health and education for everybody. By promoting equal opportunities for all, we empower individuals to participate in, contribute to and benefit from global growth, thereby reducing economic and social inequalities and making markets work for all.

## **9. Support controlled migration**

Liberal societies are open to the migration of people. The ability to move within and between nations increases freedom and the possibilities for individuals to pursue their happiness. Migration of people is natural and, as history has proved, it is beneficial and brings cultural enrichment for the receiving countries. Migrants can help to meet skill shortages and increase cultural knowledge and diversity within society, but of course this can also impoverish the communities they have left behind.

While mass migration due to economic, social, political and environmental factors is likely to increase in the future, these movements of people need to be better understood and managed. We accept that in some cases there may need to be limitations to the size and the pace of population movement given the capacity and size of the receiving country. Proper legal frameworks and support structures should also make sure that migrants and refugees are well integrated so that they, too, can thrive to their fullest potential and make a valuable contribution to the societies where they now live.

## **10. Strengthen international peace and cooperation**

Today's globalized world community is interconnected, intertwined and integrated through technological, social and economic cooperation. Nevertheless conflicts over territory, resources,

government, ethnicity, religion and ideology arise, and old feuds re-emerge. For Liberals the preservation or development of peaceful, respectful relations between communities, instead of the use of illegal, aggressive force, remains the basis for any civilized resolution of conflict. International relations must follow the law as laid down in international conventions and treaties. International institutions, courts and arbitration mechanisms need to be strengthened, and while in addition to international diplomacy, physical force may be necessary to maintain the authority and rulings of these international institutions, it is vital that all parties comply with their rulings and decisions and adhere to the force of law rather than the law of force.

Liberals want to see a peaceful world. Seventy years ago we came together after two terrible global conflicts to build liberal democratic internationalism, through our political cooperation in Liberal International, and also through the development of international structures of cooperation such as the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, structures of international law guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Union and, in later decades, through structures of regional cooperation in Asia, Africa and the Americas. It is also why we strive to be the catalyst for international disarmament and frontrunners in curbing the global spread of weapons. We know that peace processes and community development must include all the groups in a society. It is our firm belief that there is no other way the world can be peaceful, for when people believe that they are being humiliated, or treated unfairly, or that their identity as individuals and as a community is under profound threat they will be prone to resort to violence. And when people are threatened by genocide, or a tyranny is permanently suppressing the basic human rights of people over whom it has power, liberal democracies have a duty to invoke the doctrine of the 'Responsibility to Protect' as endorsed by the member states of the United Nations in 2005.

**With this new Manifesto, we Liberals reaffirm the principles of the 1947 Oxford Manifesto and refine them for the times in which we live, by stating what as Liberals we believe, and what we are committed to do, to make our world a better, freer, more prosperous, generous and sustainable place for the family of humankind.**