**Opening Address- Global Ethics Forum 2026 — Bali, Indonesia**
***Responsible Governance in a Fragmented World: Ethical Pathways to Human Flourishing***
**Rev. Prof. Dr. Dietrich Werner, Berlin/Geneva**

**Selamat datang!**

A very warm welcome to all of you.

It is my special privilege and great joy, on behalf of Globethics Foundation Geneva, to declare open the **Global Ethics Forum 2026 here in Bali, Indonesia**.

**How can responsible governance contribute to human flourishing in a fragmented world?**

And behind this question stands an even more fundamental one:

**What do we actually mean when we speak of human flourishing?**

**1. The purpose of the Global Ethics Forum**

Since its establishment as an annual multistakeholder platform in 2009, the Global Ethics Forum has brought together people from different sectors and regions to address some of the most pressing ethical and governance challenges of our time.

The decision to hold the Forum in Indonesia is therefore highly significant.

It signals Globethics' commitment to the regionalization of its work and to listening more attentively to ethical perspectives emerging from Asia and the Global South. It also reflects our desire to learn from Indonesia: from its cultural and religious diversity, its experience of social transformation, its rapidly developing economy and digital society, and its rich traditions concerning the relationship between human beings, community and nature.

Our theme brings together several concerns that Globethics has addressed over many years: responsible leadership, ethical governance, responsible innovation, the ethical challenges of new technologies, peace and coexistence, and the search for shared values in a deeply divided world.

Our vocation is not simply to produce another set of declarations (although we have some very important declarations for you available here as well).

It is to ask **critical ethical questions**.

Not only:

**What can we do?**

But:

**What should we do?**

Not only:

**What is technologically possible?**

But:

**What is ethically desirable?**

And not only:

**Who benefits from economic growth and technological transformation?**

But:

**Who may be left behind, who bears the costs, and what kind of society are we creating?**

**2. What do we mean by human flourishing?**

The concept of human flourishing enables us to move beyond a narrow understanding of development.

For too long, development has been measured predominantly through economic growth, productivity, income, consumption and technological advancement.

These things matter.

Poverty reduction matters. Economic security matters. Education matters. Health matters. Innovation matters.

But they do not, by themselves, tell us whether human beings and communities are actually flourishing.

The **Global Flourishing Studies**, such as the ones undertaken by Harvard University and Baylor University, offers a broader perspective. It considers flourishing across six dimensions: **happiness and life satisfaction; physical and mental health; meaning and purpose; character and virtue; close social relationships; and financial and material stability.**

This recognizes something fundamental:

**We are persons, not merely economic actors or consumers.**

We need relationships, meaning, belonging, dignity and purpose. We need opportunities to develop our capacities, and communities and institutions in which these possibilities can become real.

Indonesia is particularly interesting in this regard. The Global Flourishing Study finds particularly strong dimensions here relating to social connection, community engagement and meaning and purpose in life. This should not lead us to romanticize Indonesia. But it does invite a question:

**What can societies with strong communal, cultural and spiritual resources teach a world that has become increasingly individualistic, competitive and technologically driven?**

And it suggests that we need a richer understanding of development than conventional economic indicators such as GDP can provide.

**3. Towards a richer and more balanced understanding of development — working on the central ethical dilemma of our time**

Let me illustrate this with the experience of **South Korea and Japan**.

South Korea is one of the extraordinary development success stories of the modern era: highly educated, technologically advanced, prosperous and globally competitive. And yet this success is accompanied by extraordinarily low fertility, high housing and education costs, intense educational pressures, labour-market insecurity among younger generations, and significant work-life and mental-health challenges.

Japan, too, is one of the world's most prosperous, secure and long-lived societies. But **longevity is not identical with flourishing**. Pressures of work, ageing, social isolation and declining social connectedness remind us that the question is not simply:

**How long do human beings live?**

It is also:

**How well, with whom, and for what purpose do they live?**

Europe provides another perspective. European societies generally enjoy comparatively high levels of life satisfaction and social protection, but averages can conceal profound inequalities. People facing disability, poverty, unaffordable housing, exclusion or mental-health difficulties may experience a very different reality from that of the statistical average citizen.

The question therefore becomes:

**Who is flourishing—and who is not?**

These examples point toward a more holistic understanding of development, one that includes not only prosperity and health, but also **relationships, equality, participation, meaning, dignity and ecological sustainability.**

And here we encounter what I would call the **central ethical dilemma of our time**.

We have created unprecedented capacities to transform the world. Artificial intelligence, biotechnology, digital technologies and automation are expanding our possibilities at extraordinary speed.

Yet precisely at the moment when our technological powers are expanding, questions of human purpose, dignity, justice and responsibility are becoming more—not less—important.

The danger is that we confuse **capacity with wisdom**: that because something can be done, it should be done; that faster is necessarily better; that more data means more knowledge; or that more economic growth necessarily means more human flourishing.

The essential question is therefore not whether we should stop innovation.

It is:

**What is innovation for? Who decides? Who benefits? Who carries the risks?**

This brings us to the **central ethical dilemma:**

**There is a widening gap between the unprecedented technological capacities we are acquiring and our still insufficient ethical capacity to govern them responsibly.**

Our challenge is to bring **the progress of technology and the progress of human ethical responsibility back into balance.**

**4. What can spiritual and ethical traditions contribute?**

Here we must recognize the indispensable contribution of spiritual and ethical traditions.

They do not possess all the answers to our contemporary problems. But they preserve questions which modern societies sometimes forget to ask:

**What is a human being? What makes a life meaningful? What do we owe one another? What are the limits of power? What is justice? What is our responsibility toward creation?** Let me mention three Christian, Hindu and Muslim contributions as examples from our spiritual traditions.

**Magnifica Humanitas**, the recent Encyclical of Pope Leo XIV, reflecting on artificial intelligence and new forms of dehumanization, states:

**“In the era of artificial intelligence, when human dignity is threatened by new forms of dehumanization, ours is the pressing duty to remain profoundly human.”**

Technology must serve the human person—not redefine the human person according to the logic of technology.

Some very important ethical principle we also find in Hindu tradition, in the opening verse of the **Isha Upanishad** where we read: "***Everything in the universe—both the animate and the inanimate—is pervaded by the Divine. Therefore, consume and enjoy its gifts with a spirit of detachment and renunciation. Do not covet or take what belongs to others (or to future generations)."***[1] *This ancient Vedic verse is very close to what Pope Francis had reminded us in Laudato Si that nature is not a collection of commodities to exploit, but a sacred, interconnected fabric pervaded by the divine and therefore we need to respect the "integrity of creation" because we exist in a web of relationships with one another and with the Earth.*

And there is a corresponding insight from the Muslim tradition, **Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth** , the powerful concept of *mizan*—balance:

**"Al-Mizan is an unbreakable covenant with the Earth, for in its balance lies the sustenance of all life."**

These three formulations converging in substance speak powerfully to one another:

**"Remain profoundly human."**

And: ***Everything in the universe—both the animate and the inanimate—is pervaded by the Divine.***

*And:*

**"In its balance lies the sustenance of all life."**

Together our different religious traditions point towards a conception of flourishing in which **human dignity and ecological responsibility, freedom and responsibility, innovation and wisdom belong together.**

**5. From dialogue to responsible action - an invitation to all of us**

This is why our discussions during this Forum matter.

[1] **"Īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiñca jagatyāṁ jagat |**
**Tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā mā gṛdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam ||"**

Our two thematic tracks—**Responsible Innovation – Business, Technology and Ethical Governance**, and **Multistakeholder Engagement in a Fragmented Global Order – An Alliance for Peace**—are deeply connected.

How we govern technology is connected with how we govern societies.

How we understand development is connected with how we understand peace.

And how we understand human flourishing is connected with how we understand justice.

Our global challenges—climate change, artificial intelligence, poverty, inequality, migration and wars—cannot be addressed by any one nation, sector or tradition alone. We are all invited to join a movement to shape the future of our lives and societies towards ethical responsibility standards.

We therefore need **ethical multistakeholder cooperation**: spaces where disagreement does not immediately become hostility, and where dialogue means listening across differences without abandoning our convictions

And we need leaders who understand that responsible leadership is not primarily about exercising power.

**It is about being accountable for the consequences of power.**

Let me therefore leave you with one final question:

**Who defines human flourishing—and who gets to decide what flourishing should mean for whom?**

This is not merely an academic question. It concerns the future of our societies, our governance and ultimately the kind of civilization we wish to build.

Globethics seeks to connect **values with governance, principles with practice, and ethical reflection with responsible action.**

We need development that serves human beings; technological innovation guided by wisdom and responsibility; political power constrained by justice and accountability; and global cooperation rooted in dignity, peace and mutual respect.

Above all, we need a concept of human flourishing broad enough to include **the whole person, the whole community and the living Earth on which our common future depends.**

May this Global Ethics Forum become a space of critical reflection, courageous dialogue and responsible commitment.

And may our conversations here contribute to a future in which **technology serves humanity, economies serve the common good, governance serves justice**, and human beings learn again that to flourish is not simply to have more, but:

**to live well—with one another, with dignity, with purpose, and in responsible relationship with the Earth.**

With these words, and with great gratitude to all who have made this gathering possible,

**I declare the Global Ethics Forum 2026 officially open.**

**Selamat datang,**

**and may our deliberations be fruitful, courageous and transformative.**

Thank you.