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Something Has to Change in Today's World! Let's Start With Future Leaders From Across the Globe

During this period of time the world needs compassion more than ever. No one can be unaffected by the harrowing images of refugees that we're seeing in the media every day.

Thanks to support from others across the Globe the next few days will see one of my lifelong visions becoming a reality. The new Darwin Centre Trust in Shrewsbury, UK, is hosting a Press Conference to launch the world's first International Institute for the Study of Compassion (IISC). We're delighted to have individuals and media attending from around the world, including leading figures such as James Doty from Stanford University, Professor Paul Gilbert, Andrew Stone, ex chair of Marks & Spencer, and author Ruth Padel, the great-great-granddaughter of Charles Darwin. The launch will be followed by a ground breaking working conference on 1 and 2 October 2015 at Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn to explore what sustains compassion in individuals, organisations and society. Why Shrewsbury, UK? Due to Charles Darwin's views on the essential development of moral conscience and compassion for world society to function and evolve.

Compassion has to be a core concern in our health, social care and educational services. It is core to community and inter-cultural relations and, most pressingly right now, in the world's response to refugees and migrants. The IISC conference will comprise of workshops and opportunities for debate with international experts, looking at the relevance and rigour of compassion in today's world. There will be the opportunity to meet and talk to members of the group who have brought the IISC into being and to a range of international thinkers. Steering Group Members include Karen Armstrong, Mohammed Keshavjee, Professor Mervyn Morris, Dr Clare Gerada. The group is chaired by myself and supported by John Ballatt.

More than ever, we need to understand what compassion means and what undermines it and how it can be fostered. The Conference, and the new Institute, will bring together work from many disciplines to illuminate these questions. The Trust, the Institute, and the Conference have the support of the Darwin family, and his great-great-granddaughter, the poet Ruth Padel, who will be reading from her celebrated verse biography of Charles Darwin (Darwin, a Life in Poems), and discussing his views on the development of moral conscience and compassion.

The Institute will also establish a very exciting scheme like the Fulbright or Rhodes scholarships, called the Darwin Scholarship Programme which will provide bursaries for students to study the importance of compassion during a three year PhD course in their particular discipline such as business, health and social care etc. Universities across the world are currently expressing interest (including from South Africa, the US, the UK, Pakistan, and Portugal). The students from across the Globe will meet in Shrewsbury, UK, for four weeks each summer. The Institute has a vision to grow future leaders of society from across the world. The title of the scholarship programme recognises the vital perspective that Darwin's subsequent evolutionary thinking offers on the development of cooperation and altruism in human society.

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