Thought Experiment Global Conference

Imagine you are deciding on the principle of justice that will regulate relations between states. You do not know in which state or political system you will live. Moreover, you do not know about your personal characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, income, wealth, talents, intelligence, etc.). What you do not is that citizens within states and across different states have different conceptions of the good life, and that natural resources are moderately scarce (i.e., globally there are enough resources to enable a minimally decent life for everybody but not a life that enables every person to get everything he or she desires). Furthermore, you are familiar with general economic, psychological and other laws. Given these conditions, which of the following principles of global justice would you choose?

1. Egalitarianism: States have a duty to ensure that globally, all people are (roughly) equally well off.

2. Communitarianism: The identity of a person depends on his or her community. Each state should therefore be able to decide freely on how to distribute its goods. There is not duty of justice to reduce one's own well-being for the sake of the well-being of citizens of other states.

3. Basic Needs Principle: States have a duty to ensure that globally, all people are able to meet their basic needs (e.g., their needs for water, food, health, etc.).

4. Utilitarianism: States have a duty to maximize the satisfaction of preferences of people on a global level (independently of the state in which people live). (Note: the non-satisfaction of a (weak) preference for a luxury good typically enables the satisfaction of many (strong) preferences for basic goods).

5. Human Rights Principle: States have a duty to ensure that the human rights of people are protected globally (i.e., rights such as the right to life and liberty, the proscription of slavery and torture, equality before the law and freedom of religion).