

# The Earth Charter 1992-2000

## Principles

### Part I: Respect and Care for the Community of Life

#### 1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.

- a. Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.
- b. Affirm faith in the inherent dignity of all human beings and in the intellectual, artistic, ethical, and spiritual potential of humanity.

#### 2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.

- a. Accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people.
- b. Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

#### 3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.

- a. Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.
- b. Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible.

#### 4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

- a. Recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations.
- b. Transmit to future generations values, traditions, and institutions that support the long-term flourishing of Earth's human and ecological communities.

### Part II: Ecological Integrity

#### 5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.

- a. Adopt at all levels sustainable development plans and regulations that make environmental conservation and rehabilitation integral to all development initiatives.
- b. Establish and safeguard viable nature and biosphere reserves, including wild lands and marine areas, to protect Earth's life support systems, maintain biodiversity, and preserve our natural heritage.
- c. Promote the recovery of endangered species and ecosystems.
- d. Control and eradicate non-native or genetically modified organisms harmful to native species and the environment, and prevent introduction of such harmful organisms.
- e. Manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forest products, and marine life in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration and that protect the health of ecosystems.
- f. Manage the extraction and use of non-renewable resources such as minerals and fossil fuels in ways that minimize depletion and cause no serious environmental damage.

#### 6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.

- a. Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.
- b. Place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm, and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm.
- c. Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.
- d. Prevent pollution of any part of the environment and allow no build-up of radioactive, toxic, or other hazardous substances.

e. Avoid military activities damaging to the environment.

**7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.**

- a. Reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials used in production and consumption systems, and ensure that residual waste can be assimilated by ecological systems.
- b. Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.
- c. Promote the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies.
- d. Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services in the selling price, and enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.
- e. Ensure universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction.
- f. Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

**8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.**

- a. Support international scientific and technical cooperation on sustainability, with special attention to the needs of developing nations.
- b. Recognize and preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom in all cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human well-being.
- c. Ensure that information of vital importance to human health and environmental protection, including genetic information, remains available in the public domain.

**Part III: Social and Economic Justice**

**9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.**

- a. Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.
- b. Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.
- c. Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.

**10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.**

- a. Promote the equitable distribution of wealth within nations and among nations.
- b. Enhance the intellectual, financial, technical, and social resources of developing nations, and relieve them of onerous international debt.
- c. Ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labor standards.
- d. Require multinational corporations and international financial organizations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.

**11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.**

- a. Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.
- b. Promote the active participation of women in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social, and cultural life as full and equal partners, decision makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.
- c. Strengthen families and ensure the safety and loving nurture of all family members.

**12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.**

- a. Eliminate discrimination in all its forms, such as that based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic or social origin.
- b. Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods.
- c. Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.
- d. Protect and restore outstanding places of cultural and spiritual significance.

## **Part IV: Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace**

### **13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.**

- a. Uphold the right of everyone to receive clear and timely information on environmental matters and all development plans and activities which are likely to affect them or in which they have an interest.
- b. Support local, regional and global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.
- c. Protect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and dissent.
- d. Institute effective and efficient access to administrative and independent judicial procedures, including remedies and redress for environmental harm and the threat of such harm.
- e. Eliminate corruption in all public and private institutions.
- f. Strengthen local communities, enabling them to care for their environments, and assign environmental responsibilities to the levels of government where they can be carried out most effectively.

### **14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.**

- a. Provide all, especially children and youth, with educational opportunities that empower them to contribute actively to sustainable development.
- b. Promote the contribution of the arts and humanities as well as the sciences in sustainability education.
- c. Enhance the role of the mass media in raising awareness of ecological and social challenges.
- d. Recognize the importance of moral and spiritual education for sustainable living.

### **15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.**

- a. Prevent cruelty to animals kept in human societies and protect them from suffering.
- b. Protect wild animals from methods of hunting, trapping, and fishing that cause extreme, prolonged, or avoidable suffering.
- c. Avoid or eliminate to the full extent possible the taking or destruction of non-targeted species.

### **16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.**

- a. Encourage and support mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation among all peoples and within and among nations.
- b. Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.
- c. Demilitarize national security systems to the level of a non-provocative defense posture, and convert military resources to peaceful purposes, including ecological restoration.
- d. Eliminate nuclear, biological, and toxic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.
- e. Ensure that the use of orbital and outer space supports environmental protection and peace.
- f. Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.

## Short History

- The World Commission on Environment and Development (aka "the Brundtland Commission") called for "a universal declaration" and "new charter" to set "new norms" to guide the transition to sustainable development. (Our Common Future, 1987)
- A draft UN Earth Charter was developed for the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, but the time for such a declaration was not right. The Rio Declaration became the formal statement of the achievable consensus among nations at that time, but the proposal for an Earth Charter received considerable support from global civil society.
- In 1994, Maurice Strong (Secretary-General of the Rio Summit) and Mikhail Gorbachev, working through their organizations (Earth Council and Green Cross International respectively), restarted the Earth Charter as a civil society initiative, with initial facilitation and support from the government of the Netherlands.
- The process quickly broadened to engage national committees, as well as civic and academic consultations, in dozens of nations. The initial drafting and consultation process also drew on hundreds of international documents, with special attention to those statements of ethical principle that were already embedded in international agreements.
- Messrs. Strong and Gorbachev convened a formal, high-level, and independent Earth Charter Commission in 1997. Comprised of a very diverse set of twenty-five leaders, the Commission worked to oversee the final development of the text and to come to agreement on a global consensus document.
- After numerous drafts and after considering the written input of over 5,000 people, the Earth Charter Commission came to consensus on the Earth Charter in March, 2000, at a meeting held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The Earth Charter was formally launched later that year, in ceremonies at The Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands.
- Over the next five years, a formal endorsement campaign attracted over 2,500 organizational endorsements, representing millions of people, including numerous national and international associations, as well as the global assemblies of institutions such as UNESCO and IUCN. Over 400 cities and towns enacted resolutions endorsing the Earth Charter. And many thousands of individuals endorsed the Earth Charter through the on-line endorsement system.
- Efforts to have the Earth Charter formally recognized at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, 2002, came very close to success,

resulting in numerous public statements of support from world leaders and heads of state.

- By 2005, the Earth Charter had become widely recognized as a global consensus statement on the meaning of sustainability, the challenge and vision of sustainable development, and the principles by which sustainable development is to be achieved. It was being used as a basis for peace negotiations, as a reference document in the development of global standards and codes of ethics, as resource for governance and legislative processes, as a community development tool, as an educational framework for sustainable development, and in many other contexts. The Charter was also an important influence on the Plan of Implementation for the UNESCO Decade for Education on Sustainable Development.
- Beginning in 2007, national governments began to make even stronger, more formal commitments to the Earth Charter. The Brazilian Ministry of Environment entered into a formal agreement (with the Earth Charter International secretariat and a Brazilian human rights NGO) to promote the Earth Charter to every sector of Brazilian society, as well as internationally. Two ministries of the Mexican government made public commitments to the Charter in the context of a Presidential celebration of Earth Day. Other state and city governments began, or strengthened, similar processes of making formal public commitments to implement the charter in major policies and programs, including the State of Queensland, Australia, the Republic of Tatarstan in the Russian Federation, and cities like Oslo (Norway), Munich (Germany), and Calgary (Canada).
- During 2007, the Earth Charter website experienced a dramatic increase in visitors, growing by over 1,500% (fifteen times, increasing to nearly 100,000 per month) in just nine months. In late 2007, the Earth Charter International Council launched a new strategy of "Decentralized Empowerment for Scaling Up," designed to dramatically increase active participation in the Initiative without the need for an expanded central administration. New "Action Guidelines" were released to provide a framework for this expected upsurge in decentralized activity to promote the Earth Charter and implement its vision.
- Looking to the future, the Earth Charter continues to grow in international stature as a source of inspiration for action, an educational framework, and as well as a reference document for the development of policy, legislation, and international standards and agreements. Endorsement of the Earth Charter has become a process that stresses engagement with the document in practice, including use of the Charter as an assessment framework, and active contribution to initiatives that reflect Earth Charter values and principles. Decentralization paves the way for a rapid expansion in Earth Charter-related activity world over.