

# The Earth Charter

*Values and Principles for a Sustainable Future*



**T**he Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century. It seeks to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family and the larger living world. It is an expression of hope and a call to help create a global partnership at a critical juncture in history.

The Earth Charter's inclusive ethical vision recognizes that environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development, and peace are interdependent and indivisible. It provides a new framework for thinking about and addressing these issues. The result is a fresh, broad conception of what constitutes a sustainable community and sustainable development.

## *Why is the Earth Charter important?*

At a time when major changes in how we think and live are urgently needed, the Earth Charter challenges us to examine our values and to choose a better way. It calls on us to search for common ground in the midst of our diversity and to embrace a new ethical vision that is shared by growing numbers of people in many nations and cultures throughout the world.

## *What is the history of the Earth Charter?*

In 1987 the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development issued a call for creation of a new charter that would set forth fundamental principles for sustainable development. The drafting of an Earth Charter was part of the unfinished business of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. In 1994 Maurice Strong, the secretary general of the Earth Summit and chairman of the Earth Council, and Mikhail Gorbachev, president of Green Cross International, launched a new Earth Charter initiative with support from the Dutch government. An Earth Charter Commission was formed in 1997 to oversee the project and an Earth Charter Secretariat was established at the Earth Council in Costa Rica.

## *By what process was the Earth Charter created?*

The Earth Charter is the product of a decade long, worldwide, crosscultural conversation about common goals and shared values. The drafting of the Earth Charter has involved the most open and participatory consultation process ever conducted in connection with an international document. Thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations from all regions of the world, different cultures, and diverse sectors of society have participated. The Charter has been shaped by both experts and representatives of grassroots communities. It is a people's treaty that sets forth an important expression of the hopes and aspirations of the emerging global civil society.

## *Who wrote the Earth Charter?*

Early in 1997, the Earth Charter Commission formed an international drafting committee. The drafting committee helped to conduct the international consultation process, and the evolution

and development of the document reflects the progress of the worldwide dialogue on the Earth Charter. Beginning with the Benchmark Draft issued by the Commission following the Rio+5 Forum in Rio de Janeiro, drafts of the Earth Charter were circulated internationally as part of the consultation process. Meeting at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in March, 2000, the Commission approved a final version of the Earth Charter.

## *What are the sources of Earth Charter values?*

Together with the Earth Charter consultation process, the most important influences shaping the ideas and values in the Earth Charter are contemporary science, international law, the teachings of indigenous peoples, the wisdom of the world's great religions and philosophical traditions, the declarations and reports of the seven UN summit conferences held during the 1990s, the global ethics movement, numerous non-governmental declarations and people's treaties issued over the past thirty years, and best practices for building sustainable communities.

## *What is the mission of the international Earth Charter Initiative?*

A new phase in the Initiative began with the official launching of the Earth Charter at the Peace Palace in The Hague on June 29, 2000. The mission of the Initiative is to establish a sound ethical foundation for the emerging global society and to help build a sustainable world based on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.

## *What are the goals of the Earth Charter Initiative?*

1. To promote the dissemination, endorsement, and implementation of the Earth Charter by civil society, business, and government.
2. To encourage and support the educational use of the Earth Charter in schools, universities, faith communities, and many other settings.
3. To seek endorsement of the Earth Charter by the United Nations.

# The Earth Charter

## PREAMBLE

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

## EARTH, OUR HOME

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

## THE GLOBAL SITUATION

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable.

## THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

## UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.

## PRINCIPLES

### I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE

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

- Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.
- 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.*

- 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.
- 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.*

- Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.
- 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.*

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

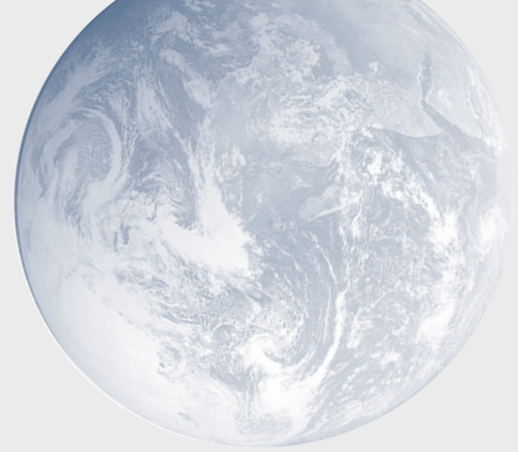
In order to fulfill these four broad commitments, it is necessary to:

### 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.*

- Adopt at all levels sustainable development plans and regulations that make environmental conservation and rehabilitation integral to all development initiatives.
- 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.
- Promote the recovery of endangered species and ecosystems.
- Control and eradicate non-native or genetically modified organisms harmful to native species and the environment, and prevent introduction of such harmful organisms.

- 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.



- 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.*

- Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.
- 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.
- Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.
- Prevent pollution of any part of the environment and allow no build-up of radioactive, toxic, or other hazardous substances.
- 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.*

- Reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials used in production and consumption systems, and ensure that residual waste can be assimilated by ecological systems.
- Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.
- Promote the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies.
- 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.
- Ensure universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction.
- 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.*

- Support international scientific and technical cooperation on sustainability, with special attention to the needs of developing nations.
- 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.

### 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.

### 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.

## The Way Forward

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Such renewal is the promise of these Earth Charter principles. To fulfill this promise, we must commit ourselves to adopt and promote the values and objectives of the Charter.

This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision. We must deepen and expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom.

Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals. Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership. The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance.

In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations, fulfill their obligations under existing international agreements, and support the implementation of Earth Charter principles with an international legally binding instrument on environment and development.

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.



## Who has endorsed the Earth Charter?



Thousands of nongovernmental organizations and cities and towns throughout the world have endorsed the Earth Charter and are working to implement its principles. Among these groups are national and international environmental organizations, educational institutions and associations, religious groups, peace initiatives, and local government councils, including the United States Conference of Mayors and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives. The Earth Charter has also been endorsed by the United Nations University for Peace in Costa Rica, with which the international Secretariat is presently affiliated. See the Earth Charter website for more information on endorsements.

## How can the Earth Charter be used?

A growing number of individuals, organizations, and communities are finding that there are a variety of interrelated ways to use the Earth Charter. It can be utilized as:

- an educational tool for developing understanding of the critical choices facing humanity and the urgent need for commitment to a sustainable way of life.
- an invitation to individuals, institutions, and communities for internal reflection on fundamental attitudes and ethical values governing behavior.
- a catalyst for multi-sectoral, cross-cultural, and interfaith dialogue on global ethics and the direction of globalization.
- a call to action and guide to a sustainable way of life that can inspire commitment, cooperation, and change.
- a values framework for creating sustainable development policies and plans at all levels.
- an instrument for designing professional codes of conduct that promote accountability and for assessing progress towards sustainability in businesses, communities, and nations.
- a soft law instrument that provides an ethical foundation for the ongoing development of environmental and sustainable development law.

## How you can participate in the Earth Charter Initiative

- Consult the Earth Charter website (<http://www.earthcharter.org>). The website provides extensive information on the background of the Earth Charter and suggestions for how to use it in a variety of settings.
- Contact a local or national Earth Charter group in your area. This information can be found on the Earth Charter website.
- Start an Earth Charter study group and explore how to use the Earth Charter and apply its principles in your home, workplace, and local community.
- Provide copies of the Earth Charter and relevant background information to schools, faith communities, businesses, and local governments. To request copies of the Earth Charter brochures, call the International Secretariat at (506) 205-1600 or write to [info@earthcharter.org](mailto:info@earthcharter.org).
- Make use of the Earth Charter in public events, conferences, and workshops.
- Endorse the Earth Charter and encourage endorsement by organizations to which you belong.
- Encourage your local and national government to use and endorse the Earth Charter.
- Urge your national government to support endorsement of the Earth Charter by the United Nations.
- Make charitable contributions in support of local Earth Charter projects and the international Earth Charter Initiative.

## Who provides the funding for the Initiative?

The Earth Charter Initiative is dependent upon contributions from individuals, nongovernmental organizations, and foundations. Some governments have also provided support. Financial contributions to the international Earth Charter Initiative can be sent to The Earth Charter Fund/TPC, attention: Claire Wilson, Post Office Box 648, Middlebury, VT 05753 USA.

## What does endorsement of the Earth Charter mean?

Endorsement of the Earth Charter by individuals or organizations signifies a commitment to the spirit and aims of the document. It indicates an intention to use the Earth Charter in ways that are appropriate given the situation and to cooperate with others in working for the implementation of its principles. Endorsement builds support for the Earth Charter Initiative and social change. See the website for further information on endorsement.

## Earth Charter Commission

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*The well-being of the human family and greater community of life depends on our personal commitment...*

*Join the Earth Charter Initiative!*