

THE EARTH CHARTER



A declaration of fundamental principles
for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful
global society in the 21st century

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1 The Earth Charter International Council oversees the activities of the Earth Charter Initiative.

2 The Earth Charter Commission has authority over the text of the Earth Charter document.

The 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 wellbeing 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 framework for thinking about, talking about, and taking action on these issues. The Charter offers a fresh, broad conception of what constitutes sustainable living and sustainable development.

Shared Global Values ... for Our Common Future

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 shared by growing numbers of people in many nations and cultures throughout the world.

Answering the Call for a New Global Vision

In 1987 the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development called for the 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. The initiative grew and spread to all regions of the globe, involving thousands of people from all walks of life and experts in the fields of science, philosophy, ethics, religion, and international law. The growth of the Initiative reflects the shared understanding of the need for a common vision on the journey to a just, sustainable, and peaceful future.

A Growing Global Network of Endorsers

Endorsement of the Earth Charter is an expression of support for the spirit of the document, for the Principles themselves, and for the growing international consensus regarding the Charter's authority, relevance, and usefulness as a guiding ethical framework. Endorsement is open to all, and Endorsers range from individuals, to cities, to governments and prominent global institutions. Earth Charter International invites all Endorsers to take the additional step of becoming an Engaged Endorser, by making a commitment to promote the Earth Charter actively, to contribute to the Earth Charter Initiative globally and locally, and to implement the Charter's Principles to the best of one's ability.

For further information on endorsement – and for access to many resources supporting the use of the Charter in government, business, education, and in many other areas – please visit our website.

www.EarthCharter.org

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.

I. Respect and Care for the Community of Life

PRINCIPLES

- 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

PRINCIPLES

- 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.

III. Social and Economic Justice

PRINCIPLES

- 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

PRINCIPLES

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.





Action projects around the world, inspired by the Earth Charter, are contributing to the realization of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, the UN Decade for Education on Sustainable Development, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the betterment of human rights, and the empowered participation of youth in local action and global governance.

Please visit our website for information on resources and opportunities for getting involved and taking action in support of the Earth Charter and its vision of a just, sustainable, and peaceful world.

Origin of The Earth Charter

The Earth Charter was created as an initiative of global civil society and is the product of the most open and participatory worldwide consultation process ever associated with the drafting of an international declaration. Many thousands of people and hundreds of organizations contributed to the drafting process. The drafting of the text was overseen by the independent Earth Charter Commission, which was convened by Maurice Strong and Mikhail Gorbachev with the purpose of developing a global consensus on values and principles for a sustainable future. The Commission continues to serve as the steward of the Earth Charter text, and the Commissioners act as ambassadors for the Earth Charter itself.

The Earth Charter was completed in March 2000 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris and launched in a special ceremony at The Peace Palace in The Hague, the Netherlands, on 29 June 2000. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands attended the ceremony.

The Charter has since then been formally endorsed by thousands of organizations representing millions of people, including the UNESCO Conference of Member States, the World Conservation Congress of IUCN, national governments and their ministries, national and international associations of universities, and hundreds of cities and towns in dozens of countries. It has also been endorsed by many civil society and political leaders, Nobel Peace Prize winners, and heads of state.

The Earth Charter Initiative

'The Earth Charter Initiative' is the collective name for an extraordinarily diverse, global network of people, organizations, and institutions that participate in promoting the Earth Charter and in translating its principles into practice. The Initiative is a broad-based, voluntary effort bringing together leading international institutions, national government agencies, university associations, civil society organizations (NGOs), cities, faith groups, and many well-known leaders in sustainable development, as well as many thousands of citizens in all walks of life.

Earth Charter International

Earth Charter International (ECI) is the coordinating secretariat for the Earth Charter Initiative and the International Council. ECI coordinates a formal network of Affiliates and National Committees that promote use of the Earth Charter around the world. Many of these Affiliates are based in prominent national-level organizations and institutions.

For more information, please visit

www.EarthCharter.org

SELECTED INTERNATIONAL ENDORSEMENTS

African Women's Development and Communication Network, Kenya
Arab Office for Youth and Environment, Egypt
Associação Portuguesa de Educação Ambiental - ASPEA, Portugal
Australian Centre for Environmental Law
Bellagio Forum for Sustainable Development
The Club of Budapest
National Council on Environment and Sustainable Development, Portugal
The CORE Trust, United Kingdom
Consejo Estatal de Ecología de Michoacán, Mexico
Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions
The David Suzuki Foundation, Canada
Development Alternatives, India
Environmental Defense, United States
Fundación Mundo Sustentable, Mexico
Fundación Valores, Spain
Fundación Cultura de Paz, Spain
The European Environmental Bureau
The Ministries of Environment in the Nations of Brazil, Costa Rica, and Honduras
The Government of Mexico
The Government of the Republic of Niger
Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Youth Council
The Green Belt Movement, Kenya
Green Cross International
Grupo de los Cien, Mexico
Grupo Xcaret, Mexico
Instituto Paulo Freire, Brazil
International Consortium on Religion and Ecology
International Council of Local Governments for Sustainability - ICLEI
International Institute for Environment & Development - IIED
Inuit Circumpolar Conference - ICC
The Jane Goodall Institute
Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development
Kehati, Indonesia
LEAD International
Lenting, Indonesia
Millennium NGO Forum (a group of a 1000 NGO's)
The Ministry of Youth, Egypt
The National Center for Human Rights Education, United States
The National Center for Youth Development, Nigeria
National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development, Netherlands
National University, Costa Rica
National Wildlife Federation - NWF, United States
Natural Resources Defense Council, United States
Pro-Natura, Italy
The Senate of Puerto Rico
The Senate of Australia
The Parliaments of Tatarstan, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Kalmykia, Russian Federation
Physicians for Social Responsibility, United States
Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden
Third World Academy of Sciences - TWAS, Italy
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - UNESCO
United Nations University
University for Peace, Costa Rica
The US Conference of Mayors
Vitae Civilis, Brazil
The Wilderness Society, Australia
World Conservation Union - IUCN
Women & Environment Development Organization - WEDO
World Federation of Engineering Organizations
World Resources Institute, United States
WWF International

A 'living charter' ... for the whole community of life

The Earth Charter is an inspirational document that has been endorsed by thousands of organizations, from many different sectors, around the world.

But it is not just a document. In the words of Wangari Maathai, a member of the Earth Charter Commission that oversaw its creation, it is a 'living Charter.' Its words have inspired a growing civil society movement to promote its comprehensive vision. Participants in the **Earth Charter Initiative** are wide-ranging, from government leaders to students ... from international agencies to local organizations ... from global corporations to small towns. **The Earth Charter has the power to unite people in a common purpose: respect and care for the whole community of life.**

Earth Charter International (ECI) has a variety of programs to support the widespread use of the Charter and to promote active engagement in the creation of a just, sustainable, and peaceful world. Working with its Affiliates and Partners, ECI is especially active in the following areas:

Education The Earth Charter has been recognized as an international reference document by UNESCO. It has been adopted by Ministries of Education, integrated into national curricula, and used as the basis for university degree programs. ECI is an active partner to UNESCO in promoting the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

Businesses and Organizations ECI promotes the use of the Charter to inspire organizational sustainability and responsibility, to strive for the highest possible standards of ethical performance, and to assess values and practices against the Charter's internationally recognized statement of guiding principles.

Youth The Earth Charter Youth Initiative (ECYI) empowers young people to get involved in action for sustainability. Earth Charter Youth Groups around the world work on action projects ranging from local environmental clean-up and youth employment, to participating in global governance processes.

Local and National Government The Earth Charter has been formally recognized by national governments and their ministries. Over 400 cities and towns around the world have formally endorsed the Earth Charter. ECI partners with other organizations to support the application of the Charter to government policy, planning, and operational practice, at all levels.

Law and Ethics ECI works with partner initiatives to promote the use of Earth Charter Principles in framing international conventions, codes of ethics, legislation, and standards of organizational practice and reporting.

Religion The Earth Charter's Program on Religion and Sustainability is dedicated to supporting religious and inter-faith initiatives in their engagement with the great global challenges of our time. Leaders and scholars from many religious traditions participated in the drafting of the Charter.

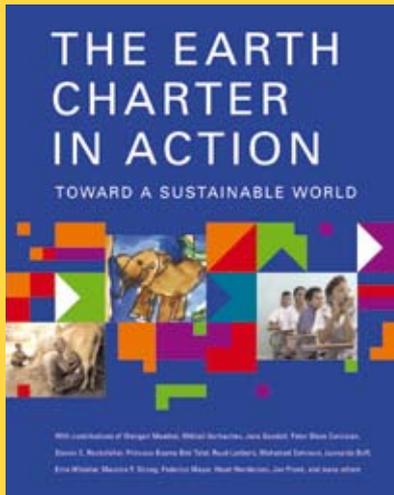
ECI as an organization is not affiliated with any religious or political organization or ideology. With its inclusive vision of common values and ethical principles, the Earth Charter serves as common ground for building awareness, engagement, and action to improve our world — across many boundaries and differences.

The Earth Charter in Action

The Earth Charter Initiative is a growing effort of organizations and individuals actively using the Earth Charter to create positive change in the world. To learn more about the Initiative, we invite you to read ***The Earth Charter in Action: Toward a Sustainable World*** (KIT Publishers, 2005).

The Earth Charter in Action is a collection of over seventy thematic and descriptive essays inspired by the Charter, and demonstrating the rich diversity of its uses. The book points toward the many possibilities for engaging the Earth Charter in the great challenges facing our world, including the Charter's ability to bridge the Islamic and Christian worlds (and many other traditions), to inspire extraordinary demonstration projects, and to create a greater sense of common purpose among people of different hemispheres, cultural traditions, political perspectives, and levels of economic wealth.

The entire book can also be downloaded free of charge from a special website, **www.EarthCharterinAction.org**. This site also publishes a continuous stream of news and articles about inspiring, Earth Charter-related projects and initiatives around the globe.



Cover, *The Earth Charter in Action*. Peter Blaze Corcoran, Mirian Vilela, and Alide Roerink, Editors. KIT Publishers, The Netherlands, 2005.



The Earth Charter in Action is filled with inspiring words, photographs, and art from around the world. Authors include A. T. Ariyaratne, Leonardo Boff, Jane Goodall, Mikhail Gorbachev, Wangari Maathai, Steven Rockefeller, HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and Erna Witoelar.

The mission of the Earth Charter Initiative

is to help establish a sound ethical foundation for the emerging global society and to promote the transition to a sustainable way of life founded on: respect and care for the community of life; ecological integrity; universal human rights; respect for diversity; economic justice; democracy; and a culture of peace.

Join the Earth Charter Initiative

by using the Earth Charter in your field of activity.

Endorse the Earth Charter

and help spread its vision of a better future for coming generations.

Contribute to Earth Charter International

and support our action programs around the world.

For more information on our offices, affiliates, programs, and opportunities to get involved – and to read and endorse the Earth Charter on-line – please visit our website.

www.EarthCharter.org

Earth Charter International Secretariat and Earth Charter Centre for Education for Sustainable Development at UPEACE

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