

# EARTH CHARTER

**It is time to update the UN charter on Human Rights to ensure the well-being of all life.**

*Benchmark Draft II, April 1999*

*from Resurgence Issue 195*

**This charter has been endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations and adopted by UNESCO as its educational framework for the Decade of Sustainable Development.**

## *Preamble*

In our diverse yet increasingly interdependent world, it is imperative that we, the people of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations. We are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The well-being of people and the biosphere depends upon preserving clean air, pure waters, fertile soils, and a rich variety of plants, animals and ecosystems. The global environment with its finite resources is a primary common concern of all humanity. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity and beauty is a sacred trust.

The Earth community stands at a defining moment. With science and technology have come great benefits and also great harm. The dominant patterns of production and consumption are altering climate, degrading the environment, depleting resources and causing a massive extinction of species. A dramatic rise in population has increased the pressures on ecological systems and has overburdened social systems. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, corruption, crime and violence, and armed conflict deepen the world's suffering. Fundamental changes in our attitudes, values and ways of living are necessary.

The choice is ours: to care for Earth and one another or to participate in the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life.

As a global civilization comes into being, we can choose to build a truly democratic world, securing the rule of law and the human rights of all women, men and children. We can respect the integrity of different cultures. We can treat Earth with respect, rejecting the idea that nature is merely a collection of resources to be used. We can realize that our social, economic, environmental and spiritual problems are interconnected and co-operate in developing integrated strategies to address them. We can resolve to balance and harmonize individual interests with the common good, freedom with responsibility, diversity with unity, short-term objectives with long-term goals, economic progress with the flourishing of ecological systems.

To fulfill these aspirations, we must recognize that human development is not just about having more, but also about being more. The challenges humanity faces can only be met if people everywhere acquire an awareness of global interdependence, identify themselves with the larger world, and decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life will be strengthened if we live with reverence for the sources of our being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in the larger scheme of things.

Having reflected on these considerations, we recognize the urgent need for a shared vision of basic values that will provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. We, therefore, affirm the following principles for sustainable development. We commit ourselves as individuals, organizations, business enterprises, communities and nations to implement these interrelated principles and to create a global partnership in support of their fulfillment.

Together in hope, we pledge to:

## **I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

### **1. Respect Earth and all life,**

recognizing the interdependence and intrinsic value of all beings; affirming respect for the inherent dignity of every person and faith in the intellectual, ethical and spiritual potential of humanity.

### **2. Care for the community of life in all its diversity,**

accepting that responsibility for Earth is shared by everyone; affirming that this common responsibility takes different forms for different individuals, groups and nations, depending on their contribution to existing problems and the resources at hand.

### **3. Strive to build free, just, participatory, sustainable and peaceful societies,**

affirming that with freedom, knowledge and power go responsibility and the need for moral self-restraint; recognizing that a decent standard of living for all and the quality of relations among people and with nature are the true measure of progress.

### **4. Secure Earth's abundance and beauty for present and future generations,**

accepting the challenge before each generation to conserve, improve and expand its natural and cultural heritage and to transmit it safely to future generations; acknowledging that the benefits and burdens of caring for Earth should be shared fairly between present and future generations.

## **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 and

renew life.

1. Make ecological conservation an integral part of all development planning and implementation.
2. Establish representative and viable nature and biosphere reserves, including wild lands, sufficient to maintain Earth's biological diversity and life-support systems.
3. Manage the extraction of renewable resources such as food, water and wood in ways that do not harm the resilience and productivity of ecological systems or threaten the viability of individual species.
4. Promote the recovery of endangered species and populations through in situ conservation involving habitat protection and restoration.
5. Take all reasonable measures to prevent the human-mediated introduction of alien species into the environment.

**6. Prevent harm to the environment as the best method of ecological protection** and, when knowledge is limited, take the path of caution.

1. Give special attention in decision-making to the cumulative, long-term and global consequences of individual and local actions.
2. Stop activities that threaten irreversible or serious harm even when scientific information is incomplete or inconclusive.
3. Establish environmental protection standards and monitoring systems with the power to detect significant human environmental impacts, and require environmental impact assessments and reporting.
4. Mandate that the polluter must bear the full cost of pollution.
5. Ensure that measures taken to prevent or control natural disasters, infestations and diseases are directed to the relevant causes and avoid harmful side effects.
6. Uphold the international obligation of states to take all reasonable precautionary measures to prevent transboundary environmental harm.

**7. Treat all living beings with compassion**, and protect them from cruelty and wanton destruction.

### **III. A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC ORDER**

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

1. Eliminate harmful waste, and work to ensure that all waste can be either consumed by biological systems or used over the long term in industrial and technological systems.
2. Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy and other resources, and reduce, reuse and recycle materials.
3. Rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as the sun, the wind, biomass and hydrogen.
4. Establish market prices and economic indicators that reflect the full environmental and social costs of human activities, taking into account the economic value of the services provided by ecological systems.
5. Empower consumers to choose sustainable products over unsustainable ones by creating mechanisms such as certification and labeling.

6. Provide universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction.

**9. Ensure that economic activities support and promote human development** in an equitable and sustainable manner.

1. Promote the equitable distribution of wealth.

2. Assist all communities and nations in developing the intellectual, financial and technical resources to meet their basic needs, protect the environment and improve the quality of life.

**10. Eradicate poverty**, as an ethical, social, economic and ecological imperative.

1. Establish fair and just access to land, natural resources, training, knowledge and credit, empowering every person to attain a secure and sustainable livelihood.

2. Generate opportunities for productive and meaningful employment.

3. Make clean affordable energy available to all.

4. Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and respect their right to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.

5. Relieve developing nations of onerous international debts that impede their progress in meeting basic human needs through sustainable development.

**11. Honour and defend the right of all persons**, without discrimination, to an environment supportive of their dignity, bodily health and spiritual well-being.

1. Secure the human right to potable water, clean air, uncontaminated soil, food security and safe sanitation in urban, rural and remote environments.

2. Establish racial, religious, ethnic and socio-economic equality.

3. Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of traditional sustainable livelihoods.

4. Institute effective and efficient access to administrative and judicial procedures, including redress and remedy, that enable all persons to enforce their environmental rights.

**12. Advance worldwide the co-operative study of ecological systems**, the dissemination and application of knowledge, and the development, adoption and transfer of clean technologies.

1. Support scientific research in the public interest.

2. Value the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities.

3. Assess and regulate emerging technologies, such as biotechnology, regarding their environmental, health and socio-economic impacts.

4. Ensure that the exploration and use of orbital and outer space support peace and sustainable development.

#### **IV. DEMOCRACY AND PEACE**

**13. Establish access to information, inclusive participation in decision-making**, and transparency, truthfulness and accountability in governance.

1. Secure the right of all persons to be informed about ecological, economic and social

developments that affect the quality of their lives.

2. Establish and protect the freedom of association and the right to dissent on matters of environmental, economic and social policy.
3. Ensure that knowledge resources vital to people's basic needs and development remain accessible and in the public domain.
4. Enable local communities to care for their own environments, and assign responsibilities for environmental protection to the levels of government where they can be carried out most effectively.
5. Create mechanisms that hold governments, international organizations and business enterprises accountable to the public for the consequences of their activities.

**14. Affirm and promote gender equality** as a prerequisite to sustainable development.

1. Provide, on the basis of gender equality, universal access to education, health care and employment in order to support the full development of every person's human dignity and potential.
2. Establish the full and equal participation of women in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life.

**15. Make the knowledge, values and skills needed to build just and sustainable communities an integral part of formal education** and lifelong learning for all.

1. Provide youth with the training and resources required to participate effectively in civil society and political affairs.
2. Encourage the contribution of the artistic imagination and the humanities as well as the sciences in environmental education and sustainable development.
3. Engage the media in the challenge of fully educating the public on sustainable development, and take advantage of the educational opportunities provided by advanced information technologies.

**16. Create a culture of peace and co-operation.**

1. Seek wisdom and inner peace.
2. Practise nonviolence, implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict, and use collaborative problem-solving to manage and resolve conflict.
3. Teach tolerance and forgiveness, and promote cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogue and collaboration.
4. Eliminate weapons of mass destruction, promote disarmament, secure the environment against severe damage caused by military activities, and convert military resources toward peaceful purposes.
5. Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by balanced and harmonious relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.

## **A New Beginning**

As never before in human history, common destiny beckons us to redefine our priorities and to seek a new beginning. Such renewal is the promise of these Earth Charter principles, which are the outcome of a worldwide dialogue in search of common ground

and shared values. Fulfillment of this promise depends upon our expanding and deepening the global dialogue. It requires an inner change — a change of heart and mind. It requires that we take decisive action to adopt, apply and develop the vision of the Earth Charter locally, nationally, regionally and globally. Different cultures and communities will find their own distinctive ways to express the vision, and we will have much to learn from each other.

Every individual, family, organization, corporation and government has a critical role to play. Youth are fundamental actors for change. Partnerships must be forged at all levels. Our best thought and action will flow from the integration of knowledge with love and compassion.

In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations and develop and implement the Earth Charter principles by negotiating for adoption a binding agreement based on the iucn Draft International Covenant on Environment and Development. Adoption of the Covenant will provide an integrated legal framework for environmental and sustainable development law and policy.

We can, if we will, take advantage of the creative possibilities before us and inaugurate an era of fresh hope. Let ours be a time that is remembered for an awakening to a new reverence for life, a firm commitment to restoration of Earth's ecological integrity, a quickening of the struggle for justice and empowerment of the people, co-operative engagement of global problems, peaceful management of change and joyful celebration of life. We will succeed because we must. •

*This is a draft document. If any readers would like to comment on it or make suggestions, please contact Stephen C. Rockefeller, Chair, Earth Charter Drafting Committee, PO Box 648, Middlebury VT 05753, USA. Fax: (802) 388-1951.*