

New Blueprint for a Green Planet

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Published 4:00 am, Sunday, December 31, 2000

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge facing humanity as it enters the new millennium is the need to develop a sound ethical foundation for the emerging global civilization.

"The Earth Charter" endeavors to address this need. It is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful world. The product of a rapidly developing global civil society, it gives expression to values and ideals shared by growing numbers of people throughout the world.

A deepened spiritual awareness and a heightened sense of ethical responsibility, leading to development of a new global ethic, are an especially urgent matter. First, freedom is insupportable without responsibility, and humanity's freedom and power have grown dramatically over the last century as a result of the development of technology and the spread of democracy and free markets.

Second, we live in an increasingly interdependent and rapidly changing world, and the human family confronts environmental and socio-economic problems that threaten the foundations of global security. In an interdependent world, problem-solving requires cooperation. Effective collaboration requires agreement on common goals and shared values.

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 [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.

The creation 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 representatives of grassroots communities and experts in science, international law, philosophy, religion and sustainable development. The commission approved a final version of the document in March.

The major themes of "The Earth Charter" ethic are respect for life and universal responsibility.

The ethical life begins with respect - respect for oneself, other people, other cultures, other life forms and nature as a whole. Before the awesome mystery of life, respect can deepen into a reverence for life. The idea of universal responsibility recognizes that in the midst of great diversity, we are one human family, and that humanity is part of nature and the greater community of life. It affirms that everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world.

In addition, "The Earth Charter" recognizes that caring for people and caring for Earth are two aspects of one great task. We cannot care for people in a world with collapsing ecosystems, and we cannot care for the greater community of life in a world with widespread poverty, injustice and violent conflict. "The Earth Charter" offers an inclusive and integrated ethical vision and a fresh, broad conception of sustainable living.

A new phase in "The Earth Charter" initiative began with the official launching of the charter at the Peace Palace in The Hague on June 29, 2000. The objectives of the initiative are to disseminate "The Earth Charter" throughout the world, to

promote its educational use and to support the implementation and endorsement of the charter by civil society, business and government at all levels. The Earth Charter secretariat maintains its own Web site (see Resources box) and works closely with nearly 50 Earth Charter national committees and a large number of partner organizations around the world.

"The Earth Charter" is already being used widely in schools, universities, faith communities and other organizations as an educational tool for developing understanding of the critical challenges and choices facing humanity. Supporting educational materials are being developed. Businesses and professional associations, such as the [World Federation of Engineering Organizations](#), are using "The Earth Charter" to design codes of conduct that promote accountability and transparency. National councils of sustainable development and governments are beginning to use "The Earth Charter" as a guide to sustainable development and as an instrument for assessing progress toward sustainability.

"The Earth Charter" has been endorsed by the [Amazonian Parliament](#) in South America and the 10th [World Congress of Local Governments](#) meeting in Germany, as well as many other groups, including the [Sierra Club](#). An effort is under way to seek endorsement of "The Earth Charter" by the U.N. General Assembly in 2002, the 10th anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit.

"The Earth Charter" can be used to foster a much-needed partnership between government, business and civil society, and it provides an ethical vision that promotes the development of more coherent global governance. It shifts authority from the outmoded ideologies of the last century to a new ecology of shared values. It can inspire hope and commitment to the great work before us.