In this book, Dutch Minister of State, Ruud Lubbers, leads the reader through the recent history of governance. He states with some emphasis that both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Earth Charter (2000) constitute an important basis for modern global governance. The first document marks the beginning of the human rights tradition; the second builds further on these values, and also includes more modern aspirations. It highlights the interconnectedness of all living beings and our duty to protect the Earth’s vitality, diversity and beauty. Ruud Lubbers also underlines the importance of spirituality for governance and the need to connect civilisations.

Realising these aspirations requires global governance. Since governance power has partly shifted from States to civil society and business, these private actors - now globally connected - must also participate in addressing the global challenges we are facing.

The Earth Charter is par excellence a ‘People’s Document’: many around the world contributed to it, and are using it, each in their own sphere of influence. The decentralised approach of the Earth Charter also presents a new - and additional - way of practising human rights and protecting the environment. This is argued volubly in this book by two experts on human rights law and corporate social responsibility, Willem van Genugten and Tineke Lambooy. They present an analysis of where and when ‘the environment’ entered the human rights discourse, and discuss the new roles of business and civil society therein.

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