

## **Earth Charter: It's necessary to care for life**

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*Two big problems will force us to change the way we consume and produce: the shortage of drinking water, the nature's scarcest good nowadays, and the restriction of petroleum fossil fuel, that is already scaring us now. But, more than everything, the threat that weighs heavy over the biosphere.*

We live a phenomenon that the past generations didn't know. Since the Second World War, we have realized that there are weapons of mass destruction: the atomic weapons. In the last years the principle of self-destruction has been created. Using nuclear weapons, physical; chemistry weapons, biological, already built and already stocked, may profoundly aggravate the biosphere, and destroy human kind.

Before, we could make wars. There were aggressions to nature but we always had this as a presupposition: that life continues, and that the planet Earth is inexhaustible. Today this presupposition is no longer valid. We can destroy ourselves and we can deeply devastate the biosphere. We are responsible for the human future, for the quality of life in the planet. And the great majority of humanity is not aware of this.

In reality, the central problem of humanity, the new radicalism of consciousness and also the technical-science is this. What is the future of planet Earth? What is the future of humanity? In which measure each knowledge, each religion, each pedagogy, each project must give his contribution to guarantee the future of hope and this unique spaceship that we have, which is planet Earth and humanity. So, we must politically decide that we want to live and guarantee the future, because if we leave things like they are, we may share the destiny of the dinosaurs. This is the new conscience of humanity and the Earth Charter; we may know the destiny of the dinosaurs. This is the new consciousness of humanity and the Earth Charter emerged to answer this.

### **Time is passing**

We must make a revolution. It will not be a political revolution, but more basic than the political one, which is an ethical revolution. This is, when we talk about ethic, we talk about behaviors; we talk about a few fundamental values that we must accomplish. And if we don't accomplish them, we risk the life of human kind as well as our own. We risk the physical-chemical bases which sustain the biosphere. These values must be based in something very evident that doesn't need to be explained, that can immediately be lived and placed in practice because time is passing, we don't have much time. I see that the foundation to sustain a human ethic is the ethic of care, the ethic of compassion, the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of solidarity and cooperation. These four basic values are sustained in the most fundamental essence, proto-primary of the human being. Because the essence of the human being, the foundation of the human being, the ultimate structure of the human being, is not reason; the ultimate structure of human being is faith, sensibility, it's lovingness. To say it in one word, the foundation of the human being resides in "Platos", a Greek word from which comes sympathy and empathy. We come from a

logocentric tradition. The “logos” from the Greeks and the Cartesian “cogito” are at the basis of our civilization. But reason isn’t everything, because there is something more fundamental than reason. We have found out through empiric reasons, that intelligence is always emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, in the book “Emotional Intelligence”, with more advanced technological principles that measure the neurons in the brain, says that the first reaction of human being is the reaction for affection. Just after, a few seconds after, intelligence starts to work. We are affection. We are human beings that are in the world with each other, interchanging a more immediate relation, pure, feeling reality and letting reality affect ourselves. And the first reaction of affection of human beings is the reaction of care, without care life doesn’t survive. Care is a loving relation with reality; a reaction that protects, that shelters; it’s not a relation of interest, of aggression.

### **Care and Compassion**

There is a philosophical tradition that came with the Romans, that didn’t have too much repercussion in the West, but that was awaked with the ecological crisis, that defines the essence of human being, not as reason, nor as creativity, nor as liberty; it defines the essence of the human being as care. A new baby born, left for a few hours alone, without care, dies. Care permits life to survive, intelligence to bloom, the word to emerge, creativity to be exercised. So, care is that fundamental basis without which life doesn’t develop itself.

Today, perhaps, one of the biggest crimes of humanity is that we don’t take care of the lives of children, the life of the old people, of the ecosystems; we don’t take care of the garbage, of the water, of the quality of food, we don’t take care of the collective health. There is a generalized disregard. So, to recover care means to recover the feminine dimension of the human being, which is from the essence of the feminine in man and woman: protect, take care of. Together with care comes compassion, which is the great contribution that the Oriental tradition, that the Buddhist tradition brings. Compassion is not to “feel sorry” for the others, like a devaluating apprehension, common among us. First it means to respect the other, not willing to dominate the other, may it be a tree, a stone, an animal, a human being. Respect otherness, the difference, avoid touching him/her, and consider him/her something sacred. We immediately want to dominate, submit and appropriate in the logic of our interest. Secondly, compassion means to turn back to the other to care, in order to be co-responsible, suffer with him/her, be happy with him/her, walk together with him/her to share. It’s the Oriental form to live care. And the Earth Charter, in its first principle says exactly this: “respect, take care of the community of life”.

We need compassion because we live in a cruel world without pity, that doesn’t have the minimum compassion with their co-equals, that let millions and millions starve; that has no compassion with the animal that suffers, with the ecosystems that are being degenerated and threatened. We have no compassion with the community of life. We are not the only living beings. We are a link of the enormous life current. We occupy 83% of the planet, as a species, and we threaten all the others.

The third great value is cooperation. If we don’t cooperate among us, if we don’t create an alliance to take care of the Earth and each one of us, we can destroy ourselves. In cooperation we rescue the ethic value that depends on the good will of people.

### **We are the fruits of cooperation**

We know, based on Quantic Physics, from new cosmology, that the most universal law of the Universe is not that one from Darwin, that he studied only in the world of the living beings, that is the competition with the victory of the fittest; it's not that one. The most universal law of the Universe, including the pre-living universe, is cooperation of all with everybody, because what as a matter of fact exists is a network of relations. The Universe is not made of the sum total of all living beings that exist, real or virtual. The Universe is made of a network of relations, of all with everyone. That's why Niels Bohr, formulator of the Quantic Physics, frequently repeated by Werner Heisenberg, used to say that everything is related to everything, in all aspects, in all circumstances. And if the living beings exist today its because all of them cooperated with each other, since the primordial elements: electrons, neutrons, neutrinos, that form energy fields, interacting, making it possible that everything coexists. That's why cooperation, solidarity, is a fundamental cosmic factor. When it gets to the human level, we want to transform this cooperation into the decision of our life project, personal and collective. That cooperation, solidarity, governs the relations. We only exist because when we were growing in the womb we could count on cooperation and unconditional love of our mother that sheltered us, because she could have left us. We are the fruits of cooperation. Anthropologists say that we jumped from animality to humanity when our ancestors went hunting and didn't eat individually their kill but instead brought it and placed it in the commons, to eat their harvest with each other. From this cooperation language was born, the human society. We jumped towards our humanity and our responsibility.

### **Collective Responsibility**

To be responsible is to be aware of the consequence of our acts. Today our acts may have as a consequence the production of fantastic wounds in the biosphere, and some of them irrecoverable. And we must measure the consequence of our acts. The Earth Charter says that the best attitude is prevention. And when we don't know the effects, we must always use caution, we should never adventure. So, at the beginning of self-destruction, that has already been created, we should offer the principle of collective co-responsibility, of all humanity. And we'll continue together, as a human family. May this family not divide between those who eat and those who don't eat; those who can survive until 130 years using biotechnology and the capacity to live in our lands, and the others left aside. Keep the human family united, Earth and humanity, in front of the future. And this time not like in Noah's Ark that saved a few and let others perish. Either we save all of us, or we lose. We don't have another house to collectively live in except this one, planet Earth. So we must be responsible for her, and assume an ethic of continuous responsibility.

We don't need to call on teachers to explain us that a child shouldn't step on a banana peel, that she should treat her notebook and backpack well, that she should be careful when she crosses a street. The child knows all that, it's linked to her instinct. We must transform this today, in the content of consciousness, in a pedagogical method, in a political process, a lesson, a molecular revolution, that we start doing, beginning with ourselves, until the great revolution. So, revolution today is to conserve, because if we don't conserve, other projects have no meaning. All of them assume life, humanity, and the existence of our planet. I finish with this appeal of the Earth Charter: "that our time may be remembered by the awaking of a new reverence facing life, by the living commitment to

reach sustainability, of the intensification of the struggle for justice and for peace, and for the light celebration of life”.

### **A minimum consensus between citizens**

In 1992, Rio de Janeiro, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, or “Earth Summit” was held. The Global Forum 92 was held parallel to the Earth Summit, sponsored by Civil Society entities. The first draft of the Earth Charter was elaborated there, calling on all participants to adopt the spirit and principles of the Charter, on an individual and societal level and based on concrete actions.

The Earth Charter consists of an ethical and global code for a sustainable development that proposes changes in our attitude, values and ways of life, starting from three interdependent principles: the values that guide individuals; the community of interests between states; and the definition of the principles of a sustainable development. The Earth Charter guide individuals; the community of interests between the States; and the definition of the principles of a sustainable development. The Earth Charter proposes a global ethic for a global world and presents basic principles that will conduct the economical behavior and environment, regarding peoples and nations, in order to secure “our common future”(The complete document of the Earth Charter can be accessed in the site: [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org) )

*This was Leonardo Boff's speech, given on the 3rd World Social Forum, during the seminar promoted by Paulo Freire Institute about the EARTH CHARTER: a minimal consensus between humans, January 24<sup>th</sup> 2003. Besides Leonardo Boff, the seminar also had the presence of Moacir Gadotti, Mohit Mukherjee, José Eustáquio Romão, Mariliese Esteves, Danilo Streck and Moema Viezzer.  
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