

“Spiritual Dimensions of Sustainable Development – Project”

2012

"The Spiritual Dimensions of Sustainable Development" is the title of a project launched by the Earth Charter Task Force on Religion, Spirituality, and Ethics and the Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values. The purpose of this project is to bring together a global alliance of religious, spiritual and ethical organizations to deepen the understanding, public awareness and practical application of the ethical and spiritual foundations of sustainable development. A special section of the Soetendorp Institute's website has been dedicated to this project: <http://soetendorpinstitute.org/Spiritual-Dimensions-of-Sustainability-Project/>

The Spiritual Dimensions of Sustainability Project invites religious, spiritual and ethical organizations to

- 1) Participate in a global conversation aimed at deepening the understanding of these spiritual or "inner" dimensions of sustainability;
- 2) Promote a greater public awareness of this "fourth pillar" of sustainability, especially by bringing these dimensions to bear on the major international debates and processes including the Rio + 20 Conference and the UN Decade for Sustainable Development (DESD); speaking in a unified voice for justice, sustainability, and all-embracing peace; and developing joint strategies for advocating effectively for approaches to sustainable development that include the spiritual purposes of life;
- 3) Deepen the practice of compassionate and sustainable living through exchanging good practices and available educational materials; helping to establish a Millennium Share Fund by encouraging its members and adherents to pledge a voluntary self-taxation of 0,1 % of one's income to help realize the Millennium Development Goals and alleviate abject misery; and helping to create a Council of Conscience which provides moral guidance on the urgent global challenges humanity is facing.

The inspiration for this project crystallized at the Earth Charter +10 Conference in Ahmedabad, India, which called for deepening the general understanding of sustainable development that considers sustainability based on distinct but interrelated ecological, social and economic dimensions. The former Dutch prime minister Ruud Lubbers stated: *"We may even begin to speak about four 'P's: People, Planet, Profit and 'Pneuma' "*

Earth Charter International Council Co-Chair Steven C. Rockefeller commented: *"There is a*

fourth pillar - the global ethical and spiritual consciousness that is awakening in civil society around the world and that finds expression in the Earth Charter. This global ethical consciousness is in truth the first pillar of a sustainable way of life, because it involves the internalization of the values of sustainable human development and provides the inspiration and motivation to act as well as essential guidance regarding the path to genuine sustainability."

The Earth Charter articulates some of the deeper, ethical and spiritual dimensions of sustainability, including the awareness that:

- In the midst of our magnificent diversity of cultures, we are one human family with a common destiny;
- We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and the global are linked;
- Humanity does not "own" the planet but shares it with a myriad of life forms with which we are bound together in an Earth community;
- Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life.
- The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust;
- When basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more;
- 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;
- All beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.
- For making headway in the great transition to a just, sustainable and peaceful future, fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. This requires a change of mind and heart, a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We need to identify ourselves with the whole Earth Community as well as our local

communities and form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another.

With the help of an international steering committee, Rabbi Soetendorp has drafted the statement "Towards Rio + 20 and beyond - A turning point in Earth history" that is currently being revised in an international consultation with the aim of articulating a unified and powerful message of the world's religious and spiritual traditions to the Rio + 20 Conference. It presents some basic recommendations for the outcomes of the Rio + 20 Conference such as creating a green economy ensures social justice and equity, protects the ecological balance and creates economic sufficiency by internalizing social and environmental costs into the economic bottom line; and affirming a framework of strong sustainability aimed at securing Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations, such as the Earth Charter, as a guide to development policy and practice.

The vision is to present this statement in an interreligious assembly in Rio de Janeiro that would appeal to the assembled governments to take bold and far-reaching decision at this historic conference. As a local action to prepare the Rio + 20 Conference, the Soetendorp Institute invites faith-based organizations to organize solidarity marches between different houses of worship and contemplation that would include stops at the different places for conversations about what the diverse traditions have to say about protecting the environment and creating a healthy future for forthcoming generations.

The text of the statement is available and open for edits and suggestions at <http://123.writeboard.com/jtsg0iqouifc7509qoiyt862/login> (The password is: truth2power)
Please send us your comments and suggestions by March 20, 2012.

A first discussion on strengthening ethical and spiritual input into Rio+20 took place in New York City on December 14, 2011. Close to 50 participants from different backgrounds shared their organizations' recommendations for the outcomes of the Rio + 20 Conference, identified common priorities, and strategized as to how we can work most effectively on the Road to Rio+20 to ensure that our policy priorities are included in the Zero Draft, and in the final outcome document.

The meeting began with a review of the recommendations from the 75 submissions to the Compilation document discuss ethics, spirituality, the Earth Charter. These affirm the need for a stronger, ethical and spiritual framework for sustainable development. They emphasize the adoption of specific policy mechanisms, such as ombudspersons for future generations, implementing the Precautionary Principle, new measures of GDP, and millennium consumption goals.

The next meeting will take place in New York City on January 24, 2012 preceding the initial discussions of the Zero Draft Outcome Document.

For more information and to get involved in the project, please contact [Michael Slaby](mailto:rio+20@soetendorp.org) at rio+20@soetendorp.org and [Rick Clugston](mailto:rmclugston@aol.com) at rmclugston@aol.com and visit the project's website at <http://soetendorpinstitute.org/Spiritual-Dimensions-of-Sustainability-Project/>