

EARTH CHARTER INTERNATIONAL



# The Policy Relevance of the Earth Charter for Europe

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## *The Policy Relevance of the Earth Charter for Europe*

By **Johannah Bernstein**<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

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The first decade of the 21st century marks a period of profound and rapid transformation for European integration as Europe grows quickly in number and scope. These factors are enormous challenges for Europe as it strives to realise its potential beyond economic cooperation (Baykal 2004). At the same time, as other chapters in this book assert, Europe's political role and impact on the global stage is in need of revitalization.

There can be no doubt that the globalized and complex world against which Europe defines itself does not require a new hegemon. Instead, what is needed is a Union that is grounded in an ethos of multilateral cooperation and collaboration and which asserts a strong global partnership role to ensure that the benefits of globalization are spread fairly around the world. As stated in the Earth Charter's prologue entitled "The Way Forward", what is indeed required is "a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility." However to be effective, the new ethos of international and cross-cultural collaboration must be grounded in a global ethic, common goals and shared values. These are the essential underpinnings for the foundation upon which the emerging global community must develop, and within which Europe has an important role to play.

This chapter describes the policy relevance of the Earth Charter for Europe during this time of great transition. It provides an overview of the Earth Charter, especially in terms of its legitimacy and authority in international law and then describes the visionary and

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operational importance for Europe in general, and in particular as regards a few selected policy tracks such as EU Development Policy, the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy, the European Neighbourhood Policy and EU Security Strategy.

This chapter argues that what the Earth Charter offers to the EU and other nations in search of redefinition and identity is an integrated set of ethical guidelines to make the fundamental transition towards sustainable development. The Earth Charter provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the environment, development, democracy and peace challenges, and offers a basis for developing integrated solutions to the new generation of global survival challenges.

## **The Significance of the Earth Charter**

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### *Overview of the Earth Charter*

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century — one that is based on respect for nature and people, universal human rights, social and economic justice, democratic and participatory societies, and non-violent conflict resolution.

Launched in 2000 in The Hague, the Earth Charter is a product of one of the most transparent and participatory civil society consultation processes in history. The development of the Earth Charter was guided by Dr. Steven Rockefeller under the auspices of the international Earth Charter Commission, which was led by Mikhail Gorbachev, president of Green Cross International, and Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development.

The ten-year long drafting process resulted from collaboration with civil society organizations, national-level committees, scholarly seminars, and thousands of individuals across the globe. The result of this extraordinary process reflects a deep

consensus that has emerged worldwide on the need for an integrated ethical vision to guide the sustainability transition in the new millennium.

The Earth Charter is an expression of global interdependence, of partnership and shared responsibility for the well-being of both humanity and the larger community of life. It builds on over 100 international declarations, charters, and treaties, including those which were drafted by a variety of non-governmental organizations. And many of the principles draw directly from recent scientific discoveries and insights as well as the moral insights of the world's religions, and the extensive world literature on global ethics and the ethics of environment and development (Rockefeller 1996).

The original purpose of the Earth Charter Project was to create a "soft law" document that set forth the fundamental principles of the emerging new ethics of respect for human rights, peace, economic equity, environmental protection, and sustainable living. Laying out an ethical foundation for building a just and sustainable world, it is hoped that the Earth Charter will eventually become a universal code of conduct for states and people to advance the global cause of sustainable development in the way that the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights has done for human rights. (Rockefeller 1996).

Starting with the 1987 Brundtland Commission, many have written on the need for an integrated vision of the basic ethical principles and practical guidelines that should govern the conduct of people and nations in their relations with each other and the Earth. The Earth Charter is a response to this call. The integrated ethical vision that lies at the heart of the Earth Charter is grounded in the indivisibility and interdependence of environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development, and peace.

Moreover, the Earth Charter's ethical vision is premised on the conviction that a fundamental change in humanity's attitudes, values, and ways of living is necessary if social, economic, and ecological well-being are to be realised in the twenty-first century (Rockefeller 1999).

The Earth Charter's combination of core principles of respect for nature, social justice and commitment to human rights, democracy, peace and respect for diversity represent the core values that are widely shared across the world and which are needed to ensure the global transition for a sustainable future. Together they reflect a vision that integrates the four major priorities that have been consistently emphasized by the United Nations in the major environment and development summits of the last thirty years (Rockefeller 2003).

However, it is important to emphasise that the objective of the Earth Charter in framing an integrated ethical vision, is not to impose the values of one culture or tradition on everyone else or to create a new monoculture. Rather, the goal is to highlight those values and principles that are fundamental in character and of enduring significance and which reflect the common concerns and shared values of people of all races, cultures, and religions (Rockefeller 2001).

The Earth Charter calls for the search for common ground in the midst of growing global diversity and for the embracing of a new ethical vision that is grounded in a spirit of universal responsibility and stewardship. This search for common ground is precisely the challenge that Europe faces right now as it sets out to redefine itself as a global player on the 21<sup>st</sup> century stage. At a time when major changes are required in the way that the international community makes decisions on critical challenges to climatic and ecosystem well-being, as well as on long-term economic and social well-being, the Earth Charter provides a new foundation upon which to make those decisions that will lead to a more just, peaceful and sustainable future for all.

### *The authority of the Earth Charter*

From the perspective of international law, the Earth Charter is considered to be a very innovative and useful instrument (Bosselmann 2003) with its authority rooted in several important factors. First, some legal scholars maintain that the process that generated the Earth Charter and its substantive content make it especially significant. Steven Rockefeller has said, “the meaning of the Earth Charter in this time of crisis is found not only in its words, but also in the extraordinary process by which it was crafted” (Rockefeller 2001). Because of the worldwide, cross-cultural, interdisciplinary dialogue that produced the Earth Charter, and because of its extraordinary breadth and the scope of expertise involved, the drafting process succeeded where other international declaration drafting processes have not, namely in integrating the principles and insights of science, ethics, religion, international law, and the wisdom of indigenous peoples. Compared with Agenda 21, a government-negotiated soft law document adopted at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the Earth Charter represents a much broader consensus, as the drafting process engaged many more people and sectors of society. Many would agree that the Earth Charter is likely the first document produced by global civil society with such a strong and wide consensus on global sustainability ethics.

A second important factor that underpins the Earth Charter’s authority is the fact that it is grounded in established international law. The entire text of the Earth Charter endeavours to articulate clearly and integrate the fundamental values and principles that the United Nations, international law, and the emerging global civil society have identified as widely shared and essential to achieving both equitable human development and preservation of Earth’s ecological integrity. Each of the principles builds upon, interconnects, and expands the ethical vision found in other international declarations and covenants. Additionally, the Earth Charter incorporates hard-law multilateral environmental agreements such as the UN Climate Change Convention, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Convention on Desertification (Rockefeller 2003).

The third factor relates to the ongoing endorsement process, which has involved declarations of commitment and support from over 2,500 organisations and institutions, as well as many thousands of individuals and numerous heads of states. (Rockefeller 2003). Support among national and regional and local governments has increased considerably in recent years, with a growing number of city, state and national governments now having independently endorsed the Earth Charter. These include the Governments of Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Jamaica, Jordan, Niger, Romania, and the Republic of Tatarstan, as well as hundreds of cities. The promotion of its principles in more than 50 national Earth Charter campaigns and the ever-increasing number of endorsing institutions are further evidence of the Earth Charter's considerable success.

The most recent expression of political support by a UN body is reflected in the decision of the 32nd General Conference of UNESCO, which took place in October 2003. It calls on Member States "to recognize the Earth Charter as an important ethical framework for sustainable development" and to "acknowledge its ethical principles, its objectives and its contents, as an expression that coincides with the vision that UNESCO has with regard to their new Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007." Furthermore, all Member States except the United States affirmed their intention "to utilize the Earth Charter as an educational instrument, particularly in the framework of the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development" which began in 2005. UNESCO is the leading organisation in this initiative and the Earth Charter has been officially regarded as an important tool for the Decade.

It is also important to highlight how close the Earth Charter came to formal recognition in the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development at the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development. South African President Mbeki cited the Earth Charter in his opening address as a significant expression of "human solidarity" and as part of "the solid base from which the Johannesburg World Summit must proceed." And in the closing days of the Summit, the first draft paragraph 13 of the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development included recognition of "the relevance of the challenges posed

in the Earth Charter.” While the reference was deleted in the final stages of negotiations, it is important to highlight that paragraph 6 of the Johannesburg Declaration included wording almost identical to the concluding words of the first paragraph of the Earth Charter Preamble, which states that “it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.” (Rockefeller 2002). Despite the deletion of the specific reference to the Earth Charter, the fact that the international community came as far as it did in preparing to recognise the Earth Charter is an important indication of the increasing receptivity of the international community of the need for an integrated ethical framework.

The fourth important factor relates to the growing body of legal scholars who recognise the substantive merit and innovation of the Earth Charter as a legal reference document. The fact that increasing numbers of states (usually by way of specific government departments) have now formally adopted the Earth Charter as a guide to policy, combined with its increasing recognition in legal education and scholarship, is evidence of the Charter's growing status as a soft law instrument. Indeed, recognition among legal scholars actually counts as a subsidiary source of international law according to Article 59 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice. International law expert Klaus Bosselmann also maintains that the authority of the Earth Charter is best asserted by characterizing it as a “novel instrument in international law “. He describes the Earth Charter as global civil society’s first and foremost founding document. Such achievement is in stark contrast to the efforts of governments who have not succeeded in even attempting to negotiate a legally binding agreement on sustainable development. And unlike Agenda 21, a government-negotiated soft law document that resulted from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the Earth Charter represents a broader consensus (Bosselman 2003).

Other legal experts suggest that while it is common to think of the Charter as a document as a "soft law" instrument aspiring to lead to more binding commitments, it is equally accurate to see the Charter as a document summarizing key aspects of what is already international "hard law" in the form of binding agreements and treaties. These range from



international norms to multilateral agreements such as the Convention on Biodiversity or the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Parallels are often made between the Earth Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which itself has taken decades to implement in the form of international norms, agreements, and legal decisions. Originally a non-binding resolution of the General Assembly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has successfully codified human rights standards that are regarded as the most important source of authority for the litigation of human rights violations around the world. While the Universal Declaration is an example of a soft-law instrument that is not legally binding, when adopted by a State, they acquire a binding character of a moral quality. The Earth Charter Commission articulated similar hopes for the Earth Charter during the drafting process, notably that it would become a universally accepted standard for ethical, just and environmentally sound behaviour by which the conduct of all individuals, organisations, businesses, governments and international organisations is to be guided, evaluated and ultimately held accountable. Given the clearly established need for an integrated ethical framework, it is highly likely that the Earth Charter's ethics of sustainable development will start making a profound difference on the level of law-making and the development of jurisprudence around the world.

### ***The value of the Earth Charter relative to other UN declarations***

Designed as a set of action principles to live by, rather than a prescription for specific actions, the Earth Charter stands apart from the many other UN-driven declarations and treaties that address environment and development. The Earth Charter's unique nature comes from a number of factors, including its incorporation of good governance and its bottom-up approach.

First, it presents a holistic worldview driven by such ethical concerns as respect for nature, rather than the economics and science-driven approach that many economic actors tend to advance in developing sustainability policy. This holistic approach views the

strengthening of democratic institutions, the transparency and accountability of international institutions, and inclusive participatory decision-making as inseparable from the imperatives of environmental protection, and social and economic justice.

Second, the Earth Charter is largely a bottom-up rather than a top-down initiative, shaped and adopted primarily by civil society and local government authorities through an extensive process of public consultation that was carried out throughout the world. The actual process of the creation of the Earth Charter embodies two of the good governance principles that are enshrined therein, namely the right of citizens to participate in decision-making and the importance of the transparency of decision-making processes. The World Resources Institute refers to the Earth Charter consultation process as “textbook participatory democracy in action”.

Third, designed as a “people’s treaty”, rather than an instrument to be further negotiated and ultimately endorsed or adopted by the UN, the Earth Charter drafting process could thus produce an instrument that is forceful, visionary, concrete, coherent and not subject to the political dynamics multilateral diplomacy, which tends to dilute ambition levels. Further, many of these principles contained in the Earth Charter were not actually created during the drafting process. Rather they were refined and elaborated with their cross-linkages having been further articulated. Concepts such as inter-generational equity, common but differentiated responsibilities, ecological integrity, precautionary principle, democratic decision-making, human rights or non-violence are well established in international law, but the interaction between all these concepts has not been spelled out in any other single document, not even in Agenda 21.

While the Earth Charter now stands on firm ground, it also has the potential for future growth as an authoritative reference document on the ethics of sustainable development. Moreover, there are numerous strategies still to be explored for advancing the Earth Charter from soft law to hard law status. For example, by having the Earth Charter referenced in multilateral or bilateral agreements among countries, it is suggested that the Charter could gain hard law status. Such agreements may not be equivalent in status to

formal endorsement by national governments, but an implicit assumption could be drawn, which would serve to move the Earth Charter onto even firmer legal ground.

### *The Earth Charter's relevance for public policy*

Implementation of sustainable development policy around the world continues to be sub-optimal. There are many political and institutional reasons that have been discussed and debated since the 1992 Earth Summit. One of the most important factors is the lack of a coherent policy framework to support the further integration of the principles of sustainable development in law and policy at all scales of governance.

As noted below, the Earth Charter's integrated framework has already been used by many national governments for their sustainability strategies, with clearly positive results. In addition to supporting the implementation of national sustainability strategies, the Earth Charter's integrated framework can support facilitation of linkages between existing treaties and their implementation at the national level. It can also serve as a tool for supporting integration and coherence between global-level agreements and policy-making at the EU, national and local levels.

Moreover, the Earth Charter's integrated framework is now helping to reinforce the growing consensus on basic norms and ethical principle that are enshrined in Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). The Earth Charter's integrated framework can also serve to fill in gaps in international law by placing, in a global context, principles which only appear in certain instruments and by adding priorities which are of fundamental importance but which are not yet enshrined in any international instrument. This is particularly true in the case of the Earth Charter's main and supporting principles on the culture of peace and non-violence.

Among the key purposes of the Earth Charter, its use as a values framework for designing sustainable development plans has been particularly important. In many cases, the Earth Charter has provided the orienting vision for these policies and practices (Strong 2000).

Increasingly, the Charter is being adopted as a reference guide for more specific policy in areas such as mandated education curricula and environmental policy development.

Despite the value of the individual principles that have increasingly shaped international law an integrated framework there is a need to provide a coherent legal framework to support the further integration of the principles of sustainable development. There is similarly a need to consolidate into a single juridical framework the vast body, but disparate principles of soft law on environment and development.

All of these important developments reflect the importance and relevance of the Earth Charter for public policy. They also demonstrate the how quickly international support is now growing for the further recognition of the Earth Charter in international law. The experience at the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development, at which the Charter came very close to formal UN recognition, reflected a remarkable advance and demonstrated how many governments were actually prepared to endorse the Earth Charter itself.

### ***The Earth Charter In Practice***

Since 2003, the Brazilian Ministry for the Environment has been disseminating the Earth Charter and using it as a guide for the implementation of national Agenda 21 and highlighting the need to use the Charter in policy-making. The intention is for the Earth Charter to be used as an awareness-raising and decision-support tool among all actors in government, civil society, and business who share the aim of promoting sustainable development. In practice, Brazil has been using the Charter as a basis for university courses, training workshops, and environmental conferences. In Brazil, the Charter is no longer seen simply as an educational tool. In December 2005, Brazil held the Second National Environmental Conference in Brasilia, where the primary topic was how best to use the Earth Charter as a guide in the environmental policy making-process. In April 2007, Brazil's Minister of Environment, Marina Silva signed an agreement of technical cooperation with Earth Charter International and the Human Rights Defense Center of Petropolis. Under the agreement, Brazil has promised to promote the Earth Charter and

its principles and values "among people, organizations and all sectors of society and governmental organs." At the signing Minister Silva voiced her strong support of the Charter, marking a new phase in the growing relationship between her government and the Earth Charter.

[http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/2007/02/experience\\_of\\_the\\_brazilian\\_mi.html](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/2007/02/experience_of_the_brazilian_mi.html))

In Mexico, the implementation of the Earth Charter has taken the form of a national campaign that began with efforts of the Ministry of the Environment and the National Council for Sustainable Development which led to the endorsement of the Earth Charter by 16 Municipalities, 23 educational institutions as well as some private institutions and thousands of individuals. In 2002, then Mexican President Vicente Fox expressed his support for the Charter. More recently, in connection with Earth Day celebrations in April of 2007, which were hosted by current Mexican president Felipe Calderón, Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Education entered into a formal agreement to collaborate in the dissemination of the Earth Charter throughout Mexico's educational system. Today over 130 Academic institutions in Mexico have endorsed the Charter, which includes every single technical institution in the country.

[http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/2007/05/mexican\\_government\\_commits\\_to.html](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/2007/05/mexican_government_commits_to.html))

In Costa Rica, the government of President Oscar Arias has recently reaffirmed its commitment to the Earth Charter both domestically and internationally. Historically, the city of San José had taken on a leading role regarding the Earth Charter. San Jose has itself endorsed the Earth Charter and in early 2000, the Mayor of San José convened a public meeting to present the results of this Earth Charter process, the Municipality of San José's local version of the Earth Charter, and their commitments to its implementation. The city has worked hard to integrate the Charter's principles into its management of municipal employees and has developed an Earth Charter training programme, which encourages over 1,800 municipal employees to incorporate Earth Charter principles into their daily activities.

[http://www.earthcharter.org/innerpg.cfm?id\\_page=86](http://www.earthcharter.org/innerpg.cfm?id_page=86)).

Other important endorsements of the Charter in Costa Rica have come from the Costa Rican Ministry of the Environment, the City of San Ramón, and the Department of Environmental Promotion of the Costa Rica's national power company CNFL.

(<http://www.earthcharter.org/endorse/>)

Jordan's support for the Earth Charter has also been considerable, especially in light of HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal of Jordan's participation in the Earth Charter Commission and in the launch of the Earth Charter Campaign in Paris in 2000.

Endorsement has been widespread in Jordan, with all ninety-nine city governments in Jordan having endorsed the Earth Charter.

(<http://www.earthcharterusa.org/ecinaction.html>)

Among the most inspiring and promising of these regional endorsements is the effort of the Republic of Tatarstan to engage the Earth Charter as a roadmap to a new society. Tatarstan's State Council formally embraced the Earth Charter in April 2001, becoming the first provincial government in the world to adopt the Earth Charter as a guide for conducting affairs of state. In November 2000, senior government ministers, Members of Parliaments, representatives of other key institutions in Tatarstan, and foreign experts held a conference in Kazan to consider the Earth Charter. In tandem with the conference, the government of Tatarstan also analyzed in detail how well its laws and policies conform with Earth Charter principles. The State Council held hearings on the Earth Charter, at which the Council Chair declared his support for declaring Tatarstan as an "experimental territory" for the further implementation of the Earth Charter and the UN Decade for the Culture of Peace (Smith 2003).

## **The Importance of the Earth Charter for the European Union**

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### ***The visionary importance of the Earth Charter for Europe***

The 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome and the 15th anniversary of the Treaty of Maastricht are important moments in time for Europe to reflect on its critical path ahead. 50 years has seen a radical transformation and maturation of the European “project”. But Europe is now struggling with the search for a new identity and its transformative role in world politics.

The first decade of the 21st century marks a period of profound and rapid transformation for European integration as Europe grows quickly in number and scope. These factors are enormous challenges for Europe as it strives to realise its potential beyond economic cooperation (Baykal 2004). At the same time, as other chapters in this book assert, Europe’s political role and impact on the global stage are in need of revitalization.

There can be no doubt that the globalized and complex world against which Europe defines itself does not require a new hegemon. Instead, what is needed is a Union that is grounded in an ethos of multilateral cooperation and collaboration and which asserts a strong global partnership role to ensure that the benefits of globalization are spread fairly around the world. As stated in the Earth Charter’s prologue entitled “The Way Forward”, what is indeed required is “a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility.” However to be effective, the new ethos of international and cross-cultural collaboration must be grounded in a global ethic, common goals and shared values. These are the essential underpinnings for the foundation upon which the emerging global community must develop, and within which Europe has an important role to play.

Against the backdrop of the complex international scene, lays the European Union’s own internal struggles, which are partially brought on by the fact that EU has almost doubled its membership in a very brief period of time. The recent waves of expansion pose considerable challenges to the EU. If managed improperly, current patterns of growth

could worsen already serious environmental degradation trends, as well as exacerbate social tensions. The Earth Charter's Preamble provides a way forward for the EU. It recognises the perilous nature of current environment and development trends but also asserts that these challenges are not insurmountable. They can indeed be overcome, but only if a new form of global partnership is formed, one that is grounded in a sense of universal responsibility in which the human family and the body politic endeavour to identify with the whole Earth community.

What the Earth Charter offers to the EU and other nations in search of redefinition and identity is an integrated set of ethical guidelines to make the fundamental transition towards sustainable development. It provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the environment, development, democracy and peace challenges, and provides a basis for developing integrated solutions to the new generation of global survival challenges.

Now more than ever, Europe also needs the Earth Charter to help secure its own transition to sustainable development, long a strategic goal of the Union, but one that has been at times elusive and not fully realised. However the transition to sustainable development is not just about reducing the EU's ecological footprint. It is about bringing about structural changes in its economy and society, improving its own democratic governance and strengthening the way policies are made. It is also about securing a commitment from Europe to assume leadership and responsibility in the search for a new form of world politics that places justice, peace and democracy, human rights and environmental protection at the core of the global narrative. Ultimately, the Earth Charter can provide a robust ethical foundation and play a central and catalytic role for this important political change process, especially as the EU embarks on new round of Reform Treaty negotiations.

It is also clear that Europe needs a new ethical narrative for the role it wishes to play as a regional and global actor. These specific challenges are addressed further below in relation to the operational importance of the Earth Charter relative to the EU's new



development policy, the EU Security Strategy, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, the Lisbon process and the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy.

What is patently clear for the EU at this stage of its political development is the need for Europe to respond more effectively and more creatively to the new generation of global challenges. Political will must be generated to ensure that new solutions are implemented in such a way that ensures real and lasting change. As noted above, the political change process must be underpinned by an ethical foundation. And this is where the value of the Earth Charter comes into play. It can support the EU through its integrated ethical vision that embraces concepts of universal responsibility and interdependence, concepts that must be embedded more firmly into the new European integration project.

Europe is at a crossroads as it now embarks on a new round of Reform Treaty negotiations. The extent to which it can strengthen its own internal democratic workings will greatly impact the scope of the leadership role it is increasingly expected to play on the global stage. A European Movement Conference in Berlin on 29 June 2007 concluded that rebuilding citizens' trust in the EU remains its biggest challenge. Citizens everywhere are questioning the EU's political legitimacy and the norms that are meant to unite all Europeans. Therefore, whatever reform is agreed, the EU itself must be strengthened with effective and democratic institutions and procedures and grounded in a renewed social, democratic and normative legitimacy.

But if Europe is to step forward and play a more active role in shaping global policies, the European project of cooperation and integration at home must be firmly grounded in the new global sustainability ethic that is at the heart of the Earth Charter's call for a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society. Herein lies the value, relevance and importance of the Earth Charter to Europe. It is a shared vision of basic values that provides a basis for new forms of global partnership and an ethical foundation that will help the EU in defining its new role both internally and for forging its new global role as a positive force for change in the world.

### ***The Earth Charter's relevance for Europe as a global partner for development policy***

Increasing tensions on the world scene, escalating terrorism, religious intolerance, environmental degradation, and the systematic violation of human rights all demonstrate the need to understand the diverse roots of conflicts, as well as the links between poverty, environmental deterioration, resources and scarcity, and peace and security. These challenges also point to the need for a global vision of common values, which must underlie the new forms of dialogue and cooperation needed among nations and civilizations. This is an enormous challenge for Europe as it sets out to define itself as a global partner for development.

The EU's development policy was among the founding policy areas of the Union. With the EU's 2005 European Consensus on Development, the Community – both the EU itself and its Members States – is now bound to a development policy manifesto that provides a framework for action, with shared goals, values and principles. A key aspect of the European Development Consensus is that the Union now acknowledges its responsibility for justice in globalisation, globally sustainable development, global poverty reduction, gender equality, environmental protection and peacebuilding. It further emphasises the partnership aspect of cooperation. The European Consensus cites good governance as a decisive factor for development, while also underlining the importance of participation by civil society and non-governmental organisations.

The EU's political leadership is committed to making sure that the dynamic contribution of the Consensus on Development will continue to grow. But the effectiveness of its contribution depends in large part on how it addresses the global challenges ahead and how it chooses to reinforce Europe's role as a global partner in development. This is especially important in light of the EU's potential political and economic weight. The Union has promised to strengthen its work on sustainable development, poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and as well to improve efforts to further integrate African partner countries into the global economy and to strengthen their position in international and regional trade. The achievement of these

goals is made possible in part by the fact that the EU is the single largest market in the world, and thus is the most important trading partner for many developing countries. Here the EU, with its power and with its moral obligations and goal, has the responsibility to be a positive driving force in international development cooperation.

As described above, the Earth Charter reinforces the importance of grounding public policy in an ethical foundation and articulates the need for a new understanding of the global situation. This is precisely the exercise that Europe must undergo as it strives to elaborate a new vision of shared goals, values and principles that will underlie its role as global partner.

As the Earth Charter Preamble states:

*“As never before in history, the emerging world community beckons for a new understanding of the global situation. A shared vision of common values can provide and sustain an ethical foundation for a dialogue among civilizations”.*

Some might argue that Europe is struggling in its search for a vision of shared values, which is not at all surprising in light of the massive changes that have unfolded on its geo-political map in the last fifteen years. While the development of a vision of shared values is a process that evolves over time, here again the Earth Charter can be instructive and enlightening. The Earth Charter asserts a new concept of universal responsibility that involves a form of human solidarity and kinship with all life forms. The Earth Charter Preamble calls on humanity to *“declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations”*. Herein lies a new basis for the different spheres of human ethical responsibility that the EU could embrace; notably in terms of the relations among its population, the relations with populations amongst its partner countries, the relations of its populations with the greater community of life, and the relations of present and future generations. It is this inclusive moral vision that is central to the message of the Earth Charter, and which could underpin a new form of global citizenship for Europe as it strives to be a positive force for change in the sphere of

development cooperation.

While the search for a vision of shared values must align with the diversity of the different ethical principles, value systems and religious backgrounds that now characterise the new face of Europe, nevertheless there are certain universal principles, which all of Europe must embrace for the benefit of the common good. As one of the chief architects of the Earth Charter, Maurice Strong has often said that

*“if our political processes are not guided by fundamental values and ethical principles, we will be working in a completely anarchistic system where the strong will always prevail and will not be subject to any real constraint or discipline or societal responsibility”.*

Nobel Peace Laureate Ang San Suu Kyi of Burma also asserts “Crossing the Divide: Dialogue Between Civilisations”, that the challenge we now face is for the different nations and peoples of the world to agree on a basic set of ethical values to serve as a unifying force in the development of a truly global community. This applies equally for the EU’s ongoing challenge of managing the process of political integration, as it does for the EU’s ongoing challenge to find its new role on the global stage.

While the Earth Charter advances the vision of a new global sustainability ethic, it is important to stress that is in no way as a new ideology , nor is it intended to make the specific ethics of the different religions superfluous. What the Earth Charter represents instead is a global ethic that is in essence a core consensus of the common values, standards, and basic attitudes from all of the great religious and spiritual traditions. The global ethic enshrined in the Earth Charter constitutes a core of belief, which is acceptable to all; it strives for unity, and seeks neither to eradicate nor compromise diversity.

### ***The Earth Charter's relevance for the EU Sustainable Development Strategy***

In the past two years, the EU has renewed both its Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) and the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. Designed to complement each other, the EU SDS is primarily concerned with quality of life, intra and inter-generational equity and policy coherence. In contrast, the Lisbon Strategy endeavours to contribute to sustainable development by focusing primarily on actions aimed at increasing competitiveness, economic growth and job creation. In addition to the EU SDS, sustainable development is also enshrined in the EU Treaty, which requires the integration of sustainable development into all European policies so that they contribute in an integrated way to meeting economic, environmental and social objectives.

However, while the EU has explicitly stated that sustainable development is the overarching principle of all EU policies, in reality the issue of Europe's competitiveness and the Lisbon's reform agenda for growth and jobs continues to dominate the political agenda. A growing number maintain that the renewed Lisbon Strategy places far too much emphasis on the economic pillar of competitiveness and that it disregards the reality that the forces of competition need a social and ecological framework to ensure the promotion of sustainable development.

There can be no doubt that Europe's future competitiveness depends on fully embracing sustainable development today. However, sustainable development is still not perceived as the unifying vision for Europe. Efforts continue to be needed to ensure a better balance between the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability. In this regard, the Earth Charter's combination of core principles of respect for nature, social justice and commitment to human rights, democracy, peace and respect for diversity represent the core values that are not only widely shared throughout Europe, but which could stimulate the EU to a swifter transition to a sustainable future. The sustainability ethic embedded in the Earth Charter's vision asserts the indivisibility and interdependence of environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development, and peace, and this message -- which is consistent with both stated EU

policy as well as the EU's promotional messaging campaigns (e.g., "Y/our choice is peace") -- can support the EU in its efforts to balance and synergise the competitiveness and sustainability imperatives.

Moreover, for new EU Member States who are now in the process of having to align their own national sustainability strategies with the EU SDS, the Earth Charter can provide an orienting vision for these policy initiatives and provide a values framework for designing sustainability strategies at the national level.

In addition to the challenge of integrating sustainable development into the core of policy-making, Europe is facing very specific problems related to continuing high level of natural resource consumption. These persistent trends present problems not only in terms of Europe's continuing biodiversity loss, but also in terms of the impacts that Europe's resource needs generate for developing countries. Reducing the EU's external ecological footprint is absolutely necessary if it is to support the global transition to sustainability. If the EU is to play a true global leadership role in the sustainability arena, it must acknowledge the EU's contribution to global problems and it must begin by tackling the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation and by examining how best to reduce the EU's global natural resource use. Embracing the Earth Charter's messages of adopting production and consumption patterns that safeguard resources and communities, and its overall ethic of stressing "being more" over "having more" as expressed in the Earth Charter's Preamble, can help the EU to strengthen its own path to sustainability.

In addition, the Earth Charter's central messages of interdependence, diversity and universal responsibility can provide an ethical foundation for the type of dialogue that Europe must now have with its partners around the world. For example, the Earth Charter's principle of interdependence highlights the reality that human existence is connected in an intricate web of ecological, social, economic and cultural relationships that shape our lives. The interdependence between humanity and the greater community of life calls for a display of greater responsibility- not only for the ecosystems on which

all life depends, but for each other as a single human community and for the generations that will follow. The principle of responsibility is also reflected in the Earth Charter's Preamble, which calls for humanity to recognise that:

*“in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one family and one Earth community with a common destiny... and towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.”*

The concept of universal responsibility contained in the Earth Charter is also tied to another important message of the Earth Charter, which is equally relevant for the EU as it implements its EU SDS. It is the Charter's call for fundamental change in attitudes, values, lifestyles, all of which are essential if social, economic, and ecological well-being is to be realised in the twenty-first century. However, the Earth Charter does not just reconceive the challenge of sustainable development as more than reconciling economic development and environmental protection. As Professor Mary-Evelyn Tucker, a prominent member of the Earth Charter Drafting Committee maintains:

*“For it is not only sustainable development or ecological security that is in question, but the very notion of who we are as humans within the Earth community. We are facing ethical questions we have never before faced. It is no longer only an ethics for suicide or homicide that we seek, but an ethics to respond to biocide and ecocide. What we are in search of then is a sustaining vision of the future that will engender hope in the minds and hearts of the next generation. On such hope rests the energies and commitments needed for creating a viable future (Tucker 2004).*

### ***The Earth Charter's relevance for the European Neighbourhood Policy***

Europe's recent waves of expansion have led to dramatic changes in its place on the world map. The Union is now significantly closer to a wider array of countries including

many Middle Eastern and African nations; and it has increased its proximity to several of its old partners – for example, Russia and Norway. These physical border changes along with the increasing threat from terrorism and large-scale environmental degradation have made it increasingly important for the EU to develop strong partnerships with its new neighbors. However, for these partnerships to provide lasting security, minimize the environmental impacts and ensure human rights, the relationships must be based upon true collaboration and a commitment to a shared set of moral and political values.

It is against this backdrop and need that the EU has renewed its commitment to the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) as an important basis for strengthening relations between the EU and its partners and prevent the emergence of dividing lines in the new neighbourhood.

The European Neighbourhood Policy aims to reinforce existing forms of regional and sub-regional cooperation and provide a framework for their further development. The ENP will reinforce stability and security and contribute to efforts at conflict resolution.

Although the vision of the ENP has been set in that its priority and goals have been laid out, the exact path forward remains open. In this context there is room for the Earth Charter to provide the EU with an integrated ethical framework that might guide the further development of implementing tools and other policy initiatives under the ENP. The Earth Charter's messages such as the indivisibility between peace, environment and development are particularly critical. The Earth Charter asserts that there can be no peace without social and economic justice and the eradication of poverty. It also recognizes that any efforts to achieve these goals are doomed to fail if there is no common ethical framework to guide policy development. These are important messages for the EU's new neighbours who are coming to terms with how best to balance these oft-perceived competing interests. In very recent years, concerns have been raised that many of the new implementing tools developed under the ENP seem to reflect an imbalance between the three pillars of sustainability. This is especially the case where national action plans



developed under the ENP place emphasis on economic growth and competitiveness as dominant policy goals, while disregarding the environmental impacts that will result.

As with the Earth Charter's use and value as an ethical framework for sustainability strategies, it could be equally instructive and valuable as a policy tool to guide the further development of policy instruments that neighbour countries will be expected to develop over the coming years. This is especially the case in light of the Earth Charter's messages regarding the interdependence of the indivisibility of peace, environment and development, and regarding the imperative of building lasting cultures of tolerance, nonviolence and peace as a precondition to sustainable development. These messages are particularly relevant in light of the ENP's priority focus on increasing security and human well-being in the new neighbourhood.

### ***The Earth Charter's relevance for the European Security Strategy***

The European Security Strategy (ESS) was approved by the European Council in 2003 and drafted under the auspices of the EU High Representative Javier Solana.

The ESS is the policy document that guides the EU's international security strategy. It addresses the need for a comprehensive security strategy that encompasses both civil and defence-related security measures. The Strategy itself is not necessarily an operational document with a detailed plan of action. Rather it lays down overall objectives of EU external actions and the principal ways of achieving these. The main types of threats addressed by the ESS include: terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure (Bernstein et al 2006).

When the ESS was first drafted, the intention was actually to restrict its ambit to those threats caused by humans in order to create a manageable and viable regime. However, despite its rather restricted ambit the ESS approach has come to recognise the speed with which threats are changing as a result of increased interdependence and the extent to which these new security threats have clear environmental dimensions.

As with the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Earth Charter's relevance to the further development of the ESS and its eventual review, lies in its message that there can be no peace without social and economic justice and the eradication of poverty. And as with the ENP, the Earth Charter's common ethical framework can serve as an invaluable underpinning for the ESS. Another equally important message of the Earth Charter that is relevant to the ESS is the Charter's emphasis on the "culture of tolerance, non-violence and peace", as enunciated in Principle 16 of the Earth Charter. With the changing nature of conflict, Principle 16 expresses the importance of peace embracing so much more than the absence of violence, war and conflict. In the Earth Charter, the "culture tolerance, non-violence and peace" represents a complex of attitudes, values, beliefs and patterns of behaviour that not only promote the peaceful settlement of conflict, but as well the quest for mutual understanding which enable individuals to live harmoniously with each other and the larger community of life.

UNESCO's enabling constitution affirms that "since wars began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." Thus, the concept of the "culture of peace" enshrined in the Earth Charter presumes that peace is a way of being, doing and living in society that can be taught, developed, and improved upon. Indeed, the full realisation of a culture of peace will require both a transformation of institutional practices as well as individual modes of behaviour. It does not however imply a culture without conflict, but rather a culture where members and institutions deal with conflict in the spirit of cooperation, integration, transformation, and mutual adaptation, using the tools of collaborative and creative problem-solving, rather than resort to violence and war. The goal of a culture of peace, and herein lies its relevance for the EU and its further elaboration of the ESSS, is to recognise the value and importance of a rich diversity of cultures as cause for appreciation and cooperation, rather than a source of social despair, disintegration and violent conflict.

The Earth Charter's message of global interdependence between nation states and civil society is equally relevant for the EU's Security Strategy. Just as new forms of global cooperation are essential because of the increasing complexity of the new global

challenges that cut across ecological, economic, political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, the principle of interdependence helps societies and governance institutions to recognise that none of the fundamental problems that face communities, nation-states, and the world can be effectively addressed in isolation. Against this backdrop, it becomes eminently clear that holistic thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and integrated problem solving are essential, most particularly in dealing with the new global threat environment and the complex interplay between environmental degradation, poverty, state failure and conflict, all of which the EU is coming to terms with in the further development of its Security Strategy.

### **Conclusion**

The Earth Charter's value to Europe has been described both in terms of its visionary importance and in its operational utility. As Europe struggles in the redefinition of its role both internally and externally, the Earth Charter provides a shared vision of values that provides a new basis for partnership between the EU, its new neighbours, and third countries.

If Europe is to step forward and play a more active role in shaping global policies, the European project of cooperation and integration at home must be firmly grounded in the new global ethic of sustainability. Now more than ever, Europe needs the Earth Charter to help secure its own transition to sustainable development, but also to strengthen its role on the world stage, so that it can be a force for positive change and ensure that the Earth Charter's integrated ethical vision of justice, peace and democracy, human rights and environmental protection are elevated to the core of the global political agenda.

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