

Ecumenical One World Initiative organized Christian-Buddhist Dialogue on the Earth Charter

“The Renewable Energies of Hope – Approaches to an Interreligious Collaboration for Sustainable Ways of Living” was the title of this year’s Annual Meeting of the Ecumenical One World Initiative, the German Earth Charter Affiliate. The two-day conference that was held end of April 2009 brought together around 50 people from different age groups ranging from 19 to 80 years. Its main focus was on the Earth Charter’s call for a change of mind and heart required in the transition towards sustainable ways of living.

Together with the speakers Michael Slaby, the renown theologian and biologist Dr. Günter Altner, Sr. Margrit Höpfler of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, and Sr. Chou Nghiem and Sr. Ingrid of the newly established European Institute of Applied Buddhism (EIAB) founded by the Vietnamese Zen Master, author and poet Thich Nhat Hanh, the participants explored Christian and Buddhist approaches to “educating the heart” for building the inner foundations for this required transformation.

The conference showed that the Earth Charter provides a rich resource for facilitating interreligious dialogues on the core challenges facing humanity. After Michael Slaby introduced the priorities of the Earth Charter Initiative’s Focus Area on Religion and Spirituality, Prof. Günter Altner called for a “new scientific revolution” enabling us to think in open rather than in closed systems, to move from mechanistic to process-dynamic ways of dealing with the environment, and to make the transition from linear concepts of progress to integrated, inclusive, and systemic models of sustainable development. According to Altner, the Earth Charter provides a solid foundation for this new paradigm.

On day two, Sr. Ingrid started the morning programme with leading a walking meditation through the park of the Ecumenical Center that hosted the meeting. For 45 minutes, the participants walked slowly in silence, following the instructions of Sr. Ingrid of breathing mindfully and being fully aware of one’s steps. For many, this walk was a genuine experience of entering into a deeper relationship with nature, walking carefully on Mother Earth.

After the meditation, Sr. Margrit Höpfler introduced the audience to the activities of the SHALOM network of the School Sisters of Notre Dame that is working in more than 35 countries to provide education for all, especially the forgotten and marginalized. In 2002, the SHALOM network endorsed the Earth Charter and started a reflection process on the Charter’s integrated vision for sustainable living. In course of this process, the School Sisters developed a series of Earth Charter study guides and launched a network of SHALOM-Clubs that are mostly run by young people and support local projects to implement its guiding values and principles.

In the afternoon, Sr. Chou Nghiem shared how the practice of meditation can help us to live more mindfully and to be present in the current moment. This awareness can lead us to a more careful behaviour towards the environment: “Being fully aware of myself, I can really touch the Earth. I can feel that I am alive, and that the Earth below me is also alive. I feel the Earth below me, and the Earth feels me walking on her. If I am fully aware of this inner connection with the Earth, my relationship with nature will be transformed.”

The program was rounded by an interreligious celebration entitled “the joyful celebration of life” that included songs, prayers, and scriptural readings of both traditions. Especially the elements of celebration, walking together in silence, and dancing circle-dances until late at night helped to make the event holistic by engaging not only the intellectual but also the

“artistic, ethical, and spiritual potential” (Earth Charter Principle 1b) of the participants. The conference thus revealed that the Earth Charter can indeed provide a valuable framework for initiating deep dialogues between people of different faiths that can help us generate the inner resources required for the transition to more sustainable ways of living.