Generating the Renewable Energy of Hope
- The Earth Charter Guide to Religion and Climate Change

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The current version is being steadily reviewed and updated. Please send your comments to Michael Slaby, Coordinator of the Earth Charter Programme on Religion and Climate Change: MSlay@EarthCharter.org

The cover pictures show the “solar cross” of the Evangelical “Friedenskirche” (“Peace Church”) in Herten-Disteln, Germany, as well as the inauguration ceremony of the photovoltaic system of the Buddhist Deer Park Monastery in California, USA, led by Ven. Thich Nhath Hanh.
## Table of Contents:

### Setting the Context
- Why do we need this guide?  
- Who should read this guide?  
- Ban Ki-Moon’s call to people of faith to support the struggle against global warming

### The Facts about Climate Change
- The Basics
- Environmental Challenges
- Social Challenges
- Economic and Political Challenges
- Ethical Challenges

### The Transformative Power of Faith and Hope: Religious Responses to Climate Change
- Ecumenical Christianity
- Church-based projects
- The Catholic Church
- Patriarch Bartholomew I and Orthodox Christianity
- The Evangelical Community
- The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life
- Muslim Responses
- Buddhism
- Interfaith projects and organizations
- Assessment

### The Earth Charter’s Integrated Ethical Approach to Climate Change
- The Background of the Charter
- A methodology for assessing the ethical challenges of climate change with the Earth Charter
- Understanding the holistic, layered structure of the Charter
- Step 1: Reflecting on our planetary situation
- Step 2: Assessing the root causes of climate change
- Step 3: Framing inclusive responses

### Next Steps for Religious Action on Climate Change
- Practical guidelines on how to use the three-step methodology
- Suggestions for Action

### Appendix
- An Earth Charter – A Spiritual Perspective, Preamble
- The Earth Charter – Full text
- The Earth Charter Action Guidelines, adapted to religious contexts
- Notes
- List of Resources and Websites
Setting the context:

Climate change is one of the most urgent global challenges for the 21st century. Addressing the root causes of the problem will require an unparalleled level of international cooperation, to which national governments, businesses, civil society and religions have contributions to make. As UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon points out, we cannot succeed in the struggle against global warming without the help, the support and the guidance of our religious and spiritual traditions. Our religious and spiritual traditions have guided human conduct for thousands of years, and they can inspire the change in the minds and hearts of people required in the transition to a sustainable path of living and development. They can also bring something into the discussion that is desperately needed in the current situation: the renewable energy of hope, of joy and celebration that helps us to see light and creative energy in situations of darkness and despair.

Why do we need this guide?

The social and environmental impacts of climate change are complex, massive and inextricably interrelated. Bearing this interrelatedness in mind, this guide uses the holistic ethical framework of the Earth Charter and the Earth Charter related materials, tools and resources as a starting point to reflect on the role of religious leaders and their congregations towards these massive challenges, which require nothing less than a deep transformation of how we live, produce, consume and relate to nature.

The Earth Charter Guide to Religion and Climate Change honours and builds on the numerous activities that religious and spiritual organizations, congregations and individuals around the world are conducting to halt and reverse global warming. The task of the day is to mainstream these activities and initiatives and put them on a broader base and platform.

In order to support the process of mainstreaming religious action against climate change, this guide seeks:

- To summarize the most up-to-date scientific knowledge about climate change
- To give an overview of available resources, materials, initiatives and websites for interested religious communities, leaders and laypeople
- To present a three-step-methodology for integrated ethical reflection based on the Earth Charter aimed at gaining a macro-perspective on our climate crisis, assessing the root causes of climate change and framing inclusive responses
- To provide a short, concise and practical guide for religious leaders, laypeople and their communities on how to take action on climate change

The thesis of this guide is that the Earth Charter document, the Earth Charter Initiative and the resources and materials that are based on the Charter’s integrated ethical vision can help religious institutions, communities and individuals better understand and respond to the challenge of climate change.

More specifically it claims that understanding the integrated, global, ethical vision of the Earth Charter and utilizing Earth Charter based resources will provide inspiration and guidance for religious people and institutions. Core themes include the ethical challenge of climate change and the need for common ground in the midst of religious diversity.

This guide is meant as a contribution to the challenge of connecting the different projects, initiatives and activities regarding climate change and building an Earth community committed to creating a sustainable future.
Who should read this guide?
The guide is specifically meant for religious leaders, laypeople and their constituencies who seek guidance on the key findings on climate change, the main organizations and networks involved and practical suggestions of how to get started. All spiritual and religious communities and faith-based organizations are encouraged to use this guide as a tool-box and inspiration for starting their own workshops, courses and action projects on climate change and the global challenges of our time. Being based on the inclusive ethical vision of the Earth Charter that appeals to all of humanity – religious and non-religious institutions and individuals alike – this guide recognizes the importance of the spiritual dimension of life and is mindful that the global challenges of our time require creative solutions based on the deep wisdom preserved by humanity’s major religious and spiritual traditions. The language of this guide is therefore inclusive and non-sectarian and gives hints where readers can find guidance and inspiration on how to incorporate the materials presented here into their own specific faith traditions and belief systems.

At the same time, this guide can also be instructive for institutions and professionals working on the issue of climate change from a secular perspective – providing them with an overview on a largely neglected stakeholder to involve in the global movement against climate change.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon’s call to people of faith to support the struggle against global warming, New York City, 13 November, 2007

“I send sincere greeting to this annual prayer service for the United Nations.

This evening finds me far from New York in the heart of the Amazon rainforest. I have travelled to Latin America to see for myself the terrible toll environmental degradation and climate change are already inflicting on the planet and its people.

I am heartened that all of you have gathered to devote this year’s service to the theme of climate change. By now, the basic facts of global warming are incontestable. But, up close, its effects are doubly unnerving. Last week, I visited Punta Arenas, the southernmost city in South America. It is near the centre of the famous “ozone hole” in the Earth’s atmosphere. This time of year, children have to wear protective clothing against ultraviolet radiation at all times. There are days when parents don’t let them play outside, or even go to school.

Antarctica was another stop on my fact-finding tour. The message of scientists studying that vast expanse was chillingly simple: the continent is melting. The ice shelves off the area I visited -- King George Island -- have started to break up. For now, no one expects the worst but, if all of Antarctica’s ice were to melt, sea levels could rise by catastrophic amounts.

Slowing, indeed reversing, these trends have emerged as the defining challenge of our age. It requires both your prayers and your participation. Indeed, success in the fight against climate change is hard to contemplate without the input and energy of men and women of faith.

All of you can help inspire millions of people around the world to become better stewards of our planet. You can guide them towards healthier, more sustainable lifestyles. You can encourage them to conserve more, and to want less. And you can reinforce the belief, fundamental to all religions, that we have a sacred obligation to leave the world a better place for those who will follow.

So, dear friends, let us pray for our world and for its well-being.”
The facts about climate change

Before any ethical assessment and consideration of possible actions can be done, it is necessary to gain a clear picture of the magnitude and complexity of the challenge ahead of us. Therefore, this section provides a quick summary of some of the key scientific facts on the environmental, social, economic and political dimensions of climate change. The gist of this section is that climate change in its deepest sense needs to be understood as an ethical issue that raises serious questions about how we define our role and responsibilities towards one another, future generations and other species. In workshops, study groups and action planning sessions, these facts could be used as starting points for discussion.

The Basics: Climate change is real, massive and human-induced

- Climate change is already taking place: From 1906 to 2005, global average temperatures have increased by 0.74 °C (23 F). The rate of global warming has increased massively from the 1970s to the present.

- This has led to a rise of the global sea levels and a highly increased frequency of extreme weather events such as heat waves, droughts, floods and hurricanes.

- Eleven of the warmest years on record have occurred during the last twelve years, and recent findings indicate that the year 2007 was the second warmest year in a century.

- Global warming is caused by human activity: It is now unequivocally accepted by the world’s scientific community that human activities intensify the natural greenhouse effect by emitting heat-trapping gases such as carbon dioxide (CO\(_2\)), methane (CH\(_4\)) and nitrous oxide (N\(_2\)O).

- Between 1970 and 2004, global greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 70% due to human activity.

- Atmospheric concentrations of CO\(_2\) and CH\(_4\) in 2005 exceeded by far the natural range over the last 650,000 years.

- By 2100, global temperature could increase by 1.1 °C to 6.4 °C, depending on the international community’s ability and willingness to effectively mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. As a comparison, the last ice age was about 5 °C cooler than our current climate. Never before in human history have we experienced a climactic temperature change of this magnitude.
Environmental Challenges: *We are edging towards ‘tipping points’*

- Scientists warn that destabilized ecosystems could react with *non-predictable, abrupt and non-linear events* with catastrophic consequences for humans and the environment. These non-linear changes are fuelled by self-enforcing “positive” feed-back loops that accelerate the destabilization process.

- One famous case is the “albedo-feedback” that affects the decline of snow-cover on our polar caps as well as on land: More sunlight is reflected by the bright surface of snow and sea ice than by the dark surface of open water or the mountain cover. While the reflection declines, the water and the mountain surface heat up, which accelerates the melting process\(^\text{11}\).

- Another example is the *melting of perma frost in Siberia* which has stored estimated 70 billion tons of carbon that could be released into earth’s atmosphere once the temperatures rises, emitting *ten times the amount of annual emissions from human-generated sources.*

- *Research suggests that these feedback circles have already set in:* During summer 2007, the *withdrawal of Arctic ice* shattered all previous records, reaching an all time low of 4.13 million sq km and falling below the previous record of 2005 by an area roughly *the size of Texas and California combined, or nearly five UKs\(^\text{12}\).* Due to these feedback processes, scientists drastically reconsidered their previous estimates of an *ice-free Arctic* projected for the later half of the 21\(^{st}\) century and are now forecasting a total disappearance of Arctic sea ice *at a much earlier point in time\(^\text{13}\).* A study on the methane (CH\(_4\)) bubbling from Siberian thaw lakes has shown that methane emissions in the study region have increased by 58 % between 1974 and 2000, emitting a greenhouse gas 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide\(^\text{14}\).

- Climate change leads to a *massive meltdown of glaciers and inland ice:* According to the United Nations Environment Programme, Himalayan glaciers – the world’s largest store of water outside the polar caps serving as freshwater reserve for almost 40 % of the world population – are retreating at rates between 10 to 60 meters per year\(^\text{15}\). As glaciers retreat, lakes form, which accumulate increasing amounts of water, putting the downstream communities at risk of glacial lake outburst floods. If the trends continue, millions of people may face flooding followed by dire water shortages once the snow and ice has melted.

- *Global warming has devastating impacts on the world’s ecosystems and biodiversity:* Around one-half of the world’s coral reefs have suffered ‘bleaching’ as a result of warming seas\(^\text{16}\). For many species, climate systems are changing more rapidly than they can adapt: According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the current rate of extinction of species is up to 1,000 times higher than the fossil record indicates\(^\text{17}\). Scenarios predict that this rate could again increase 10 times in the coming decades. Climate change is contributing massively to this problem.
Social Challenges: The world’s poor are bearing the brunt of global warming

- Climate change has *disproportionate effects on the world’s poor*. Their vulnerability to climate change is higher and their capacity for adaptation is lower, because they lack the means for protecting themselves from the harm caused by rising seas, increased natural hazards and changes in rainfall patterns.

- The *inverse relationship* between responsibility for the causes of climate change and vulnerability to its impacts is one of the most urgent ethical challenges posed by global warming\(^18\).

- If every person in developing countries would adopt the same carbon-intensive lifestyle as most people in Western societies, *we would need nine planets to absorb the emitted gases*\(^19\).

The adverse effects of global warming on the world’s poor are most severely felt in the following areas:

- *Agricultural production and food security*: Changes in temperature, rainfall patterns and water availability have long-term impacts on the viability and productivity of agricultural systems. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that an expected increase in average world temperatures of 1 to 3°C would lead to a drop in cereal production in more than 65 countries now accounting for half the world’s population\(^20\).

- During the past few years, the world’s hunger for alternative energy resources has turned to the *booming market of bio fuels*, which made the prices for corn, soybeans, palm oil and other grains almost double in 2006\(^21\). This trend is aggravating the adverse effects of global warming on agricultural outputs and is leading to a *competition between the world’s food and energy markets* – a competition in which the world’s poor are on the weaker side.

- *Water stress and water insecurity*: More than one-sixth of the world’s population (around 1.1 billion people) live in glacier- or snowmelt-fed river basins and will be affected by seasonal shifts in stream flow, increased short-term risks of flooding and long-term risks of drought\(^22\).

- *Rising sea levels and exposure to climate disasters*: According to UNDP, some 262 million people were affected by climate disasters from 2000 to 2004, over 98 percent of them in the developing world\(^23\). The risk of being affected by a natural disaster in a developing country is almost 80 times higher than in the developed world\(^24\).

- *Human health*: Global warming is expanding the reach of mosquitoes and other carriers of vector-borne diseases such as Malaria and Dengue Fever. These human induced changes are most severely felt in developing countries\(^25\).
Economic and Political Challenges: Addressing global warming will require unprecedented international cooperation based on common goals and a shared vision

- Global warming is already taking place, and cannot be avoided. The big question is at which level it can be stabilized. While pre-industrial greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere were 280 parts per million (ppm) CO$_2$ equivalent, we currently are at a level of above 380 ppm$^{26}$.

- The largest conservation organizations such as the World Conservation Union IUCN, the World Resources Institute and the World Wide Fund for Nature - agree that greenhouse gas emissions need to be stabilized somewhere between 450 and 550 ppm CO$_2$e so that global warming can be kept in the threshold of 2 °C above pre-industrial levels$^{27}$. An increasing number of scientists warn, however, that we will need to go further and reverse the present CO2 content in the atmosphere to 350 ppm to avoid disastrous impacts on life on earth$^{28}$.

- For avoiding dangerous climate change, rich nations need to cut emissions by at least 80%, with cuts of 30% by 2020$^{29}$. However, even far reaching cuts in emissions from developed countries will be of no avail if developing and emerging countries will not take their share of reducing emissions.

- We are lacking far behind of reaching this goal: Between 1980 and 2000, global carbon emissions increased by 22 %. Since 2000, the annual growth rate has tripled over the average for 1990 – 1999. Since 2000, annual emissions from fossil fuels have risen by 17 % alone$^{30}$. The International Energy Agency projects that if societies continue on a business-as-usual path between 2004 and 2030, global carbon output will again rise by 55 % globally$^{31}$.

- Massive investments in low-carbon research, development and deployment are needed in the next ten to twenty years, because every minute we do not act will increase the ecological debt that we leave to our children, and could create costs and economic shocks similar to those associated with the great wars and the economic depression of the first half of the 20th century$^{32}$.

- It is imperative that the international community adopts a new legally binding agreement based on a per capita allocation of emission entitlements$^{33}$.

- However, even with drastic mitigation measures, global temperature is still going to rise because of the time-lags within the global climate system$^{34}$. In the first half of the 21st century, we will have to live with the climate change that we have already set in motion.

- Rich nations need to support the developing countries with finance and technology to protect themselves from the risks and vulnerabilities that will come along with global warming$^{35}$. 


**Ethical Challenges**

- Given the seriousness of the challenge ahead of us, we need to realize that climate change has not only scientific, economic and political aspects as the public debate seems to suggest. At its core, *climate change needs to be understood as an ethical issue*. How we live our lives today will determine the fate of future generations and the most poor and vulnerable that cannot protect themselves against rising sea levels and increased climate disasters.

- As UNDP argues, global warming is the avoidable catastrophe of the 21st Century. *Allowing that tragedy to happen would be the major moral and political failure of our time.* The world community lacks neither the financial resources nor the technological capacities to act, nor can we say we did not know.

- While technological innovation and voluntary reductions of energy consumption will certainly be necessary to curb carbon emissions, they will not be sufficient to the problem: a response that is commensurate with the problem requires deeper and wider changes. *Our solutions need to be wholesale and systemic rather than incremental. What is required is a change of mind and hearts, or what James Gustave Speth calls “the rise of a new consciousness“*: We must question the way we eat and work, how we travel and do business, how we produce energy and grow our food.

- In its deepest sense, the challenge of climate change has to do with who we are as human beings, how we relate to nature and how we define our responsibilities towards our fellow human beings, future generations and the greater community of life of which we are a part.

- As arbiters of life’s deepest moral values, religious communities, leaders and adherents are ideally positioned to speak out forcefully for the voiceless, for the poor and for future generations. They should be at the forefront of reminding individuals, organizations, businesses and governments of what is at stake if we fail to act on global warming.

**Key questions to consider**

- In times to come, how will our time be remembered? What kind of world do we want to leave to our children and grandchildren, and how will we answer if they ask us why we exposed them to the risk of global ecological and humanitarian disaster?

- Will we be able to foster the political will to take decisive action before it is too late?

- Will we be able to reach a fair and equal distribution of emission entitlements among the nations?

- Bearing in mind the instrumental role that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights played and still plays in catalysing the aspirations of millions of people and defining a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations, which values should guide the massive transition which is needed to move the world towards sustainable living and sustainable development?

- Albert Einstein issued the famous notion that the problems that exist in the world today cannot be solved by the level of thinking that created them. As Thomas Berry points out, we are currently reacting to macro-scale problems with micro-scale ethics. Will we be able to expand our circles of identity and concern and develop an ethic of care that embraces the whole community of life on this planet?
The Transformative Power of Faith and Hope: Religious Responses to Climate Change

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of how different religious traditions are addressing climate change. The aim is not to give an exhaustive list but to show the diversity of religious answers to global warming, to present some good practices for other groups and institutions to follow, and assess the level of religious activism on this crucial issue. An instructive resource for further reading is Elizabeth Allison’s paper ‘Religious Organizations Taking Action on Climate Change’ that highlights 33 mostly US-based organizations that address climate change from interfaith, religious and secular perspectives.

Fortunately, an increasing number of communities and institutions of every religious faith are waking up to the challenge of climate change and affirm the need to conserve energy resources and protect the environment. Many congregations participate in conservation struggles, ecological restoration projects, community-supported agriculture, and practices of sustainable living including energy efficiency. As Dieter T. Hessel noted, the tipping point of environmental awareness and opinion among the religions has been crossed, so now the question is not whether religions should get involved, but how they should get involved and how seriously they are taking their (environmental) mission. The following overview gives a few examples of what is already happening.

**Ecumenical Christianity**

Ecumenical Christianity has played a pioneering role in fostering a vision of a “Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society”. As early as 1975, theologians and ethicists of the World Council of Churches discerned that ecology and justice are non-sequential, simultaneous requirements, and began to express their deep interrelation by framing the concept of “eco-justice” that emphasises four basic, interrelated norms:

1. **Solidarity** with other people and creatures,
2. **Sustainability** in development, technology and production,
3. **Sufficiency** as a standard of equitable consumption and organized resource-sharing
4. Socially just **participation** in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage community for the good of all.

Over the next three decades, ecumenical thought and action have reinforced these four interrelated core values and have applied them as corrective criteria to guide personal practice, social analysis, economic life and public policy.

Most recently, the National Council of Churches of Christ of the United States and other religious institutions in the US have developed a statement of faith principles to be addressed in any climate change legislation. The statement calls on the US government...
• To enact “a fair and equitable distribution of total benefits and costs among people, communities, and nations, and in particular rectify the disproportionate impact that low-income communities have and will experience as the climate continues to change” (Justice);

• To adopt legislation focussed on the short term goal of “reducing U.S. carbon emissions to reach a 15-20 percent reduction in carbon by 2020 with a long term vision to achieve carbon emissions that are 80 percent of 2000 levels by the year 2050” (Stewardship);

• To “support energy sources that are renewable, clean, and avoid destruction of God’s creation” (Sustainability)

• To “encourage energy conservation in our homes, our communities, and our places of worship” (Sufficiency)\textsuperscript{39}.

**Church-based Projects**

In many parts of the world, churches are reducing their carbon footprint by engaging in energy efficiency programs and purchasing renewable energy. In the US, the Episcopal Church paved the way with its award-winning Episcopal Power and Light Campaign that was expanded into an interfaith initiative: Interfaith Power and Light reaches across 28 US states and unites more than 4,000 congregations in reducing the devastating effects of global warming by conducting energy audits and purchasing green power.

In Germany, the ecological management programme “The Green Rooster” has been developed to apply the official European Ecological Management and Auditing Scheme (EMAS) issued by the European Commission to the context of the churches. More than 200 Protestant and Catholic churches and church-based institutions went through a sophisticated certification process which culminated in being audited by an external expert and granted the “Green Rooster” certificate.

To facilitate this process, the dioceses and regional churches in Germany have established environmental directorates that train volunteer environmental tutors and auditors who help the individual congregations to go through the auditing process.

Based on the positive experiences gained with EMAS, 15 pilot institutions in Germany, Austria, Spain and France have been audited in the Sustainable Churches project based on EMAS\textsuperscript{plus} that contains an improvement cycle involving action not only on environmental but also on economic and social issues.

Apart from the commitments made under the ecological management system that involve the reduction of energy use, water consumption, and waste production, institutions that adopt a sustainability management system set out to

• Procure their goods in a environmentally and socially responsible way

• Protect the interests of their staff (security of employment, initial and continuing education and training, system for staff suggestions, family-friendly policies and flexible working time models)

• Fulfil their social responsibility through diverse measures such as ethical investments and support for civic activities

• Gain economic success through strategic long-term optimisation of their activities

For the introduction of the EMAS\textsuperscript{plus} sustainability management system, detailed documentation was developed and tested, including checklists, questionnaires, methodological guidelines, a management
handbook and an open source software that enables the collection and regular evaluation of quantitative and qualitative sustainability indicators.

The Catholic Church

Under Pope Benedict’s thoughtful leadership, the Catholic Church is increasingly becoming “green”. On numerous occasions he spoke out for the responsibility of Christians to be stewards of God’s creation.

In his message for the World Day of Peace 2008 he stated: “One area where there is a particular need to intensify dialogue between nations is that of the stewardship of the earth’s energy resources. The technologically advanced countries are facing two pressing needs in this regard: on the one hand, to reassess the high levels of consumption due to the present model of development, and on the other hand to invest sufficient resources in the search for alternative sources of energy and for greater energy efficiency.”

In questioning the unsustainable consumption patterns in affluent Western societies, Benedict can draw on the teachings of John Paul II who in Centesimus Annus in 1991 criticised “a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards ‘having’ rather than ‘being’” and urged people to “create life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments.”

Pope Benedict has moved one step further by installing 2,000 solar panels on the roof of the Vatican’s main auditorium building, and committing to restore 37 acres of forest in Hungary to offset Vatican City’s carbon emissions. The Pope is therefore hailed as the first head of state that has actually created a carbon-neutral economy.

Orthodox Christianity

“The Green Patriarch” is a title of honour given to His All Holiness, Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, the spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians. In an article entitled “The ‘Pope’ of Hope” published on June 18, 2008, the British newspaper The Guardian called Bartholomew “one of the most influential figures in the fight against climate change and world poverty.”

Since 1995, Bartholomew is organizing biennial “Religion, Science and the Environment Movement”-Symposia that are being held on cruise ships that bring religious leader, scientists, environmental experts and politicians to the front-lines of environmental degradation such as the Black Sea, the Amazon and the Arctic. In his opening remarks to the Symposium of 2002 in the Adrian, Bartholomew addressed the deeper and inner causes of our environmental crisis:

“We often refer to an environmental crisis; but the real crisis lies not in the environment but in the human heart. The fundamental problem is to be found not outside but inside ourselves, not in the ecosystem but in the way we think.”
The root cause of all our difficulties consists in human selfishness and human sin. What is asked of us is not greater technological skill but deeper repentance, metanoia, in the literal sense of the Greek word, which signifies ‘change of mind.’ The root cause of our environmental sin lies in our self-centeredness and in the mistaken order of values, which we inherit and accept without any critical evaluation.

We need a new way of thinking about our own selves, about our relationship with the world and with God. Without this revolutionary ‘change of mind,’ all our conservation projects, however well-intentioned, will remain ultimately ineffective. For, we shall be dealing only with the symptoms, not with their cause. Lectures and international conferences may help to awaken our conscience, but what is truly required is a baptism of tears.”

The symposia played a crucial role in lobbying the Albanian government to clean-up toxic waste that was poisoning the Adriatic Sea in Porto Romano and pressuring Brazilian soy bean traders to agree on a two-year moratorium on crops from newly deforested land.

**Evangelical Responses**

While some scepticism about the reality of human-induced climate change prevails, more and more leaders of the Evangelical community are recognizing the dangers of climate change and calling on their adherents to be good stewards of the Earth.

In November 2002, the Evangelical Environment Network (EEN) officially launched the “What Would Jesus Drive” (WWJDrive) educational campaign to help Christians and others understand the relationship between transportation choices and the three major problems of human health impacts, the threat of global warming, and the increasing American oil dependence. During the campaign, automobile executives were urged to improve the fuel economy of their fleets; a large number of Christian leaders signed the WWJDrive Call to Action; and fact sheets and resources for preaching, teaching, hosting community discussions and establishing a system of carpooling were developed. The core element of the campaign was a tour through the Bible belt from Austin, Texas, to Washington, DC that Rev. Jim Ball, executive director of the EEN and his wife did in their hybrid, fuel-efficient car, visiting churches and elected officials to help reframe the national debate over gas-guzzling cars as a moral choice.

In January 2006 the Evangelical Climate Initiative was formed that published a statement signed by 86 prominent Evangelical leaders. Reacting to the scepticism regarding the reality of human-induced climate change, the statement cites the Bush administration and concludes: “In the face of the breadth and depth of this scientific and governmental concern, we are convinced that evangelicals must engage this issue without any further lingering over the basic reality of the problem or humanity’s responsibility to address it.”

In spring 2007, students of 60 evangelical colleges and seminaries participated in a Step It Up grass roots campaign initiated by “End of Nature” author McKibben. The campaign culminated in local demonstrations in more than 1,400 places throughout the US to demand that Congress commit to cutting carbon emissions by 80 % by 2050, and to creating millions of “green collar” jobs. The evangelical participation was supported by Calvin DeWitt, President of the Academy of Evangelical Scientists and Ethicists who issued and circulated a statement to endorse the campaign.
**Jewish Responses**

Within Judaism, the **Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL)** is the number one address to turn to find Jewish answers to climate change. Established in 1993 by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, COEJL partners with the full spectrum of national Jewish organizations to deepen the Jewish community’s commitment to stewardship of creation and protection of the Earth and all its inhabitants.

In 2006, COEJL launched a Four-Part Climate Change Campaign consisting of interconnected programs:

- To encourage Jewish institutions to use CFL light bulbs,
- To encourage synagogues to go green by conducting energy audits, offering Torah studies on Judaism and the environment and providing Jewish environmental education to children and youth.
- To encourage the Jewish community to “take your senator to synagogue” and interact with political leaders on the issues of energy efficiency and climate change.
- To encourage Hebrew schools, youth groups, congregations and other Jewish youth institutions to become part of the Climate Challenge, a worldwide youth initiative aiming at becoming carbon neutral.

**Muslim Responses**

The UK is the hotspot for **Muslim engagement on climate change** and the environment: In the mid 1980’s the **Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES)** has established itself as “perhaps the only internationally recognized body articulating the Islamic position on environmental matters.”

IFEES is doing research and disseminating information on environmental issues; producing teaching materials, books and journals; campaigning with mainstream environmental organizations on climate change, fair trade, sustainable development and GM foods; and supporting the formation of autonomous environmental groups to engage in educational, awareness raising and campaigning activities.

IFEES has been instrumental in creating the **London Islamic Network for the Environment (LINE)** that hosts monthly forums, supports and organizes climate change marches and campaigns for the implementation of a strong climate change bill. In addition, LINE has prepared a photograph exhibition on “Climate Change & Islam: A Visual Journey”, raising awareness about climate change in different parts of the world, including a number of predominantly Muslim countries.
Buddhist Responses

Within Buddhism, to give an example of an Eastern religion, the Deer Park Monastery in California, USA, led by Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, presents us with a shining example of a carbon-neutral monastery. Since spring 2008, the monastery has been producing all its electricity with clean solar power. Their 68-kilowatt photovoltaic system produces all the electricity needed by the monastery residents and practitioners attending retreats, besides the solar energy is made available to the surrounding communities without charge.

Apart from a strong focus on simple monastic living and eating a strictly vegetarian diet, the monastery is supporting car-free days held once a week, has purchased two electric vehicles to shuttle residents and visitors through the 400-acre sanctuary, and even recycles its kitchen oil to fuel its primary automobiles. Part of the cooking and hot water boiling is done with solar cookers.

The solar panels were inaugurated with a festive ceremony. After incense offering and chanting the Heart Sutra, the Abbot of Solidity Hamlet at Deer Park Monastery, read the Offering to the Land Ancestors for the Dedication of Solar Energy in which he stated:

"As practitioners we see we are part of and not separate from the whole of human civilization. As human beings we see that we are children of the Earth and not separate from the soil, the forests, rivers and sky. We share the same destiny. We are aware that much harm has been done to the Earth out of ignorance, craving and arrogance. As children of this land we ask for your great compassion to forgive us for these shortcomings. Today we are determined to begin anew-- to make all efforts, large and small, to collectively effect real change in our global ecological situation."50

Interfaith Projects and Organizations

Apart from the mentioned denominational and ecumenical institutions, there are a growing number of interreligious organizations that are helping the religions to recognize their environmental responsibility and provide platforms for sharing experiences and building alliances. Among these are Faith in Place (a Chicago cluster), Earth Ministry (a Seattle based regional program), GreenFaith (active in New Jersey), Religious Witness for the Earth (active on the US East Coast), and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (working with the National Council of Churches of Christ, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Evangelical Environmental Network and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life). Important scientific background on religious intersection with the environment is provided by the Forum on Religion and Ecology as well as the Yale Project on Climate Change: Religion and Ethics.

While these organizations mostly have a strong focus on the United States, the main environmental interfaith organization with a global outreach is the Alliance of Religions (ARC), based in Bath, UK. ARC’s beginnings can be traced to the historic meeting of environmental and religious leaders in Assisi in 1986, where the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) celebrated its 25th anniversary by bringing together, for the first time in history, five major world religions to explore and explain what their faith teaches them about care for nature. What resulted were the Assisi Declarations from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, and Jewish leaders to their own faithful.
ARC has been working on climate change-related issues since its inception and in 1999 it launched a Climate Change Partnership Initiative with WWF. In this context, ARC published a Climate Change Partnership Handbook, which was one of the first books giving sound advice on how to implement energy reduction programmes in the faith’s own houses of worship. Under the slogan “if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it” the handbook suggests a four step methodology for reducing energy consumption and CO$_2$ emissions in the key domains of temperature control (insulation, heating and cooling), electrical appliances, lightning and transport.

In December 2007, UNDP pledged to join ARC in advancing a major international programme on the religions, climate change and the natural environment. The natural environment was included because both groups noticed that it was too frequently being forgotten. In the course of the project, leaders from the 11 ARC member faiths (Baha’ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism) as well as some of the major faith-related women’s organizations that are working with the environment are invited to adopt their own Seven Year Plans of Action. These will commit their leaders and followers to projects and programmes addressing climate change and the protection of the natural environment in practical ways: from forestry conservation to organic farming, to introducing and financing alternative energy sources, to rewriting liturgies to celebrate the environment. The Plans are being launched in 2009 and will run from 2010 through the end of 2016.

Assessment

While the good news is that a growing number of religious communities in the US, in Europe and in the global South affirm their ecological responsibility, the bad news is that they still receive relatively little public attention, and have not yet been able to fully reach into the religious mainstream.

Michael S. Hogue identifies two reasons that so far have impeded a more significant religious response to global warming and also explain why the ethical and religious implications of global warming do not get much public attention: Partly, the problem lies in the way how the public culture in most Western societies confines religion to a private domain and mainly focuses on religious conflicts and inter- and intrareligious rivalries on social morality or political concerns.

Apart of this narrow perception of religion in the public culture, Hogue sees a problem in the ways how the religious traditions are lived and practiced by their own faithful: “We who are religious aid and abet the constriction of our public culture’s soul, we corroborate in the narrowing of its (and our) moral concern. Our ways of being religious are infected with the same self-interested consumerist contagion that sources global warming and that militates against the radically other-regarding moral work that our time of life’s vulnerability calls us toward.”

Hessel’s critique of the religious community response to global warming goes in the same direction, stating that most religious responses have stayed in the realm of fostering less wasteful lifestyles through recycling, purchasing fair traded goods, eating locally grown food, reducing personal and household energy use, and driving cars that get higher gas mileage. “While voluntary reduction of energy consumption is a prominent aspect of what needs to be done to keep global warming from becoming catastrophic, a response that is commensurate with the problem requires deeper and wider
changes. If the response is not systemic, we are likely to see an increasing green style among affluent consumers that actually do little to reduce overall CO$_2$ emissions.\textsuperscript{55}

This is where the Earth Charter comes into play: It provides an integrated ethical vision that was drafted in the largest and most open and participatory consultation process ever conducted in history. At a time when major changes in how we think and live are urgently necessary, the Earth Charter challenges us to examine our values and choose a better way.

It encourages us to search for common ground in the midst of our diversity and to embrace a new global ethic that is shared by an ever growing number of people throughout the world. The Earth Charter recognizes that the goals of ecological protection, the eradication of poverty, equitable economic development, respect for human rights, democracy, and peace are interdependent and indivisible.

The Earth Charter provides, therefore, a new, integrated ethical framework, a vision of hope and a call to urgent action that may help religious institutions at all levels to reflect on the interrelatedness of our environmental, economic, political, and spiritual challenges and to address these challenges in a systemic and holistical manner.

The Earth Charter’s integrated ethical approach to climate change

“\textit{The battle against dangerous climate change is part of the fight for humanity. Winning that battle will require far reaching changes at many levels – in consumption, in how we produce and price energy, and in international cooperation. Above all, though, it will require far-reaching changes in how we think about our ecological interdependence, about social justice for the world’s poor, and about the human rights and entitlements of future generations.}”


\textbf{The Background of the Charter}

In this statement, the Human Development Report expresses the central message that the struggle against global warming requires fundamental changes in our values, institutions and ways of living. It requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility for the wellbeing of the human family and the larger living world. To inspire these changes is the central aim of the Earth Charter and the global network of people, organizations and institutions that participate in translating its principles into practice.

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21$^{\text{st}}$ century. It is an expression of hope and a call to help create a global partnership at a critical juncture in history. It was drafted in a decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural and interreligious dialogue on the above mentioned questions and challenges. Drawing on the visions and aspirations of thousands of people and hundreds of organizations from the fields of science, philosophy, ethics, religion, and international law, the Earth Charter articulates a consensus on the religious and ethical foundations of creating sustainable communities globally and locally. It presents an inclusive framework for thinking about, talking about, and taking action on the deeper causes of our global climate crisis and the other global challenges that are related to it.
As early as 1989, *interreligious consultations* were initiated to create Earth Charter drafts from a faith perspective that would be infused into the preparation process of the Earth Summit. Faith-based organizations in New York working with UNEP’s Environmental Sabbath Project created the International Coordinating Committee on Religion and Earth (ICCRE, later called International Communities for the Renewal of Earth, ICRE). A series of consultations was held on almost every continent, involving organizations such as Religions for Peace, the Temple of Understanding, the World Council of Churches, the Green Belt Movement of Kenya, the National Episcopal Conference, the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders for Human Survival.

The final draft “An Earth Charter – A Spiritual Perspective” identified core spiritual principles such as the interdependence, sacredness and beauty of all life and suggested key ethical values for sustainable living such as sufficiency, simplicity and solidarity with the poor. It was infused into the preparation process of the Earth Summit, where the Earth Charter negotiations among governments were put to a halt due to a seemingly irreconcilable divergence of views and interests.

In 1994, the efforts of drafting an Earth Charter were taken up by a new civil society initiative. In the worldwide consultations led by Steven C. Rockefeller, Professor of Religion at Middlebury College in Vermont, several hundred religious leaders, theologians, experts and religious organizations from Bahá’í, Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Indigenous, Islamic, Jain, Jewish, and Shinto traditions shared their visions for a just, sustainable and peaceful world. Apart from these inputs, a broad range of religious and interreligious texts, statements and declarations were reviewed and used as a basis for the Earth Charter's inclusive global vision for sustainable living.

Important input also came from a series of ten major conferences on Religions of the World and Ecology that were held at the Harvard Divinity School Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) from May 1996 to July 1998. In these conferences, some 800 scholars and activists from around the world explored the potential of the world’s religions to contribute to the crucial effort of re-visioning human-Earth relations. Earth Charter Benchmark Drafts were discussed and commented on during the conferences, which played an essential role in distilling a global consensus among the world’s religions on a new planetary ethics on environmental sustainability.

The global dialogue on shared values and global ethics in which the Charter was created was an end in itself – an inspiring example of exchange and collaboration across social, cultural, linguistic and religious boundaries and a contribution to advancing understanding, tolerance, peace and solidarity among the world’s religions, cultures and nations.

Since its launch in the year 2000, hundreds of religious organizations use the Earth Charter in their efforts of conducting environmental education and teaching the vision and values of eco-justice ethics; raising awareness of the meaningful linkages between the environment, justice and faith; enacting environmentally inspired liturgy and forming interreligious alliances to safeguard our planet. In these activities, they follow the Earth Charter’ call for a continuation of the global dialogue process in which the Earth Charter was drafted: ‘We must deepen and expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom.’

To capture the growing interest among the religions to use the Earth Charter as an inspirational tool for environmental activism, the *Earth Charter Programme on Religion and Sustainability* was launched in fall 2006. Its main objective is to help religious institutions to use the Earth Charter as a major ethical guide for creating a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world. For this purpose, high quality education...
materials are being developed to help religious institutions, leaders and laypeople to grapple with the global challenges of our time, and respond in a systemic and integrated way.

With the risk of oversimplification, the core messages of the Earth Charter can be summarized as follows:

- The global challenges we are facing are interconnected and systemic.
- Our interconnected challenges require integrated answers, fragmented or one-sided solutions won’t work.
- For finding integrated solutions, we need a holistic vision grounded in core values shared by all of humanity.
- In the ongoing collaborative search for common goals and shared values, our religious communities have a vital role to play.

A methodology for assessing the ethical challenges of climate change with the Earth Charter

In an open letter to Al Gore and the organizers of the Live Earth events held on 07 07 2007, Earth Charter International Co-Chair Steven C. Rockefeller and then ECI Executive Director Alan AtKisson called for seeing the bigger picture of climate change: “Melting glaciers, rising seas, and changing rainfall patterns should be seen as symptoms of a greater illness. Other symptoms include growing poverty in some parts of the world, overconsumption in others, grave challenges to peace and human rights and the degradation of the environment everywhere.”

The Earth Charter is a key guide for seeing this bigger picture, and addressing our global emergencies in an integrated manner. It is an ethical frame of reference for guiding personal, community and institutional practices, and for choosing among public policy options. As Dieter Hessel puts it: “The Charter helps people of all ages in every walk of life to recognize global/local patterns of eco-injustice and unsustainable living, and to discern both the spirit and the substance of truly sustainable development that respects every kind while building healthy community.”

Within religious communities and institutions at all levels, the Earth Charter may therefore serve as a key guideline and framework for initiating a process of integrated ethical reflection on the critical ethical choices facing humanity. Only a deep understanding of our current planetary situation as well as of the drivers of our global challenges will provide an adequate basis for framing responses that are commensurate with the depth of the problem we are facing.

In this context, Hessel suggested an instructive methodology for integrated ethical reasoning based on the Earth Charter that should

- Draw on the Earth Charter’s main principles and supporting principles as interactive imperatives for a sustainable way of life;
- Think across the four parts of the Charter to emphasise combinations of ethical imperatives that ought to guide our response to current issues of ecological integrity, social and ecological justice, democracy and peace; and
- Bring Earth Charter principles to bear both as general ideas and as practical guidelines for personal, institutional and governmental conduct in the historical situation now confronting us.

In religious contexts, the reflection process should be based on the triangular basis of sacred texts and religious scriptures, the most up-to-date scientific facts and findings on the matter, and the Earth Charter as an integrated standard of shared values and common goals agreed upon by thousands of experts, institutions, and activists around the world. This suggested model of ethically aware eco-social analysis could be used in seminaries, theology and ethics classes, congregational study groups and interfaith dialogues.

The process should include the steps of

- Gaining a macro-perspective on the interdependent challenges posed by global warming
- Analysing its root causes
- Framing inclusive responses

Understanding the holistic, layered structure of the Charter:

The analysis should be facilitated with a solid understanding of the structure of the Earth Charter’s ethical tapestry:

The Earth Charter opens with inspiring and sobering words about the challenges to human beings of living in these times, and closes with a call to responsible action and commitment. In between, the Charter lists a set of sixteen general ethical principles, and sixty-one more specific supporting principles, that can help us with an essential task for the 21st Century: discerning right from wrong action in the care of nature and development of sustainable communities.

While the Preamble captures the worldview change which grounds the principles that follow and points toward “the key constellations by which we can navigate across the vast ocean in the dark night”, Part I. "Respect and Care for the Community of Life", sets forth four over-arching principles that express the ethical vision that carries through the whole document. The first of the Earth Charter’s four general principles “Respect Earth and life in all its diversity” affirms the interdependence and intrinsic worth of every kind.

From that follow three more general principles that specify shared ethical responsibility: (2) human responsibility for otherkind, i.e. “Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love”, (3) responsibility within and among human societies, i.e. “build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable and peaceful”, and (4) responsibility for future as well as present generations, i.e., “secure Earth’s bounty and beauty for present and future generations”. In all three spheres of human obligations, we are to care for and conserve the community of life, sharing benefits and burdens for the sake of life and relationships – among people and with nature.

Part II (Ecological Integrity, Principles 5 – 8), III (Social and Economic Justice, Principles 9 – 12), and IV (Democracy, Non-violence and Peace, Principles 13 – 16) present twelve main principles that specify what must be done to embody the broad commitments expressed in principles 1 - 4 of Part I. Taking a closer look at the Charter’s layered ethical tapestry it turns out that the four key norms of eco-justice...
ethics (solidarity, sustainability, sufficiency, and socially just participation) emphasized in ecumenical Christian thought over the last thirty years are developed in the four parts of the Earth Charter and are being put into an interreligious context that is:

Principles 1 – 4 focus on relational responsibilities of solidarity that comprehend the full dimensions of human-earth relations and inter-human obligations. Principles 5 – 8 focus on ecological sustainability. Principles 9 -12 illumine sufficiency – enough for all, fairly distributed – as a crucial criterion of distributive socio-economic and environmental justice. And democratic participation, animated by a culture of peace, is a major concern of principles 13 – 16.

“The Way Forward” sums up the challenge of seeking a new beginning in the light of our global emergencies, and presents us with an inspiring call to celebration and action: “Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”

The structure of the Charter reflects the recognition that humanity’s environmental, economic, social and cultural challenges are all interrelated and require holistic thinking and inclusive problem solving. The four parts of the Charter represent four integrated pillars of what constitutes truly sustainable conduct. Taken together, the Earth Charter principles thus present a comprehensive definition of what is necessary to build sustainable communities everywhere.

Step 1: Gaining a macro-perspective on the challenges we are facing

By holding the preamble and principles of the Earth Charter in one hand and the data on climate change collected in the previous sections of this guide in the other, our ethical reflection on this urgent issue comes alive. While the Charter does not directly refer to “climate change” or “global warming” as such, it addresses the much deeper problem within our societies of which climate change is merely a symptom.

Any ethical reasoning based on the Earth Charter should begin with a serious attempt to fully perceive and take in the global, long-term and far-reaching dimensions of the issues that are to be assessed. The Preamble of the Earth Charter challenges us to perceive our planetary situation in the widest possible perspective: “We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future.” As revealed in the term “Earth’s history” as opposed to “world history” or “human history”, the Earth Charter breaks with the anthropocentrism that dominates the enlightenment mentality, and calls us to build a multi-form, planetary civilization inclusive of both cultural and biological diversity whose comprehensive care and compassion needs to extend to the whole Earth community.

Scientific data on the implications of human-induced climate change reveals that we are facing a macro-scale crisis that does not only threaten the survival of the human species, but puts up to 50 % of all of earth’s species to the brink of extinction within the next one hundred years if we proceed emitting greenhouse gases at current rates.

In the light of the magnitude of the challenge, the Earth Charter’s notion of a “common destiny” shared by “one human family” and “one Earth community” lose its lofty and idealistic character, as expressed by Gus Speth: “Since today’s environmental policy and politics offer too weak a medicine, the proper perspective on environmental business as usual must be critical and must offer proposals for deeper change. Soon it will be abundantly clear that it is business as usual that is utopian, whereas creating something very new and different is a practical necessity.”

19
As overarching framework and comprehensive context for rethinking our role and purpose as humans, the Earth Charter takes the evolutionary processes that guide the unfolding of the universe itself: “Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life.” A controversial statement for some, this sentence was suggested by an astrophysicist from Tufts and Harvard to include a cosmological vision for seeing ourselves in the context of the vastness of time and space of the universe that evokes wonder and awe. The inclusion of the phrase “Earth, our home, is alive” was of special importance to representatives of indigenous people, who are reported to have wept for joy to see such a key element of their worldview being included in an international document.

Reading the full sentence and recognizing that it is “the unique community of life” that is enlivening our planet reveals the careful intersection of diverse religious and cultural perspectives, as well as a balancing of these perspectives with key insights derived from natural sciences. The product of the global Earth Charter consultations, however, should not be seen as an end in itself but as a starting point for multi-faced, cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary dialogues on our global situation as an endangered species on this planet.

In religious contexts, selected parts of the Charter could be read and analysed as starting points for assessing the global situation and facilitating a discussion that is based on the newest scientifical findings. These discussions should be infused with a thorough analysis of the social and ecological teachings of our religious scriptures. What do our sacred texts say about the role and the purpose of human beings on this planet? What are our obligations towards human kind and other kind? How do our religious scriptures relate to the comprehensive cosmological vision as expressed in the Earth Charter? Where are the gaps and challenges?

**Step 2: Assessing the root causes of climate change**

After having explored our planetary situation at this critical juncture of Earth history, the second step should involve a critical assessment of the drivers and underlying causes of the interrelated challenges we are facing: “The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening.”

The listed challenges point to a deeper problem connected to the use and distribution of resources around the world: During the past fifty years, governments in the United States and Europe have deregulated money and trade and have created a global economic system that has sent the planet’s climate into overdrive. The quest for economic growth has become the universal creed of the twentieth century, which fosters ever more production, consumption, and maldevelopment indifferent to effects on the environment and the poor.

According to the Worldwatch Institute, a world population of 6.5 billion people used an equivalent of 9.3 billion tons of oil in 2005, which led to 7.6 billion tons of carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels. A large part of the oil was used to fuel the fleet of nearly 900 million vehicles that were on the roads and the 3.7 trillion kilometres that passengers flew on airplanes in 2006.

During the same year, 276 million tons of meat was consumed. For producing this much meat, approximately 56 billion land animals are slaughtered for human consumption each year. Raising the livestock for this meat accounts for almost one fifth of the global greenhouse gas emissions, which is more than the whole transportation sector is contributing to the atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations.
However, these total numbers mask enormous disparities between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’: The developed countries represent 20 percent of the world population but account for more than 75% of the cumulative carbon dioxide emissions that have been emitted since 1850, and are responsible for 60% of today’s emissions, as well as for 60% of global private consumption. The United States emits roughly the same amount of greenhouse gases as 2.6 billion people living in 150 developing countries. This situation is aggravated by the fact that the adverse consequences of this misconduct are disproportionately felt by the poor who have not contributed much to creating the problem.

The Worldwatch Report 2008 is therefore right in stating that continued human progress – both material and spiritual – will depend on an economic transformation that is more profound than any seen in the last century.

This part of the reflection process should be informed by the insights of environmental science that reveal to us that the challenges we are facing are interconnected and systemic. What do our religious scriptures say about the values of human greed, the will for domination and the violence against humans and nature that dominate modern life and culture? How can our sacred texts help us to formulate alternative visions to the modern religions of consumerism and materialism? How can we take in the massiveness and complexity of the challenge without feeling overwhelmed and disempowered?

Step 3: Framing inclusive responses:

The Earth Charter offers a vast array of guiding principles and practical steps for starting this transformation in earnest. It offers a coherent, integrated standard for evaluating urgent global / local issues, immediate public policy choices, business and professional codes of conduct, and plans to reform organizational or community habits. The third step therefore involves going through the Earth Charter text for “gathering” Earth Charter principles that illumine the issues that are being discussed.

Letting Earth Charter principles “question” what is currently going on to aggravate any key issue we want to address may help us 1) to gain a multi-dimensional perspective on this issue, 2) to focus on real and urgent concerns stated as imperatives supporting principles that civil society groups around the world communicated to the drafting committee, and 3) to consciously articulate values that help to frame our understanding of the issue we confront and to orient us to a practical response.

The first four over-arching principles can be read as a holistic summary of the relational responsibilities of solidarity that comprehend the full dimensions of human-earth relations and inter-human obligations. Its first overarching principle (Earth Charter Principle 1) “Respect Earth and life in all its diversity” sets a strong antidote to the utilitarianism dominating the modern economy that has degraded non-human life on Earth to natural “resources” open for limitless exploitation for human purposes.

Principle 2, “Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love”, promotes the recognition that humanity is a part of nature instead of apart from nature, as articulated by Michael S. Northcott, Professor of Ethics at the University of Edinburgh and Priest of the Scottish Episcopal Church: “At the heart of our ecological crisis is the refusal of modern humans to see themselves as creatures, contingently embedded in networks of relationships with other creatures, and with the Creator. This refusal is the quintessential root of what theologians call sin. And like the sin of Adam, it has moral and spiritual as well as ecological consequences.”

The Subprinciples 2a and 2b affirm our common but differentiated responsibility to prevent environmental harm and protect the rights of people: “Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge,
and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good." (Earth Charter Principle 2b) This principle has a major importance for assessing the ethical challenges of climate change, as it places the main burden on the rich living in almost every nation to curb their luxury emissions coming from unparalleled levels of ownership and consumption.

Developed nations need to drastically reduce their emissions and provide powerful incentives, technology and other assistance to developing nations so that they can contribute to the global effort of stemming the tide while allowing their economies grow to more adequate levels. Most importantly, the rich and powerful nations need to lead by example, especially by adopting lifestyles that "emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world." (Earth Charter Principle 8 f), guided by the key insight that "when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more instead of having more". (Preamble)

Human solidarity is the main topic of Principle 3: "Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable and peaceful", and is specified by the responsibility to "Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible" (3b)

The relevance of this principle for addressing the consequences of climate change lies at hand, and is already being vigorously called for by many religious institutions, as expressed by the Working Group on Ecological Issues of the German Bishop’s Conference: “The priority option for the poor, the weak, the disadvantaged and the excluded forms an essential nucleus of the Christian faith. This is why the Church – in view of the denied or threatened justice – stands up in solidarity for God’s creation and for the victims of climate change, especially the poor, the old, the sick, children, the unborn and the coming generations.”

Earth Charter Principle 4a is of major significance for addressing our duty to reduce our emissions to a safe level: “Recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations.” Currently, we are playing with the lives of our children and our children’s-children: According to UNDP, we are emitting carbon dioxide at such unsustainable levels that risk using up the global budget of emissions for the 21st Century that would keep global warming within the “safe” limits of 2 °C by as early as 2032. Since the late 1980s, the Global Ecological Footprint has exceeded Earth’s bio capacity, as of 2003 by about 25 %. The 1.360 scientists involved in conducting the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment are therefore right in stating “In many cases, it is literally a matter of living on borrowed time. By using the supplies of fresh groundwater faster than they can be recharged, for example, we are depleting the assets at the expense of our children.” How we live our lives therefore becomes a moral issue, by doing seemingly insignificant things like turning on the light, driving a car or taking the plane, we may be condemning future generations to death.

The practical steps that need to be taken to fulfil these four over-arching commitments are expressed in the subsequent principles: The management of both renewable and non-renewable resources are addressed in Principles 5e and 5f that beckon us not to exceed rates of regeneration in using renewable resources and to extract and use non-renewable resources such as minerals and fossil fuels in ways that “minimize depletion and cause no serious environmental damage.” (5f)

Principle 6 emphasizes that preventing harm is the best method of environmental protection and calls us to apply a precautionary approach when knowledge is limited. So even if there remains some scepticism about IPCC’s famous statement that the consensus among scientists on the reality of human-induced climate change is “unequivocal”, the precautionary principle asks us to take action as a matter of prudence.

Another major guideline for framing our response to global warming is the “polluter-pays” principle as expressed in Principle 6b: “make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm” and specified in
10d: “Require multinational corporations and international financial organizations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.”

The moral argument of the polluter-pays principle has been thoughtfully advanced by the World Council of Churches, which explores adopting a statement in support of framing the obligations of the developed countries to the poor and future generations in terms of “environmental debts” that encourages the Northern nations to:

a. drastically reduce their greenhouse gas emissions within and beyond the United Nations framework of treaties on climate change, based on historical accountability and the principle of “common, but differentiated responsibilities” and according to fixed timelines;

b. compensate countries of the South and people for the costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation based on the “polluter-pays” principle, including through financing disaster-management programmes and investing in green technologies of the South; and

c. cancel the illegitimate financial debts being claimed from Southern countries (without reducing official development assistance) to free up resources for mitigation and adaptation.77

Earth Charter Principle 6c challenges us to ‘ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.’ This principle has a major significance in the context of the debate on the so-called ‘biofuels’:

As documented in numerous studies, the initial targets of the EU to replace 10 percent of its petrol and diesel used in the transportation sector with agrofuels, as well as US plans to boost their own ethanol and biodiesel consumption to become more independent from oil has led to a new gold rush in countries like Brazil and Indonesia. As the recently published report ‘Losing Ground’ of Friends of the Earth states, Indonesia, the world’s largest producer of crude palm oil – one of the main resources for agrofuels, has already increased its palm estates to 7.3 million hectares, and is planning to expand the area under plantation by a further 20 million hectares – an area the size of England, the Netherlands and Switzerland combined78.

Furthermore, the report notes that forest clearance for plantations, associated forest fires and drying out of tropical peatlands, all contribute heavily to the global greenhouse gas emissions. According to Wetlands International, and the World Bank, Indonesia has the third highest CO₂ equivalent emissions in the world after the US and China, and just ahead of Brazil whose own forest destruction boosts its emissions significantly79.

The Stern report revealed that the loss of natural forests is contributing more emissions than the whole transportation sector – a finding which is truly ironic given that many clearances of pristine forests are done with the aim of producing agrofuels that should help reduce the carbon emitted by cars, vehicles and transportation in general80.

The Barcelona-based organization GRAIN is therefore right in stating: ‘While scientists debate whether the ‘net energy balance of crops such as maize, soya, sugar cane and palm oil is positive or negative, the emissions caused by the creation of many of the agrofuels plantations send any potential benefit, literally, up in smoke’.81

And this is just the ecological dimension of the agrofuel craze: Millions of small farmers are driven off their land to make way for massive monoculture plantations that are reintroducing the colonial style of
agriculture. According to GRAIN, ‘between 1985 and 1996, 5.3 million people were forced off the land in Brazil, with the closure of 941,000 small and medium sized farms, and the rate of expulsion has intensified greatly over the last decade’.\textsuperscript{82}

As a third dimension, the agrofuels craze is hitting home on the global food prices, leading to excesses such as the Mexican ‘Tortilla Crisis’ that brought thousands of Mexicans to the streets in protests after Tortilla prices have tripled or quadrupled in some parts of Mexico from summer 2006 to January 2007 and forced Mexico’s President Calderon to cap the prices for corn products.\textsuperscript{83} Considering that the world’s poorest people already spend 50 to 80 percent of their total household income on food, for many of them large increases in the prices of staple foods will mean malnutrition, hunger and, possibly, outright starvation.\textsuperscript{84}

It therefore becomes obvious that fragmented solutions based on short-term and one-sided thinking will not work. What at first sounded like a good and sane idea – replacing a percentage of the climate wracking fossil fuels used in the transportation sector with ethanol or ‘biodiesel’ made from plants – turned out to do more harm than good once the cumulative, long-term, indirect and global consequences were assessed.

*Principle 7b* encourages us to “act with restraint and efficiency when using energy” and to “rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as energy and wind”, 7c challenges us to “promote the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies”, while 7d stresses the need to put an end to treating costs for environmental protection and social justice as economic externalities.

This combination of social and ecological imperatives harmonizes well with the Charter’s inclusive ethical approach that addresses the **basic requirements of social and economic justice** in *Principles 9 to 12*, including predicaments of “eradicat[ing] poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative” (*Principle 9*), “enhanc[ing] the intellectual, financial, technical, and social resources of developing nations, and reliev[ing] them of onerous international debt” (*10b*), “affirm[ing] gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development” (*11*) and “uphold[ing] the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being.” (*12*)

Earth Charter *Principle 9c* expresses the call to serve the poor and vulnerable that can be found in the moral orientations of most, if not all, of the world’s religious traditions: “Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.”

In regards to the **language that is being employed in the Charter** it is important to recognize that several parts and principles in the Preamble and Part I clearly go beyond the anthropocentrism that dominates most international law treaties and human rights declarations (Preamble: “To live with these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sese of universal responsibility, indentifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities”, *Earth Charter Principle 1a*: “Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings”).

However, it is important to note that this trans-humanocentric language is not being employed throughout the whole text: While the preamble affirms that our environmental, economic, political, social,
and spiritual challenges are interconnected and must be addressed in an integrated and inclusive manner, Earth Charter Parts II (Ecological Integrity) and III (Social and Economic Justice) use a clearly human-centered language of “natural resources” (5e and f) as well as the “rights to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation” (9a). It is therefore a matter of common sense not worth explicitly mentioning that in case of dangers for human health and life, the social interests of humans have a clear preference over environmental concerns. And again, we should take into account that it is not the subsistence emissions of the poor that have brought us into trouble but the luxury emissions of the rich.

On a deeper level, the massive transformations ahead of us requires us to adopt new ways of perceiving ourselves as a species on this planet, and revitalize the basic attitudes of “reverence for the mystery of being”, “gratitude for the gift of life”, and “humility regarding the human place in nature” (Preamble) that have been treasured in our religious traditions for centuries. In a final sense, we need to recognize that “the protection of Earth’s vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.” (Preamble). This statement is the basis for many religious institutions to use the Charter in their programmes and activities.

The discussion of selected Earth Charter principles should conclude with an assessment of what can be done locally and individually to translate these principles into practice. The Way Forward includes the instructive statement: “Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision.”

Mindful of the fact that the respective measures and activities need to respond to the local context, the Earth Charter trusts in the immense creative potential of human beings to address the challenges posed by global warming that needs to be unleashed by the motivational will for change. The three-step reflection process suggested here is ment to do just that.
Next Steps for Religious Action on Climate Change

Practical Guidelines for using the Earth Charter methodology

What are the appropriate steps for religious institutions to take to their efforts against global warming to a level that is commensurate with the depth and complexity of the challenge we are facing?

A fist step would be to use the above stated methodology to gain a clear perception of the deeper challenges and choices that we are dealing with:

- A reflection of this kind should start with an assessment of our planetary situation at this critical moment of Earth history, infused by a thorough analysis of the social and ecological teachings of our religious scriptures. What do our sacred texts say about our purpose as human beings? How do they define the good life? What are our obligations towards humankind and other kind? How do our religious scriptures relate to the comprehensive cosmological vision presented by modern science as expressed in the Earth Charter? Where are the gaps and challenges?

- The second step of this reflection process is then to take a thorough look into the drivers and root causes of the challenges we are facing. This part of the process should be informed by the insights of environmental science that reveal to us that the challenges we are facing are interconnected and systemic. What do our religious scriptures say about the values of human greed, the will for domination and the violence against humans and nature that dominate modern life and culture? How can our sacred texts help us to formulate alternative visions to the modern religions of consumerism and materialism? How can we take in the massiveness and complexity of the challenge without feeling overwhelmed and disempowered?

- The third step is to reflect on inclusive responses to be taken. Here, the inclusive ethical vision of the Earth Charter could help us to frame the discussion. How can the foundations of our religious faiths help us to move from denial to action and generate the “renewable energy of hope” needed to unleash the immense resources of human imagination, compassion and the power of dignity? What can we do as individuals to become active agents of change and how can our religious institutions help bringing forth sustainable communities founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace?

The workshop facilitators should give the group reasonable time to go through each of these three steps. A video on climate change, such as parts of Al Gore’s Inconvenient Truth, Interfaith Power and Light’s video’s “Lighten Up” or “Renewal” could be shown as an introduction.

A brief presentation on the Earth Charter could follow. Depending on the timeframe of the workshop and the number of participants, the group could then split up in small groups to discuss the different questions. The last step – framing inclusive solutions should be discussed in the plenary.

In all parts of the reflection process, prayers, songs, poems, and minutes of silence should be included to help participants to reflect deeply and holistically on the topics that are being discussed. In addition, these elements may allow participants to tap into the roots of of their inner spirituality that may give substance and strength to the the sincere discernments, the prudent judgements and the processes of transformation, repentance and healing that are so urgently required.
Suggestions for action

The insights gained in this process will provide a solid foundation for forging adequate and effective responses to the interrelated challenges posed by global warming. These could include

- Raising awareness about the deep connection of our environmental, economic, social and cultural challenges and the consequent need for holistic thinking and inclusive problem solving.

- Teaching the vision and values of eco-justice ethics informed by environmental sciences and the wisdom rooted in sacred scriptures.

- Help making the shift from quantity of goods to quality of life by promoting the values of sufficiency, contentment, celebration, kinship with all life and solidarity with the poor.

- Going beyond changing light bulbs to adopting sustainability management systems that are based on the integrated pillars of ecological integrity and social justice and also include measures for eco-just procurements and ethically responsible investments.

- Eating lower on the food chain and helping reducing one fifth of the global GHG emissions caused by raising livestock for human consumption.

- Adopting a more worldly and prophetic understanding of being religious by speaking out energetically in advocacy of socially just and environmentally responsible public policies.

- Seeking new ways of re-kindling the deeper roots of our inner spirituality that have been lost in the modern culture of consumerism and violence.

- Acting in partnership with other religious and secular organizations that care for creation and want to speed up humanities transition towards sustainability. Here, the Earth Charter could be used as a base for common ground and point of engagement with institutions and individuals that share the same sense of urgency.

- Encouraging young people to join the bold and dynamic action-oriented youth network of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative that is founded on the conviction that sustainable development is an ethical imperative and that urgent action is required to bring about a just, sustainable, and peaceful world.

- Inspiring reverence, gratitude, repentance, and humility – to the benefit of all forms of life on this planet.

‘In a final sense the world has always been saved not by wars and our military leaders, not by our science or technology, nor by our industrial magnates, not even by our politicians, but by our saints and spiritual leaders with integrity.’

(Late Kamla Chowdhry)
Appendix

An Earth Charter – A Spiritual Perspective – formulated by the International Communities for the Renewal of Earth (ICRE), in a process of intense interreligious consultations in 1991:

Preamble

I am because we are.
We have forgotten who we are
We have lost our sense of wonder
We have degraded the Earth
We have exploited our fellow creatures

And we have nowhere else to go.

In our ignorance we have disrupted the balance of life. Now the air we breathe hurts us and the water we drink poisons us.

All things are bound together:

If we lose the sweetness of the waters, we lose the life of the land;
If we lose the life of the land, we lose the majesty of the forest;
If we lose the majesty of the forest, we lose the purity of the air;
If we lose the purity of the air, we lose the creatures of the Earth;

Not just for ourselves but for our children – now and in the future.

But a new spirit is being born, a new awareness of our place in this delicate balance. This spirit calls us to:

- a transformation of our hearts and minds
- concrete changes in our way of life
- the renewal of our religions
- the creation of a global society

Today:

We remember who we are
We reclaim our sense of wonder
We acknowledge our responsibility
We commit ourselves to the Earth

We turn toward each other in friendship
We turn again together towards home.
The Earth Charter, final version, full text

PREAMBLE

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. 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.

Earth, Our Home

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

The Global Situation

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable.

The Challenges Ahead

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

Universal Responsibility

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. 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.

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.

PRINCIPLES

I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.
   a. Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.
   b. Affirm faith in the inherent dignity of all human beings and in the intellectual, artistic, ethical, and spiritual potential of humanity.

2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.
   a. Accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people.
   b. Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.
3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.
   a. Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.
   b. Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible.

4. Secure Earth’s bounty and beauty for present and future generations.
   a. Recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations.
   b. Transmit to future generations values, traditions, and institutions that support the long-term flourishing of Earth’s human and ecological communities.

In order to fulfill these four broad commitments, it is necessary to:

II. ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth’s ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.
   a. Adopt at all levels sustainable development plans and regulations that make environmental conservation and rehabilitation integral to all development initiatives.
   b. Establish and safeguard viable nature and biosphere reserves, including wild lands and marine areas, to protect Earth’s life support systems, maintain biodiversity, and preserve our natural heritage.
   c. Promote the recovery of endangered species and ecosystems.
   d. Control and eradicate non-native or genetically modified organisms harmful to native species and the environment, and prevent introduction of such harmful organisms.
   e. Manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forest products, and marine life in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration and that protect the health of ecosystems.
   f. Manage the extraction and use of non-renewable resources such as minerals and fossil fuels in ways that minimize depletion and cause no serious environmental damage.

6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.
   a. Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.
   b. Place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm, and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm.
   c. Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.
   d. Prevent pollution of any part of the environment and allow no build-up of radioactive, toxic, or other hazardous substances.
   e. Avoid military activities damaging to the environment.

7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth’s regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.
   a. Reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials used in production and consumption systems, and ensure that residual waste can be assimilated by ecological systems.
   b. Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.
   c. Promote the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies.
   d. Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services in the selling price, and enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.
   e. Ensure universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction.
   f. Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.
   a. Support international scientific and technical cooperation on sustainability, with special attention to the needs of developing nations.
   b. Recognize and preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom in all cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human well-being.
   c. Ensure that information of vital importance to human health and environmental protection, including genetic information, remains available in the public domain.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.
   a. Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.
   b. Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.
   c. Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.
10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.
   a. Promote the equitable distribution of wealth within nations and among nations.
   b. Enhance the intellectual, financial, technical, and social resources of developing nations, and relieve them of onerous international debt.
   c. Ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labor standards.
   d. Require multinational corporations and international financial organizations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.

11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.
   a. Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.
   b. Promote the active participation of women in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social, and cultural life as full and equal partners, decision makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.
   c. Strengthen families and ensure the safety and loving nurture of all family members.

12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.
   a. Eliminate discrimination in all its forms, such as that based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic or social origin.
   b. Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods.
   c. Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.
   d. Protect and restore outstanding places of cultural and spiritual significance.

IV. DEMOCRACY, NONVIOLENCE, AND PEACE

13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.
   a. Uphold the right of everyone to receive clear and timely information on environmental matters and all development plans and activities which are likely to affect them or in which they have an interest.
   b. Support local, regional and global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.
   c. Protect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and dissent.
   d. Institute effective and efficient access to administrative and independent judicial procedures, including remedies and redress for environmental harm and the threat of such harm.
   e. Eliminate corruption in all public and private institutions.
   f. Strengthen local communities, enabling them to care for their environments, and assign environmental responsibilities to the levels of government where they can be carried out most effectively.

14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.
   a. Provide all, especially children and youth, with educational opportunities that empower them to contribute actively to sustainable development.
   b. Promote the contribution of the arts and humanities as well as the sciences in sustainability education.
   c. Enhance the role of the mass media in raising awareness of ecological and social challenges.
   d. Recognize the importance of moral and spiritual education for sustainable living.

15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.
   a. Prevent cruelty to animals kept in human societies and protect them from suffering.
   b. Protect wild animals from methods of hunting, trapping, and fishing that cause extreme, prolonged, or avoidable suffering.
   c. Avoid or eliminate to the full extent possible the taking or destruction of non-targeted species.

16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.
   a. Encourage and support mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation among all peoples and within and among nations.
   b. Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.
   c. Demilitarize national security systems to the level of a non-provocative defense posture, and convert military resources to peaceful purposes, including ecological restoration.
   d. Eliminate nuclear, biological, and toxic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.
   e. Ensure that the use of orbital and outer space supports environmental protection and peace.
   f. Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.
THE WAY FORWARD

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Such renewal is the promise of these Earth Charter principles. To fulfill this promise, we must commit ourselves to adopt and promote the values and objectives of the Charter.

This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision. We must deepen and expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom.

Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals. Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership. The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance.

In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations, fulfill their obligations under existing international agreements, and support the implementation of Earth Charter principles with an international legally binding instrument on environment and development.

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.

The Earth Charter Action Guidelines – adapted to religious contexts

"From a single candle thousands of others can be lit, without diminishing its light"

Earth Charter International encourages everyone to contribute to putting the vision of a sustainable way of life into practice locally, nationally, regionally and globally. In the process of promoting decentralized activity on the global challenges of our time, the Earth Charter International Council drafted twelve Earth Charter Action Guidelines to empower individuals, communities and organizations to take leadership in moving our world to a sustainable path of living and development.

The Action Guidelines are addressed first and foremost to individuals. The full implementation of many principles of the Earth Charter’s inclusive ethical vision will require action on part of governments, corporations, and other organizations. However, the commitment of individuals is the ultimate source of leadership and change for a better world.

What follows is an adaptation of the Earth Charter Action Guidelines for religious contexts:

1. Take the Earth Charter as your basis.
   Take inspiration from the inclusive vision of the Earth Charter to explore the environmental and social teachings of your religious tradition and what it says about our obligations towards other humans and nature. Deepen your faith and strengthen your commitment to moral action. Let the four integrated pillars of the Earth Charter be your basic guide in planning and undertaking activities for alleviating the suffering of people and the planet caused by our unsustainable ways of living, producing and consuming.

2. Be a Living Example.
   After reflecting on our global challenges and exploring the ethical teachings of your tradition, move to action. Follow Mahatma Gandhi’s famous notion that we need to be the change we want to see in the world. Be the change. Explore small steps to reduce your ecological footprint and tread lightly. Try to live simply so that others can simply live. Try to improve the quality of life for yourself and others by doing seemingly little things to make this world a better place – at home, in the work place, and in your community.

3. Empower yourself.
   Act boldly, and trust that you can make a difference as an individual and that your activities will catalyze the efforts of many others. Take comfort in the words of Margaret Mead: ‘Never doubt that a small group of individuals cannot change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.’ Trust that genuine motivation, altruistic intentions and a good heart will make your efforts more effective and successful.

   Create the power to affect change by collaborating with others in your community or congregation. Draw on the expertise of environmental and social organizations in your local community in planning and conducting your activities. Listen to their advice and support their work. Build partnerships with people and communities of other faiths and be a messenger of peace and understanding.
5. Empower others.
Behold of the pitfalls of doing good with the hidden agenda of bolstering your own ego. Do not let self-centred thoughts keep you from seeking cooperative solutions. Share power by being inclusive and providing others with opportunities to strengthen their capacities for problem solving, decision making, and leadership, unleashing human creativity.

6. Promote Respect and Understanding.
Reach across the boundaries of your own religious or spiritual community. Endeavour to build relationships of mutual respect and trust with individuals and groups from other faiths, other cultures and other spiritual traditions. Be enriched by learning about their views, beliefs and rituals. Use the Earth Charter as an inspiration for finding common ground on shared values needed to address the global challenge affecting your local community.

7. Facilitate Self-Organization.
Encourage other congregations within your denomination or religious community to start their own action projects. Facilitate the spread of initiatives on global warming and the global challenges of our time without trying to control them, counting on the capacity of human groups with a clear ethical purpose to self-organize and achieve positive outcome.

8. Focus on Root Causes.
Focus thought and action on the root causes of the major problems and challenges we are facing. Focus thought and action on exploring and promoting the required changes in the way we think about our ecological interdependence, social justice and our responsibility towards future generations. Do not let the pressures of existing unsustainable systems and practices deter you from action.

Be like a reed: Be unwavering and deeply rooted in your commitment to ethical principles and ensure that the means adopted to achieve your goals are consistent with Earth Charter values, but always be flexible and innovative in selecting means and methods as circumstances change. Let love, compassion, understanding and care for the community of life be the guiding light for your activities.

10. Be Resourceful.
Do not let your thinking and acting be restricted by dependence on money; use your imagination and be resourceful in making things happen. Trust that the healing powers of the universe will support you if your intentions are pure and if you act and tread with humility.

11. Use Technology Wisely.
Be mindful that large numbers of people do not have access to advanced technology, and when constructing technological solutions to problems ensure that they are appropriate.

12. Protect the Integrity of the Charter.
When presenting, quoting from, or translating the Earth Charter, be faithful to the words and spirit of the original text, and link the Charter only with organizations, products and events that are consistent with its values and vision.

- Find out more information about the Earth Charter, the Earth Charter Programme on Religion and Sustainability, as well as the Earth Charter Education Programme at www.earthcharter.org

- Connect to the network of local communities that are hosting Earth Charter Community Summits on Climate Change: www.earthcharterus.org
Notes

1 In some social and religious contexts, there remains scepticism around this statement. Very helpful background information on this 
debate can be found on the informative website ‘How to talk to a climate sceptic’: http://gristmill.grist.org/skeptics. If the abundance of 
scientific proof is not as convincing to some, Principle 6 of the Earth Charter may help to strike a balance: 
‘Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.’
5 Taken from www.giss.nasa.gov/research/news/20080116/
7 Ibid. p. 4.
8 Website of the World Conservation Union IUCN: http://www.iucn.org/themes/climate/about.htm.
9 Ibid. p. 7.
13 According to a BBC Report, some scientists predict a total withdrawal of Arctic Ice for as early as 2013: Jonathan Amos: ‘Arctic summers 
free by 2013’, BBC News Website: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7139797.stm
and Associated Hazards in Nepal and Bhutan, June 2007, p.3.
17 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005, Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Biodiversity Synthesis, World Resources Institute, 
Washington, DC, p. 4.
18 Ibid. p. 3.
19 Ibid. p. 9.
20 Food and Agriculture Organization Director-General Jacques Diouf: Statement on Climate Change, Food Security and Poverty 
Reduction, given at a Conference organized by SIDA (Swedish International Development Association), September 2007, 
22 Kundzewicz, Z.W. et. al., 2007: Freshwater resources and their management. Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and 
Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change, p. 175.
24 Ibid. p. 8.
27 Ibid.
28 See for example the opinion advertisement supported by the Tällberg Forum “< 350” that was signed by many scientists and 
environmental experts, including NASA’s James Hansen, the European Environment Agency and Bill McKibben who started an 
organization “350.org” to promote this aim: http://www.tallbergfoundation.org/?C3%4DLLBERGINITIATIVES/350/tabid/429/Default.aspx ;
and www.350.org
30 Worldwatch Institute: Vital Signs, 42.
31 James Gustave Speth, 2008: The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to 
32 Stern Review: www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/index.cfm
33 See Brendan Mackey’s and Song Li’s paper: Winning the Struggle Against Global Warming. A Report to the Earth Charter International 
Council. Free to download at www.earthcharterinaction.org/climate
37 James Gustave Speth, 2008. The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to 
39 Please find the full text at http://www.nccecojustice.org/climateprinciples.html
40 Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2008, URL: 
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20071208_xii-world-day-peace_en.html
41 His Holiness Pope John Paul II, Centesimus Anus 1991, quoted by Gary Gardner: Pope Benedict: Laying the Groundwork for a 
Sustainable Civilization? Worldwatch Institute, URL: http://www.worldwatch.org/node/5707
http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jun/18/activists.environment
44 HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: Sacrifice: the Missing Dimension, RSE 2002, RSE Website, URL: 
46 Evangelical Climate Initiative, January 2006: Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action, taken from the “Christians and Climate” Website: http://christiansandclimate.org/learn/call-to-action/
47 For more information, please visit www.coelj.org
48 Taken from IFYES Website: Ifyes.org.uk
49 Please find more information at www.lineonweb.org.uk
50 Please find the full text of the statement at www.plumvillage.org/HTMLnews/solarpanel.html
51 To find out more about ARC’s Seven Year Programmes as well as its other projects with the faiths, please visit their informative website at www.arcworld.org
52 Hessel estimates that in the US, one in ten congregations in the US have environmental committees or action groups, as well as special moments of ritual life that affirm the spiritual and ethical importance of “caring for creation”, and sees this as a major success for the rise of engaged religious environmentalism. However, this estimate also shows that 90 % of the religious communities are yet to be reached. See: Dieter T. Hessel, 2008: Religions and Ethics focused on Sustainability, in: John C. Dernbach, ed., An Agenda for a Sustainable America, Washington, DC: Environmental Law Institute and Island Press, available at www.earthcharterinaction.org/religion.
54 Ibid. p. 122.
55 Dieter T. Hessel, 2007: Religion and Ethics Focused on Sustainability.
57 Ibid.
60 James Gustave Speth: The Bridge at the Edge of the World, xiv.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
74 James Gustave Speth: The Bridge at the Edge of the World, 41.
80 Stern Review, p. 171-172.
81 GRAIN: Stop the Agrofuel Crazed Seedling, July 2007, p. 5.
82 Ibid., p. 4.
85 The videos can be ordered at the website of the Regeneration Project / Interfaith Power and Light: http://www.theregenerationproject.org
86 See: http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/youth
List of Websites and Resources

The scientific facts:

Climate Change Website of the World Conservation Union IUCN: http://www.iucn.org/themes/climate

International Panel on Climate Change: http://www.ipcc.ch

Climate Change Website of the BBC Weather Center: http://www.bbc.co.uk/climate

Danish National Space Center: http://www.spacecenter.dk


World Meteorological Organization: www.wmo.ch

World Health Organization: http://www.who.int/topics/climate/en

Climate Science: http://www.realclimate.org

Award-Winning Sustainability Blogspot at WorldChanging.Com: http://www.worldchanging.com/planet

United Nations Development Programme: www.undp.org

Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN: http://www.fao.org/nr/clim/clim_en.htm

Youth Climate Movement: http://itsgettinghotinhere.org/

Websites and Resources on Religion and the Environment:

The Earth Charter Programme on Religion and Sustainability:
http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/religion

The Forum on Religion and Ecology:
http://environment.harvard.edu/religion

The Alliance of Religion and Conservation: http://www.arcworld.org

The National Council of Churches of Christ Eco-Justice Programmes, USA:
http://www.ncccecojustice.org

The National Religious Partnership for the Environment, USA:
http://www.nrpe.org

The Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility: http://www.iccr.org

Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Studies (IFEES): http://www.ifees.org.uk

The International Interfaith Investment Group (3iG): www.3ignet.org