

The Third Pillar of Sustainable Development



Mikhail Gorbachev initiated the process of change in the Soviet Union. He put in place *perestroika*, the fundamental transformation of the nation and society. *Glasnost*, or openness, became *perestroika's* driving force. A big shift in international affairs was effected. The new thinking associated with the name of Gorbachev

contributed to a fundamental change in the international environment and played a prominent role in ending the Cold War, stopping the arms race, and eradicating the threat of a nuclear war. The Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, the first parliament in Soviet history, elected Gorbachev President in 1990. In recognition of his outstanding services as a great reformer and world political leader who greatly contributed to improving the very nature of world development, Mikhail Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990. Since 1992, he has been President of The Gorbachev Foundation. He is Chairman of the Board of Green Cross International – an international independent environmental organization with branches in more than twenty countries. He has authored seventeen books, and received forty-four honorary degrees. He is an Earth Charter Commissioner and has played a leadership role in the history of the Earth Charter.

fight terrorism, but one should not forget that we might lose this war if we do not eradicate its roots. The only answer is a universal coalition of informed, responsible, and active citizens. Hence the importance of initiatives like the Earth Charter which, from an idea shared by a handful of like-minded individuals, has developed into a mass movement supported by millions of people worldwide.

The book in front of you is not simply another activity report that any organization regularly compiles – far more than five years of work lie behind it. Movements like the Earth Charter Initiative do not come to life spontaneously or out of the blue. The fact of their creation is preceded by a long prenatal period during which the people concerned come to understand their needs, formulate their demands, organize themselves, and get ready for action. In this sense, the book *The Earth Charter in Action: Toward a Sustainable World* is a testimony to the process of all humanity becoming mature, aware of the dangers it faces, and of the responsibilities it will inevitably have to assume vis-à-vis future generations if it continues to treat the environment as “business as usual.”

The current millennium started with a recognition by the international community of the many critical situations it faces, the most appalling of which are addressed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration: hunger, poverty, gender inequality, child mortality, water crisis, and environmental decline. In more general terms, I believe that the world is confronted today with three major challenges which encompass all other problems: the challenge of security, including the risks associated with weapons of mass destruction and terrorism; the challenge of poverty and underdeveloped economies; and the challenge of environmental sustainability.

No national government, even that of a super power, no group of countries, even the richest ones, can meet these challenges alone. The deadly terrorist attacks in London in July 2005, came as the latest tragic reminder of this reality. We must and will

The subjects dealt with and opinions expressed in the book are as varied and complex as our reality itself, and range from more global concepts like democracy, nonviolence, and peace to very practical issues of youth employment and gender equality. Another very impressive feature revealed by the book is the multitude of purposes for which Earth Charter can be used: promotion of equitable employment, citizen participation in environmental and educational programs, creating global dialogue on sustainable development, working with ex-combatants from war-torn regions, and even local campaigns against genetically modified organisms. This list can be continued.

One of the main themes of the Earth Charter, and of the book, the theme particularly dear to me as Founding President of Green Cross International, is ecological integrity and our common responsibility for its preservation. I was not born an ecologist, but the environment has always meant a lot to me. I grew up in a village and perceived the dying of rivers and land erosion as personal pain. Right after coming to power in the Soviet

Union, I had to deal with a huge project of reversing the flow of the rivers from North to South. If not stopped, it would have resulted in a tremendous ecological disaster. I thought this was a tough school. Yet, I still had Chernobyl to face.... This catastrophe of planetary scale shook the world and showed, in the most harsh form, that nature does not forgive human mistakes.

The Earth Charter is an unusual document since it reflects a new, universally-shared level of understanding of the interdependence between humans and nature. It also corresponds to the stage of globalization at which we find ourselves.

Coming back to the three challenges I mentioned earlier, two global documents are called to help the human community to cope with them. The first pillar is the Charter of the United Nations, which regulates the relations among states and thus sets the rules for their behavior in order to secure peace and stability. The second pillar is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which regulates the relations between states and individuals, and guarantees to all citizens a set of rights which their respective governments should provide. The importance of these two documents cannot be overestimated. But it has become obvious that another document is missing, one which would regulate the relations among states, individuals, and nature by defining the human duties towards the environment.

In my opinion, the Earth Charter should fill this void, acquire equal status, and become the third pillar supporting the peaceful development of the modern world. The process of its endorsement has already begun – it is endorsed by a growing number of local and national governments, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and many non governmental organizations. However, we founders and supporters should consider our mission accomplished only when the Earth Charter is universally adopted by the international community. ●