

Rustem Khairov, Russia. A project descriptive essay on Earth Charter endorsement by three Russian Republics as it relates to Principle 13

The Earth Charter in Russia since 1994



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in the Institute for Control Sciences and International Research Institute for Management Sciences of the Academy of Science of the USSR. Since 1994, he has participated in the Earth Charter project. Currently he is Earth Charter Project Coordinator for Green Cross International and is Deputy Chairman of the Earth Charter National Committee of the Russian Federation. Dr. Khairov is a member of the Commission for Sustainable Development of the State Duma of the Russian Federation and a member of the Expert Council for the Government of the Russian Federation. He is author of more than fifty scientific presentations and articles in the fields of philosophy, psychology, sociology, global modeling, peace research, international cooperation, ecology, and sustainable development.

The birth of the Earth Charter project coincided with one of the most difficult periods of the new Russian history. In the 1990s, we witnessed tanks attacking Parliament, war in Chechnya, panic after dramatic dissipation of the USSR and collapse of communist ideals, breakdown of the ideological guideposts, and the search for a new framework for development.

When developing the Earth Charter was proposed in 1994, Russians took its humanitarian idea of an integrated global ethic for “an outstretched hand of God.” From the first minutes of discussing that idea in The Hague Earth Charter meeting, it became clear that the document under debate could become not only the code of sustainable development principles, but even a strategic milestone on the way to building new society and new civilization.

It was at the same period of time that the Green Cross was founded – an international ecological organization headed by the first and last USSR President, Mikhail Gorbachev. I was authorized to coordinate the Earth Charter activities within the framework of that institution, while the International Foundation for Survival and Development of Humanity became the instrument to realize that work.¹ Green Cross International (GCI) worked closely with the Earth Council and other partners to develop and implement the Earth Charter.

Activities relevant to the Earth Charter in Russia can be divided into two five-year stages. The first one, 1995-2000, deals with development of the Earth Charter principles; the second one, 2000-2005, with the dissemination and implementation of the principles in the regions of the Russian Federation, as well as on the federal level. Within the framework of the first stage, our efforts, first and foremost, focused on integrating the latest scientific discoveries in the theory of biota regulation to make the basis for

necessary laws in biosphere development that were to be taken into consideration. Many eminent Russian scientists were involved, including V. Gorshkov, K. Losev, V. Danilov-Danilian, and others. The scientific theories of these Russian researchers laid the foundation for many Earth Charter principles, especially in Part II, the section on Ecological Integrity.

Parallel to that effort, cooperation was established with the leaders of the main religions of Russian Federation, as well as scientists and experts on “culture of peace and tolerance” such as F. Mayor, I. Galtung, T. Heyerdahl, at The Institute of Culture of Peace in Kazan, and others. Within this first phase, we hosted many round tables for discussing and publicizing the Earth Charter project. Public hearings were held in Moscow with participation of the Earth Council and over 150 representatives of governmental institutions and non governmental organizations. There were also workshops and conferences in Kamchatka, in the countries of Central Asia, Altai, the City of Nizhny-Novgorod, St. Petersburg, among others. Publications included compilations of the Earth Charter papers and documentation of public hearings (over 40,000 copies). Endorsement of the Earth Charter was included in some resolutions, memoranda, and other final documents of the many events that took place in different regions of the Russian Federation.

The second stage of our focus was to embed the Earth Charter in the regions

of the Russian Federation and to promote the document at the federal level as much as possible. Three regions in the rank of republics were selected: Tatarstan, Kalmykia and Kabardino-Balkaria. The choice of those regions was precipitated by the republics having constitutions similar in tone and principle to the the Earth Charter, and by the openness of their leaders to the ideas of sustainable development, on the one hand, and by the diversity of natural, economic, and social parameters on the other hand.

Of the three republics, Tartarstan is the largest, with a highly diverse population of about fifty percent Muslim Tartar peoples, forty percent Orthodox Russians, and the remainder a variety of other ethnic groups. It has become a leading oil and gas producer and contributes financially to the Russian Federation. Kalmykia is, for the most part, an agricultural country where the main religion is Buddhism. Kabardino-Balkaria is one of the most naturally beautiful countries in the North Caucasus.

At that second stage, the work was very intense. Serious consultations were held at all levels of NGOs, Parliamentary leadership, and ministries. Three key challenges faced Tatarstan: balancing development with environmental protection, ensuring peaceful coexistence among differing ethnic and religious groups, and sustaining national identity. In the face of these challenges, Tatarstan's progressive, yet assertive political leadership, especially in the person of President Shaimiev, saw the Earth Charter as a vital instrument for achieving its goals. The attempts to apply every Earth Charter principle to the specifics of the region were worked out in detail, as well as the legal issues of concordance with the constitutions of the republics concerned and the Russian Federation Constitution.

The greatest bulk of the preparatory work was carried out in the Republic of

Tatarstan. By June 2000, in the Palace of Peace in the Hague, it became possible to acquaint all those present with President Shaimiev's proposal regarding "the Republic's readiness to become an experimental territory for implementation and testing the Earth Charter principles." In April 2001, the Parliament of Tatarstan endorsed the Earth Charter as a guide for action, witnessed by members of the international Commission on the Earth Charter, delegations of the GCI, Earth Council, representatives of the Earth Charter national committees of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the USA, Australia, Europe, and India. Thus, the Tatarstan became the first republic in the world to have initiated the practical implementation of the Earth Charter principles.²

With the support of Green Cross International and the International Public Foundation for Survival and Development of Humanity, Tatarstan has actively engaged the Earth Charter as a guide for sustainable development. The government of Tatarstan has also analyzed, in detail, how well its key laws and policies stand up against Earth Charter principles. These efforts culminated with the Parliament of Tatarstan's vote to endorse the Earth Charter. Plans are under way to use the Earth Charter in school curricula.

The next region of the Russian Federation to affirm the Earth Charter was the Republic of Kalmykia. On October 24, 2002, the Earth Charter was endorsed at the 29th session of the Peoples Hural (No. 798-?). Then, it was the turn of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, where on April 24, 2003, the Earth Charter was endorsed at the sitting of the Parliament (No. 607-?-?). At present, work is under way to promote the Earth Charter's principles in eleven regions of the Russian Federation situated along its central artery – the Volga River, where over one-half of the Russian population lives.

Regarding the federal level, the Earth

Charter was included in Parliamentary hearings of the State Duma of the Russian Federation in October 2001; it was included in the official report of the Chairman of the Parliamentary Delegation of the Russian Federation in Johannesburg in 2002; and, it was reported and passed over to the President of the Russian Federation, V. Putin. More than once, it was discussed in the central mass media and relevant ministries, agencies, higher educational establishments, and public institutions. At present, the main work to promote the Earth Charter is being carried on in educational establishments of Russia;³ and, it is being considered as a network element of the international television channel, WorldMade⁴, located in and broadcasting from Amsterdam.

A tough ten years have passed. Life on Earth has not become better or easier. Wars go on in different regions of the world. Absolute poverty still exists. Terrorism continues. The world has not yet accepted (far from it) the principles of an equitable, sustainable, and peaceful global community for the twenty-first century as proclaimed by the Earth Charter. But, these ideals are increasingly discussed in the Russian public – at schools, higher educational establishments, among scientists, and on the municipal level. The Kyoto Protocol is coming into force, having recently been endorsed by the Russian Federation Parliament.

What is the future of the Earth Charter, in my opinion? What is its role and mission? Given the momentous speed of objective realities in global climate change, demographic shifts, new information technologies, terrorism, changes in the political map of the world, limits of global resources, to name but a few, the Earth Charter is, on the one hand, a universal code of principles for sustainable development in a modern world – an authentic "people's" document that has absorbed hundreds of recommendations from many countries of the world. On the other hand, it is a "living," flexible document

closely associated with existing problems of modern society. Earth Charter provides a necessary ethical framework to develop new values landmarks and new realities. I am delighted that, since its first days, it has been my good fortune to take part in this humanitarian project, together with the outstanding people of our time. Tartarstan, Kalmykia, Kabardino-Balkaria and the Earth Charter movement now enter an exciting new period when the ethical foundation described in the Earth Charter will not only be discussed, at all levels of government and society, but implemented. ●

Notes

- 1 Since 1997 together with the National Committee on Earth Charter in the Russian Federation.
- 2 I will not dwell on the results of the practical implementation of the Earth Charter principles and ideas adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Tartarstan, because they are dealt with in a special book devoted to the Earth Charter which I hope will be published in English very soon. It will be a good supplement to this collection of essays.
- 3 See the website of the Earth Charter in Russia at www.earthcharter.ru
- 4 Located in and broadcasting from Amsterdam. See also, www.worldmadechannel.tv