

Abandon Apathy and Be Moved to Action



Wangari Muta Maathai was the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctoral degree. Professor Maathai was active in the National Council of Women of Kenya from 1976-1987. Here she introduced the idea of planting trees and developed the idea into a broad-based, grassroots organization called the Green Belt Movement launched in 1977; they have planted more than thirty million trees across Kenya. In 2002, Dr. Maathai was elected to Kenya's Parliament with an overwhelming ninety-eight percent of the vote. She is Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources. Wangari Maathai is internationally recognized for her persistent struggle for democracy, human rights, and environmental conservation. In 2004, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She is an Earth Charter Commissioner and spokesperson.

When I look at the Earth Charter and reflect on it, I pick out several words. Then, if I take those words and I scan the horizon of my life, I can almost see the thousands and thousands of words that Steven C. Rockefeller must have heard, and the Earth Charter Commission must have heard, in order to come up with the very few words in the Earth Charter.

So as to make these words meaningful, we need to reflect on them. For example, when we pick the word "just," we want a just world. Can we think of all the injustices that we have on this planet, whether they are injustices against our own species, against one and another, or against the other forms of life? And, if we start with our own neighborhood, and go as far as we can before we get back to our place, we would see all the injustices that necessitate that word "just." I am sure that many communities and many individuals wrote letters to the Commission to say: you must include the word "just"—because we need justice. We need equitable distribution of our resources.

I look at the word "sustainable." I look at the word "peaceful." I look at the words "global interdependence." These words make me feel that we are truly interdependent. Do we use these words because they are beautiful words that are used often, or

do we truly *feel* interdependent? Do we really feel that we need the people in the South? Do we really feel that we need the biological diversity in the South? Do we really feel that we need the diversity of cultures in other parts of the world? Or are we only concerned about the cultures that we know? Are we only going to tolerate the cultures that we know and not hear about other rather simple, primitive cultures that we see in the films and on television?

I look at the term "shared responsibility." Is there really anything to be shared like "responsibility?" The question is whether we really feel that it is our concern when some people are dying of hunger in some parts of the world. Do we have a concern when we hear that countries are indebted to the point that they cannot provide their citizens with the basic necessities because they have to pay debts many times over what they borrowed? Is this fair trade?

I look at the words "human family" and I think sometimes we feel it is necessary to protect the butterflies, and it is necessary to protect the yet-undiscovered species in the Amazon, Congo, and other tropical forests, but we are not concerned about the diversity within the human family. I wonder whether we really know what the words "human family" mean. Is it my own family, my own nation, my own region?

So I am reflecting, and as you can see; there is not enough time for us to reflect on everything. There are enormously thought-provoking words in this document. What we should do, instead of just reading through, is to reflect on what the words mean so that we can be moved to action. In other parts of the world and in my own life, I love to do this because I can talk, I can reflect, and at the end, I can go home, dig a hole, and plant a tree.

As you will see from the stories in this book, many have reflected on words and principles in the Earth Charter so that they could be moved to action of many kinds. I encourage you to do the same—to find the words in the Earth Charter that speak to you and to give them meaning by reflecting on them. Then, allow yourself to abandon apathy and be moved to action! ●