

## A People's Earth Charter



**Maurice F. Strong** was born and educated in Canada. He has been working at senior levels for over thirty years in business, government, and international organizations. Mr. Strong has long-standing family, businesses, and official ties with China, including being the founder and first Co-Chair of the Canada-China Business Council.

His current appointments include: Under Secretary General and Special Advisor to the Secretary General of the United Nations; President of the Council of the University for Peace; Advisor on international matters, State Environmental Protection Agency of China; and Founding Chairman Emeritus of the Earth Council Alliance. Mr. Strong is a Member of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. Honours received include Companion of the Order of Canada, The Swedish Royal Order of the Polar Star, the Brazilian National Order of the Southern Cross, Tyler Environmental Prize, and the Blue Planet Prize. He has been awarded fifty-three honorary doctorate degrees. He is an Earth Charter Commissioner and has an historical role in its development.

The launching of the Earth Charter in the presence of Her Majesty, Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands, in The Hague in June 2000 was a critical benchmark in the worldwide people's movement to take up a challenge which governments were not ready to undertake at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In the five years since its launching, the Earth Charter Initiative has developed a growing constituency of people throughout the world devoted to using the principles of the Earth Charter as a guide to their own actions.

The Earth Charter was born out of the deepening concern and awareness that, despite the progress made both in our understanding of the risks to the human future acknowledged at Stockholm in 1972 and the major increases in our capacity to manage these risks successfully by the 1980s, the world community was still proceeding on a continuing development pathway that was not sustainable. Why, then, if we know so much more about the nature and extent of the problems we face, and if we clearly have the capacity to implement the measures

required to make the transition to sustainable development, are we still not doing it on the scale required? Implementation depends on motivation, and the motivation of people is the source of the political will of their governments.

It became evident that world leaders at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 were not sufficiently compelled by the motivation of their people to accept my proposal, building on the recommendation of the Brundtland Commission and extensive consultations with others, to begin negotiation of an Earth Charter as a statement of principles designed to guide the behaviour of people and nations towards Earth and each other.

After the Earth Summit, a group of concerned people undertook a process designed to produce a people's Earth Charter to manifest the commitment of people to a set of principles designed to ensure the security and sustainability of life on Earth. On the initiative of Rudd Lubbers, then Prime Minister of The Netherlands, Mikhail Gorbachev joined in forming a small and widely-representative group to guide this process. Led by Professor Steven C. Rockefeller, extensive and inclusive consultations took place throughout the world which produced broad consensus on the drafting of an Earth Charter incorporating the fundamental moral and ethical principles essential to a sustainable



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future. Agreement on it was reached at United Nations Educational, Science, and Cultural Organization headquarters in Paris in May 2000, followed by the formal launching in The Hague.

The Earth Charter has provided the impetus for a worldwide movement that has been gaining momentum in the past five years. It involves literally thousands of organizations ranging from the very local to those that are national in character, like the US Conference of Mayors, and major international organizations like the World Conservation Union (IUCN). Each of these commitments to the Earth Charter, together with those of countless individuals throughout the world, have been recorded through a small Earth Charter Initiative International Secretariat under the inspired and devoted leadership of Mirian Vilela.

These actions have produced an increasingly influential constituency for the Earth Charter that includes many world leaders. While no attempt has yet been made to obtain formal recognition of the Earth Charter by the United Nations, it is receiving growing recognition and support from United Nations members and representatives of other international organizations. It is also being included in the curricula of schools and universities, as well as the programs of a wide variety of youth organizations. Young people, particularly, have embraced the Earth Charter as an essential road map to the kind of future to which they aspire.

This timely book tells the story of the actions that have transformed the Earth Charter into a global movement which continues, and must continue to grow, as a primary source of the devotion and determination of people everywhere to ensure that our Earth remains a secure and habitable home for all people and those other forms of life with which we share it. As this book demonstrates, we have made immensely encouraging progress during the past five years. But, until the majority of people and organizations everywhere base their motivations on the principles enshrined in the Earth Charter, it will remain unfinished business. ●