

## Earth Charter Consultation Report

Center for Respect of Life and Environment (CRLE)

In the fall of 1996, the Center for Respect of Life and Environment distributed a special issue of its quarterly publication, *Earth Ethics*, focused on the Earth Charter. This report is drawn from a preliminary analysis of some of the responses to this Earth Charter issue. It includes: 1. Exemplary integrated responses and earth charter-type documents submitted; 2. Useful and illustrative responses to the main questions on the response form; and 3. A list of respondents whose material has been analyzed or included. (More will be analyzed.) This material follows a brief summary of some emerging common themes.

### Emerging Common Ground for Global Ethics?

In reviewing various earth charter responses and global ethics efforts through CRLE's lens, certain critical themes appear which should be woven into the draft document. The following are four major themes central to emerging earth ethics:

1. An understanding of existence as a community of subjects and not a mechanistic assemblage of objects

This includes an appreciation of the beauty, integrity, and interconnectedness of natural systems and the recognition of a pervasive sentience: an interiority or "soul" in each living being. In this context, evolution and development are processes which must be understood in their psychic and spiritual as well as material/physical dimensions. (The good life or frill development thus includes an awakening to this deeper subjective, even spiritual reality, and living in ways that enhance the awakening of all.)

Many respondents use religious language to express this sensibility- others a more secular or poetic "spirituality," for example:

"According to Hindu scriptures, people must not demand or command dominion over other creatures. They are forbidden from exploiting nature; instead they are advised to VIEWk peace and live in harmony with nature. Further, the Hindu religion demands veneration, respect and obedience to maintain and protect the natural harmonious unity of God and nature... "the maintainer (of all)" (*Gita*, 9:17-18). Thus both God and nature (*Prakriti*) are one and the same... The Hindu belief in the cycle of birth and rebirth wherein a person may come back as an animal or a bird gives these species not only respect, but also reverence. This provides a solid foundation for the doctrine of ahimsa-- non-violence (or non-injury) against animals and human beings alike. Hindus have a deep faith in the doctrine of non-violence. It should be noted that the doctrine of *ahimsa* presupposes the doctrine of *karma* and the doctrine of rebirth (*punarjanma*)... The cosmic vision of our planet Earth... is based on the fundamental concept of *Vasuahrnv Kutumbakam*. Every entity and organism is a part of one large extended family system which is presided over by the eternal Mother Earth." (O.P. Dwivedi)

"Enshrined in the Holy Qur'an in Sura 6 Aya 38 is: 'The Almighty God said: There is not an animal on the earth, nor a bird on the wing, which is not part of your community.' Thus the global community of the biosphere, in which man lives, is respected as a whole living entity... Sharing the world.. epitomizes a fundamental principle of Omani society, based on the Islamic Faith. A most vivid illustration of this principle was given by Wilfred Thesiger in his book Arabian Sands written in the 1950's. At a moment of near starvation during a journey across the Empty Quarter, he wrote of the time when they caught a desert hare to provide the first cooked meal for many days. As they prepared to eat it, a large party of visitors arrived. Without hesitation his guides invited the guests to share the morsel with them, depriving themselves of most of the meal. This displays an underlying principle that a man should go hungry rather than allow other to die of starvation. Extrapolated to a regional and global dimension, this has even greater significance."(The Oman Report)

"The vision of one Earth Community is a call to live in harmony with all life, to draw on the Earth's sustenance responsibly, and to care for the planet that all may benefit equitably now and in the future. The threat to one Earth Community is the promotion of consumerism and greed and the preoccupation of people and nations with money, control and power at the cost of justice, cultural and spiritual enhancement. The way forward will require a turn toward restoration and renewal. We need Th reaffirm the importance of justice, frugality, humility and reverence for life and nature. To live within such a holistic relationship requires our rediscovering the spiritual connection that unites us to the land and that nourishes our souls as well as our bodies." (One Earth Community)

2. The affirmation of the "intrinsic worth" and something like "rights" of (or duties toward) each individual person almost all animal and plant species (and some individual animals) and in some ways nature and ecosystems

This carries the correlate of recognizing our own limits in claiming the fruits of the earth and in managing and manipulating nature.

We live in a world of more or less "equal," "sacred" subjects, not of a few superior beings who have the right to dominate the many inferior beings. Despite the fact that societies are filled with coercive violence and restriction of basic freedoms, a global ethical consensus is emerging on human rights in general, and increasingly on the needs and rights of members of non-dominant groups, such as women and indigenous peoples.

Also, the nonhuman deserves more standing: we should respect every life form independent of its worth to people. Human development should not threaten the integrity of nature or the survival of other species. People should treat all creatures decently and protect them from cruelty, avoidable suffering, or unnecessary killing (Caring for the Earth).

We must accept a world of material limits. A correlate of extending rights to others is recognizing the limits of human technological and intellectual capacities. This new world view demands that we humans accept a set of restraints on our exploitation of the natural

world, based on respect for the integrity of the life community, as well as healthy skepticism about human ability to control and manage extraordinarily complex natural systems benignly (NCC). Human humility is essential. Accepting limits also means translating a recognition of the rights of others (human and non-human) into constraints on our own behavior--for example, in determining how much of the primary productive capacity of the earth humans have the right to exploit, or in refusing to trade in goods that have been produced under unjust conditions.

### 3. The recognition that we need a new "bottom line" for economics and development

The globalized market focuses on increasing financial transactions through fostering material production and consumption. All religions and philosophies recognize qualitative ends beyond enhancing quantitative, material well-being. So should development theory. The non-monetized human exchanges in the social economy, the contributions of the natural economy, and the fundamental spiritual ends of human life, all need to be factored in (NCC). Development must be assessed for its contribution of "goods such as truth, beauty, freedom, friendship, humility, simplicity. Not only are such moral and spiritual goods the most worthy ends of human life; they may be the only way to empower persons to reduce their consumption, limit their procreation, and live sustainable lives." (Engel)

This new bottom line demands new indicators for development that include natural, human, social, and even spiritual "capital," along with the economic indicators that currently dominate developing thinking. It would focus policy on a different goal for development: local self-reliance in culturally diverse and biologically rich settings, where people and communities pursue a high quality of life defined more broadly than short-term financial gain.

David Korten argues that poverty, unemployment, communal disintegration, and ecological abuse have accelerated globally, despite "a sevenfold increase in global GNP since 1950." A major reason is that "we have defined our goals in terms of growing economies to provide jobs--a means--rather than developing healthy sustainable human societies that provide people with secure and satisfying livelihoods--an end."

### 4. The identification and support of lifestyles communities and social policies which embody this fuller sense of development (best practices)

What is needed is a shift in our model of the good life. Rather than fostering mobility and greed, this new approach encourages rootedness--and caring. Policies to enhance healthy social and natural economies require a commitment to low-input, sustainable local enterprises which strengthen the bonds of community and responsiveness to ecosystematic constraints (NCC). "Markets would become primarily local in character--augmented by, rather than dependent on, trading relationships with more remote localities. Capital would be more rooted in local ownership and most production carried out by small enterprises."

Clifford and John Cobb argue that while "markets are the most efficient means of allocating resources," it is also clear that the end which must guide and constrain the market is "not maximizing economic growth, but facilitating full human development." This requires a better statistical measure such as the Genuine Progress Indicator, which takes into account a variety of social and ecological factors that the gross domestic product ignores.

Of course, such local initiatives are only possible within a strong international framework of "good globalization" where UN/WTO-type organizations demand and enforce ecologically sound, socially just, spiritually-awakening, and humane standards as well as "free" trade agreements.

Many give examples of communities and policies to support this shift: These are the "best practices" from which the values to be included in the Earth Charter are inductively derived.