

## **Speech prepared for the Cowichan Tribes Suicide Prevention Forum**

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please let me express how honoured I feel to be given the chance to speak to you today. My name is Michael Slaby. I travelled more than 12.000 miles from Germany to present the Earth Charter to young people in the region of Vancouver and Vancouver Island.

It is this international document, the Earth Charter, which I would like to humbly present to you. The Earth Charter is an international declaration of ethical principles for governments, corporations, state- and non-state organizations and individuals to overcome the major world problems humankind is facing today. The Earth Charter holds that our global challenges like environmental degradation, the depletion of resources, the extinction of species, poverty, the widening gap between rich and poor and the widespread injustice, intolerance, ignorance and violent conflict are interrelated. They have a common cause. They stem from the egocentric and materialistic way we relate to nature and life in general. In the light of the Earth Charter, the materialistic and consumeristic lifestyle which is propagated in the dominant western culture is one of the root causes of our global problems. Therefore, the global network of organizations that form the Earth Charter Initiative tries to achieve a shift of thinking about and relating to nature and our place within it.

Before I go into the details of the contents of the Charter, please let me tell you a little bit about its history. The Earth Charter has been drafted in the most open and participatory process ever conducted in relation to an international document. Thousands of people from all different faiths, cultures, nations and sectors of society have participated. People with backgrounds in religion, science, philosophy, international law or ecological movements have participated in a decade-long dialogue about global ethics. They brought in their values and visions to create a just, peaceful and ecologically and economically sustainable world. In 1997, a global commission of distinguished persons was formed, headed by Mikhail Gorbachev and Maurice Strong. This committee of 24 world leaders, scholars and famous artists oversaw the consultation process and drafted the Earth Charter.

In March 2000, the final version of the Earth Charter was officially presented to public at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

So what is the Earth Charter all about? The Earth Charter is a document that formulates ethical principles, norms and guidelines for governments, corporations, organizations and individuals. The highest principle is the Respect and Care for the Community of Life. The Earth Charter states that humankind is embedded in an ever evolving universe, the vital community of life. Therefore, each individual shares a universal responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. So in all our decisions, we must consider the long-term consequences of our activities. That means we must also take responsibility for the forthcoming generations, our children and children's-children that inherit the world after us. Against this background, environmental protection is not only a necessity to guarantee our human survival on this planet. It becomes a sacred trust. Nature itself is sacred, with all that is in it. Therefore, the Earth Charter asks us to apply a precautionary approach when we cannot oversee the consequences of our activities.

The reason why I talk to you about the Earth Charter is to tell you that there is hope. More and more people around the world try to realize respect for nature in their daily lives. The international homepage of the Earth Charter Initiative counts around 13.000 individuals, organizations and local communities that endorsed the Earth Charter. In October 2003, the UNESCO adopted a resolution in support of the Earth Charter, in addition, more and more states and governments are inspired by its ethical vision. So how ever small the changes might seem to be that have been achieved so far, and how ever overwhelming the power of the materialistic and destructive forces may look, there still is hope. There are lots of people in Germany and other countries that highly respect and appreciate what First Nation-Culture stands for. More and more people around the world are joining hearts and minds to form a global partnership for the creation of a just, sustainable and peaceful future, based on the respect for all that is living. And this partnership is growing stronger each day. So in your own efforts to preserve the sacred nature around you, please be assured that you are not alone. Please let me finish with the final lines of the Earth Charter:

*“Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”*

Thank you very much.