

The Earth Charter as an Organizing Framework for the Republic of Tatarstan, *RUSSIA*

Background

The Republic of Tatarstan is located about 700 km east of Moscow and is one of the largest republics of the Russian Federation. It has a total population of nearly four million people and occupies an area of 68,000 sq. km, about the same as Ireland. It is one of the most advanced regions of the Russian Federation in positively addressing complicated ethical and inter-faith problems.

Modern Tatarstan lies at the northern end of the confluence of three great cultural streams: a Mongol/Asian stream from the east, a Moslem stream from the south, and a Slavic Russian Orthodox Christian stream from the West. Tatarstan's population remains highly diverse, with a mix of about fifty percent Moslem Tartar peoples, forty percent Orthodox Russians, and the remainder a variety of other ethnic groups. A similar mix led to war in Yugoslavia. However, Tatarstan has chosen a different course. One of the projects to help the territory fulfill its vision is *"Tatarstan, the Territory for a Culture of Peace, Sustainable Development and Tolerance"*, which emphasizes the need to protect the natural environment and to create conditions that promote tolerance and social justice.

Aim

The three key aims of the project were to:

- Present the Earth Charter to the Parliament of the Republic and initiate a process to have it endorsed



Local and international participants of the Earth Charter meeting at the parliament, April 2001

- Make the Earth Charter a guiding framework for Tatar policies
- Promote the Earth Charter's endorsement and implementation by various institutions in the Republic

In the face of these challenges, Tatarstan's progressive, yet assertive political leadership saw the Earth Charter as a vital instrument for advancing these aims.

Participants

The Earth Charter's values and principles attracted a number of stakeholders from civil society and found response in all walks of Tartar society. The President of the Republic of Tatarstan, the Parliament, Ministry of Ecology, and various public organizations expressed their support and endorsement for the Earth Charter project.

Timeframe

The first Earth Charter-related activities took place in late 1999, and have been ongoing since then. In the last two years, the Earth Charter project has been furthering educational activities and programmes.

Description

During the launch of the Earth Charter in June 2000 in the Netherlands, a special envoy of the President of Tatarstan announced the readiness of the Republic to implement the Earth Charter in their region. A group consisting of scientific and public organizations as well as parliamentarians was established to develop ways of implementing the values and principles of the Earth Charter in practical life.



The Earth Charter commissioner Kamla Chowdhry (India) at the parliament

In November 2000, senior government officials, ministers, members of Parliament, and foreign experts came to Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, to hold discussions on the Earth Charter. Along with this conference, the government also held hearings to determine to what extent the values and principles of the Earth Charter were coherent with state laws, policies, traditional multicultural and religious values. The Environmental Committee of the Parliament studied and discussed the Charter for

a period of six months. After thorough considerations at the State Council, its members stated their support for pronouncing Tatarstan as the “experimental territory”, where the Earth Charter principles and a Culture for Peace programme were to be implemented.

Combined efforts of the government, Parliament, and various stakeholders of civil society culminated in the unanimous vote of members of parliament, to endorse the Earth Charter on 27 April 2001. This was a major step both for Tatarstan and for the international Earth Charter Initiative. The Parliament of Tatarstan also voted unanimously to adopt and apply the principles of the Earth Charter as part of Republic’s constitution.

Within the framework of the project *Tatarstan, the Territory for a Culture of Peace, Sustainable Development and Tolerance*, Tatarstan launched a large-scale experiment on implementing the Earth Charter and a Culture of Peace programme. Their agreement is to use the Earth Charter as a roadmap to a new kind of society. This project includes incorporating the Earth Charter in school curricula and in an ‘Earth Charter in Tatarstan’ book that was published in mid-2005 in Russian and English. The book offers an overview of this process. Its preface is authored by the President of the Republic, Mr. Shaimiev.

Funding

The Republic of Tatarstan is funding this project.

Results

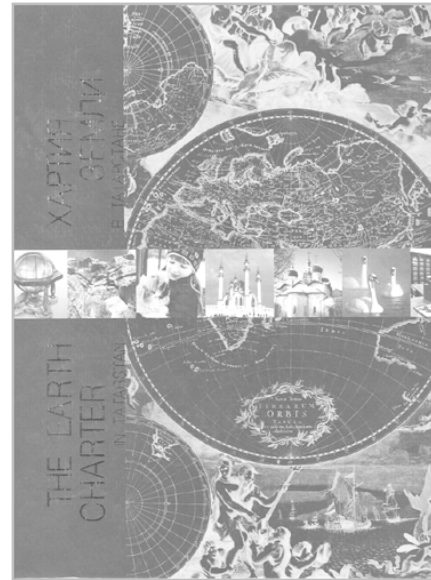
The importance of the Earth Charter in Tatarstan is that it has provided an organizing framework for the new agenda the Republic has set for itself. Clearly the Earth Charter has already made a difference in Tatarstan by helping to stimulate and channel the discussion of what kind of future the Republic wants for itself.

The endorsement has also led to concrete activities with the Earth Charter. Work is being carried out within the framework of a project on Intensive Adaptive-Landscape Farming, on preserving biodiversity. Training seminars for teachers to incorporate the Earth Charter into text books and university curriculum are also being conducted.

Conclusion

In general, Russia has not been a congenial place for assertive environmentalism. Yet the government of Tatarstan has chosen to make a public commitment to sustainable development, which not only flies in the face of prevailing views in Russia, but may ultimately change how key industries in the Republic operate. While the impact on industry remains to be seen, the Earth Charter clearly challenges the status quo. By endorsing the Earth Charter, Tatarstan has taken a courageous stand in favour of changing how things are done in order to build a better future, while confirming its most deeply held values.

Both Tatarstan and the Earth Charter movement now enter an exciting new period in which the challenge is to further embed the principles of the Earth Charter in the daily life of the Republic and its people.



Tatarstan / Earth Charter book cover

Sources: This case study was directly drawn from the following materials:

- Earth Charter Initiative website: <http://www.earthcharter.org/news>
- Stephen Smith, "Earth Charter in Tatarstan"
<http://www.earthcharter.org/files/resources/tatarstan.htm>
- Rustem Khairov: Earth Charter in the Republic of Tatarstan.
- Russia website: <http://www.earthcharter.ru/>