

The Americas

Continental Conference of the Americas

November 30 - December 3, 1998



From November 30 to December 3, 1998, the Earth Charter Continental Conference of the Americas was held in the State of Mato Grosso, Brazil. This event was organized and coordinated by a collaborative effort between the Government of Mato Grosso and the Earth Council. The conference brought together representatives from Earth Charter National Committees and involved groups from the Americas as well as the Caribbean and Indigenous Peoples groups to dialogue about the Earth Charter process. The conference was host to approximately 100 delegates from over 20 countries and was jointly sponsored by the Earth Council, the Government of Mato Grosso, UNICEF, and UNESCO.

The primary objectives of the conference were:

- To bring together the Latin American and North American preliminary results of consultations based on the initial contributions of groups from various countries in order to share experiences and dialogue about the synthesis of consultation results.
- To propose a draft Latin American and Caribbean Earth Charter that has regional validity and is reflected as a contribution to the global Earth Charter.
- To formulate an action plan for a movement of ethical affirmation in the region.
- To define common strategies for action.

Main Conclusions and Results

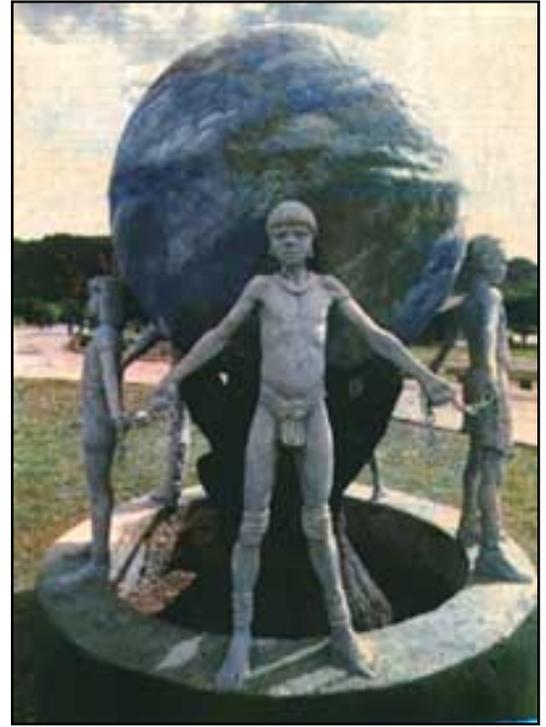
- The development of a draft proposal of a Latin American and Caribbean Earth Charter and the Strategies for Common Action were important results to the conference. Both of these documents articulated the long and short-term goals of the Earth Charter movement in the region.
- It was greatly beneficial to bring together key individuals who have been separately contributing to the process within their own countries. This was a successful opportunity for sharing and learning from each other, which served to generate inspiration and enthusiasm. In doing so, national processes were reinforced and encouraged to both expand and pursue their activities.
- The conference created the opportunity for the representative of the drafting committee to gather the thoughts from the Americas, as well as share the drafting committee process. This allowed for a bridge to be made between the global and regional processes of the Earth Charter.

- There was an overwhelming response to the proposal of continuing a regional network for information and sharing. It was generally agreed upon that the Earth Council should facilitate this electronic networking. The development of an Earth Charter Latin American Regional Committee was addressed and it was decided that there still exists much to accomplish on a ground level within each country.

Opening:

The Conference opened with a public plenary session of over 750 participants. This plenary session featured a welcoming speech by the Governor of Mato Grosso, Dante de Oliveira and an opening speech by Earth Council Executive Director, Maximo Kalaw Jr. In addition, UNESCO representative Jorge Weirthein, UNICEF representative Jorge Zimmerman, and Professor Emeritus Steven Rockefeller, Head of the Earth Charter Drafting Committee who was also representing the Earth Charter commission gave remarks.

During his opening speech, Earth Council Executive Director, Maximo Kalaw, acknowledged the support of the State of Mato Grosso and conveyed the regrets from Earth Council Chairman Maurice Strong, for not being able to attend this event. Mr. Kalaw addressed the importance of this gathering in this critical time in the history of our human species, recognizing that we have a growing ecological, economic and political interdependence and power to impact on the environment and each other. Mr. Kalaw commented that from diversity we are working to spell-out common responsibilities and areas of cooperation through the development of an Earth Charter. He further emphasized that this Charter must be relevant to the people and the Earth and must address problems of poverty, destruction of Earth's life support systems, social violence and personal alienation from nature and each other. Mr. Kalaw stressed the importance that the drafting of a People's Charter will demonstrate the fact that political will resides with the people and that the function of civil society, in cooperation with governments, is the articulation of public interest or common good. Mr. Kalaw concluded his remarks stating that the Earth Council is honored and grateful to the Governor of Mato Grosso for his support, to the sponsors of the conference, and to the participants and staff of this critical and transformative undertaking.





In his welcoming address, the Governor of Mato Grosso, Dante de Oliveira, stated that economic development is not useful if it cannot bring better conditions of life and that there is a need to reduce the gap that separates rich and poor, Indigenous Peoples and different ethnic groups. The Governor stressed the need to change concepts and incorporate new ideas and establish new forms to govern in a more efficient and democratic manner. He reinforced the desire to affirm

in this important event, of which Mato Grosso is honored to host, the commitment of the government to put forward a program of politico-environmental reform. The Governor concluded his opening speech with the following words, "To build a model of a democratic society, socially just and fraternal, in which the companionship among people is based on principles of solidarity, fraternity, and ethics, is the task of all of us. We have a shared responsibility."

Following these introductory remarks one representative from each Earth Charter National Committee briefly spoke on the process and results in his/her country. This first day was designed to give the public and the conference participants an overview of the Earth Charter process in all participating countries. Jorge Cohen and Carlos Maldonado, Coordinators of the Argentinean and Brazilian National Earth Charter campaigns, spoke about the Earth Charter movement and the need to continue this initiative with common regional goals to be reflected in each national initiative.

[Leonardo Boff](#), Brazilian theologian, addressed the sacredness of the Earth and the necessity of fostering an evolution in our points of view to understand the universe as a whole. Professor Boff presented an inspirational vision of the eminent need of an integrated ethical framework. He raised attention for the importance of ethics in the fellowship of humans, based on three points: 1) the recovery of our sensitivity to the sacredness of Planet Earth, 2) the recovery of the feminine sense within each human being, 3) the transformation from the individual to collective consciousness.

Working Sessions:

In the morning of the second day of the conference, there were three simultaneous panels for the public and conference participants. An invitation was extended to the public to rejoin the participants on the last day of the conference, December 3rd, for the presentation of the conference results. The panel topics presented were organized into three categories.



Panel 1	Panel 2	Panel 3
<p>Culture of Peace:</p> <p>Abelardo Brenes, University for Peace, Costa Rica</p>	<p>Science, Ethics and Social Action:</p> <p>Orlando Rey Santos, Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, Cuba</p>	<p>Institutional and Social Force:</p> <p>Clara Ferreira, Green Cross, Venezuela</p>
<p>Integrated Ethical Vision and the Globalization of Markets:</p> <p>Raimundo Florín, Management Council for Sustainable Development, Argentina</p>	<p>Culture, Religion, Ethics:</p> <p>Richard Clugston, Center for Respect of Life and Environment, United States</p>	<p>Global Citizenship: Moacir Gadotti, Paulo Freire Institute, Brazil</p>
<p>Values of Conservation:</p> <p>Aspásia Camargo, Ministry of External Relations, Brazil</p>	<p>Science and Culture:</p> <p>Marcos Terena, National Indigenous Movement, Brazil</p> <p>and Maria Eugenia Aguilar, RAIS, El Salvador</p>	<p>Mediation and Conflict Resolution (Ombudsman):</p> <p>Ambassador Franz van Haren, Holland</p>

Following the panel sessions, participants were divided into 20 small working groups of approximately 5-6 persons each, facilitated by representatives of Earth Charter focal point organizations. The small groups had two work sessions to address the following questions, based on the results from the consultation process in each participant's country, the synthesis of these results and their own personal views:

- How would you define, specifically, the vision of the Earth Charter?
- What are essential ethical principles and values needed to sustain the Earth Charter?
- Concretely propose how we can put into practice, and affirm socially, the ethics promoted by

the Earth Charter?

- Should a structure be created for the Earth Charter?
- What are the comments that will contribute to the process of revision for the launching of Draft II?

[Attached are the guidelines used by the working groups and summaries of these outcomes.]



for action.

The results from each small group were presented in a large group format. Each large group had two facilitators who formed a synthesis committee whose task it was to compile the results of all of the small working groups. These results were designed to contribute to the overall objectives of the conference: to define a regional synthesis, develop and create a draft Latin American and Caribbean Earth Charter, which would be validated by conference participants on the final day of the conference, and propose common strategies

On the final day of the conference the synthesis committee presented, to the public and plenary group, the synthesis of the results from the small and large work groups. The regional document developed entitled, Latin American and Caribbean Earth Charter Draft Document, reflects the integration of Earth Charter consultation results from each Latin American and Caribbean country represented. This document, in conjunction with the International Earth Charter draft and the various national positions, is a base to further enhance the national dimensions and further consultations. It is also intended to serve as a basis for continued discussion, debate and revision at the national level. The following principles have been articulated within the Latin American and Caribbean Earth Charter Draft Document:

- **Respect:** To the Earth, life, spirituality and cultural diversity.
- **Solidarity:** To translate into practice support, cooperation, communication and dialogue.
- **Equity:** To eliminate inequalities through the democratization of opportunities, satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations and the overcoming of all types of discrimination.
- **Justice:** To affirm the duties and rights of humanity in all its diversity.
- **Participation:** To strengthen democracy, guaranteeing the governability and facilitation of self-determination in all decision-making.
- **Peace and Security:** Not only as the absence of violence, but rather establishing an equilibrium in human relationships and relationships with the natural world.
- **Honesty:** As a basis to support transparency and trust.
- **Conservation:** To guarantee the existence of life and the Earth and the preservation of our natural, cultural and historical heritage.
- **Precaution:** As the obligation to foresee and, where there is risk of irreversible or serious damage to the environment, precautionary action must be taken to prevent harm.
- **Love:** As fundamental for a harmonious caring relationship that fosters a commitment and responsibility to action.

In addition to the draft document, the synthesis committee proposed Strategies for Common Action for Earth Charter National Committees. These strategies focused on promoting five common goals:

1. To develop creative activities to put into practice the values articulated by the Earth Charter.
2. To carry out periodic evaluations of the Earth Charter process.
3. To facilitate wide opportunities of participation in the process for all sectors of society.
4. To recommend to legislative bodies the concepts identified in the Earth Charter for incorporation into future legislative decisions.
5. To strengthen communication networks between participating organizations to coordinate common actions, exchange experiences, and integrate others into the process.

The presentation of both the Latin American and Caribbean Draft Earth Charter and the Strategies for Common Action was followed by an open discussion period, in which participants and the public were invited to ask questions or make comments on these conference results. These included the importance of rescuing the sacredness of the Earth and the mystery of the universe and of life, and viewing the Earth as a living Mother Earth.

To conclude the conference participants traveled to Salgadeira (Chapada Dos Guimaraes), a National Park located outside of Cuiabá, for the closing ceremony of the conference. In Salgadeira, participants were invited to be part of a mobilization effort, organized by the local government, involving the children of Cuiabá from over 20 different schools. Four thousand students lined hand-in-hand forming a human chain of students and teachers, over 3.5 kilometers in long around a mountain in a symbolic embracing of the Earth. Television and the media were on-hand to document this historic mobilization event for the Earth Charter endeavor. The closing ceremony also featured an Indigenous dance, presented as an expression of connectedness with other living beings on Earth.



In Salgadeira, the Mayor of Cuiabá presented the first Earth Charter monument which was inaugurated by Maximo Kalaw, Executive Director of the Earth Council, Professor Emeritus Steven Rockefeller, Head of the Earth Charter drafting committee and Carlos Maldonado, conference host. The monument, by artist Jonas Correa, presents the Earth being "sustained" by the trunk of a tree. Five children, representing the five continents, surround the tree holding hands as a human chain to symbolize protection and security of the planet.

General Comments:

Since North American participation was not as strong as expected and there were no preliminary

results from consultations, time was not appropriate to develop a North American regional document or synthesis. However, participants from the United States were integrated into the working groups to share aspects of the process, which reflected the enormous potential for a strong and active campaign in this region.

It was felt that the conference manifested the energy that comes from people in their seriousness in the search for an alternative development vision based on an ethical framework. The necessity for people to reinforce their own cultural identities, specifically through a Latin American and Caribbean Earth Charter, before contributing to a universal global Earth Charter was expressed.

Representatives from Cuba generously offered to host the second Conference of the Americas, reinforcing an inspiring future vision of coming together again to continue the strengthening of the Earth Charter initiative.

• View the Earth Charter Document

THE EARTH CHARTER INITIATIVE, INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT | THE EARTH COUNCIL
P.O. BOX 319-6100 | SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA | TEL: +506-205-1600 | FAX: +506-249-3500 | EMAIL:
info@earthcharter.org
