

Chapter I

The Organization of the Earth Charter Initiative

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The Earth Charter Initiative is an international movement of individuals and organizations that share the Earth Charter vision and are committed to promoting and implementing its guiding principles. A significant number of Earth Charter activities have been organized by the International Secretariat. Many others have been undertaken by Earth Charter focal points at a national level as well as by organizations that have made the Earth Charter a priority and which act as partners with the International Secretariat.

The Earth Charter Initiative is comprised of the following elements:

- Commission;
- Steering Committee;
- International Secretariat;
- Focal points;
- Partner Organizations;
- Individuals.

The Commission, Steering Committee and Secretariat make up the formal structure of the Initiative. However, these elements have not been legally incorporated as a Non-governmental Organization (NGO). This structure is formal only in the sense that it is the publicly declared organizational structure of the Initiative and operates in ways similar to a legally incorporated NGO. These formal elements are complemented by the activities and contributions of an informal network of volunteer individuals and organizations in many different countries from all regions of the world. Some of these organizations have been recognized by the International Secretariat as national Earth Charter “focal points.” Others have been recognized by the Secretariat as “affiliated” or “partner” organizations. Such recognition has occurred via the exchange of letters.

Through its informal structure the Secretariat has encouraged a large number of groups and individuals to contribute to the mission of the Initiative by promoting, endorsing or using the Earth Charter in a variety of ways appropriate to local circumstances. Such engagement has generated a significant sense of ownership and on-going commitment such that the Initiative can be called a global grassroots movement for social reform. There is no doubt that many of the accomplishments to date are a result of the continuous enthusiasm and involvement of these volunteer individuals and groups who over the years have kept the Earth Charter Initiative alive. The maintenance of such an open and

participatory venture on a global scale is unique and a powerful example of how civil society can collaborate across political and cultural divides in the search for a more sustainable future. An Earth Charter Initiative Organization Chart is included at the end of this chapter detailing the formal and informal components discussed above.

Over the decade of the nineties the Secretariat of the Earth Charter Initiative was based at the Earth Council and functioned as a project under its umbrella. As a project, it was managed by an International Coordinator functioning under the Earth Council Executive Director and at the same time reporting to the Commission and its board. During that phase the main purpose of the Secretariat was to promote and coordinate a consultation process and the drafting of the Earth Charter.

In the year 2000, when the consultation process was completed and the Earth Charter launched, the Commission, considering that the Earth Charter Initiative had grown significantly, decided to create a Steering Committee to oversee Initiative operations and to separate the Earth Charter management from the Earth Council. Since then the Earth Charter International Secretariat has been reporting directly to the Steering Committee.

A) Earth Charter Commission

The Earth Charter Commission was established in early 1997 to oversee the consultation and drafting process and to approve a final version of the Charter, which was released in March, 2000, at the Peace Palace in The Hague. The full Earth Charter Commission met twice: in March 1997 and March 2000. In the year 2000 the decision was made that “the Commission would have no executive functions but would be the repository of constitutional responsibility with the authority to approve any fundamental changes in the terms of reference of the Earth Charter campaign recommended by the Steering Committee.”¹ Since then the Commission has been kept informed about the developments of the Initiative; members have been encouraged to help promote the Earth Charter through their areas of activities; and a number of them have represented the Initiative in different contexts. Commission members have also been approached when a specific need emerged for their intervention and in cases concerning major changes in the priority of Initiative operations.

Commissioners vary considerably in the extent to which they actively promote the Earth Charter. Many Commission members when visiting a country, making speeches or presentations, have used the opportunity to share the Earth Charter. For instance, Maurice Strong presented the Earth Charter to the presidents of Brazil and Romania; Steven Rockefeller presented it to the Prime Minister of Montenegro; Wakako Hironaka presented the Charter to the Prime Minister of Japan; and Princess Basma, presented it to the government of Jordan.

¹ Strong, Maurice, Memorandum to the Earth Charter Commission of 7 April 2000.

B) Earth Charter Steering Committee

The role of the Earth Charter Steering Committee, which is co-chaired by members of the Commission, is to oversee the operation of the Earth Charter Initiative and Secretariat. It is “the executive decision making body with overall responsibility for the direction and oversight of the management and financing of the Earth Charter Initiative.”² Thus, it functions as an executive board. However the Steering Committee has only met physically as a whole body twice, and since 2001 a full meeting has not taken place due to financial constraints, although there have been some smaller gatherings. Therefore, decisions and information sharing have been accomplished through e-mails and telephone conversations. In that context, the Steering Committee reviews the Secretariat’s financial statements and fundraising proposals, but it does not have fiscal responsibility for the Secretariat. The Steering Committee has four co-chairs. Over the years, the two most active co-chairs, Steven Rockefeller and Ruud Lubbers have been intimately involved in the operations of the Secretariat and the activities of the Initiative.

C) Earth Charter Secretariat

The Earth Charter Initiative International Secretariat is based in San José, Costa Rica. The Secretariat provides support for the Commission and Steering Committee, manages major programs and global undertakings, and coordinates work with a global network of Earth Charter focal points in 54 countries and a number of partner organizations. The role of the International Secretariat is to facilitate and catalyze collaborative efforts to advance the implementation of the mission and objectives of the Earth Charter Initiative. The working team consists of three staff members (an executive director, an education programme manager, and a project officer), and from time to time its efforts have been complemented by some volunteer support.

In 2000 the Secretariat was given a mandate from the Commission to develop programs to promote the use and incorporation of the Earth Charter in business, faith groups, youth, indigenous peoples, governments, and the media sector. However, later (between 2002 and 2003), it was decided by the Steering Committee that the Secretariat should limit its work to a subset commensurate with its financial means and of greatest interest to the network of Earth Charter supporters it served. Consequently, as a priority, programs were developed in the areas of (1) education, (2) local communities, and (3) political support and endorsement.

The Secretariat undertakes a diverse array of tasks in support of the above programs, including: disseminating and promoting the Earth Charter; organizing workshops at the national level; participating in major international events such as the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development and the IUCN World Conservation Congress;

² Ibid.

conducting on-going communication with interested individuals and organizations; developing basic resource materials; continually updating the three versions of the Earth Charter website in English, Spanish and French (www.earthcharter.org); producing and distributing the monthly *Newsflash*; and overseeing the work of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative (see comments below). Examples of resources developed by the Secretariat are: the Earth Workshop Toolkit “What can I do with the Earth Charter?”; the Earth Charter *Handbook*; the Earth Charter and Business Guide; and the Earth Charter Teaching Guidebook. The Secretariat reports periodically to all members of the Steering Committee and has particularly close communication with the co-chairs.

The Secretariat functioned in Costa Rica first under the umbrella of the Earth Council, then under the patronage of the University for Peace. Based on a Memorandum of Understanding, the finances and accounts of the Secretariat are managed by the University for Peace. The University also offers technical computer and website support to the Secretariat. In early 2005 the Secretariat initiated the process of formally registering itself in Costa Rica as an NGO.

The Secretariat benefits from the unique support of seven volunteer Senior Advisors. A volunteer International Advisory Committee was established to assist the design and implementation of the Education Programme. An advisory committee was also established for the Local Community Programme. The Education Programme Advisory Committee has been active, contributing to two online discussion forums and producing a framework document. Because of limited funding, the Local Communities Programme has yet to be activated.

D) Earth Charter Youth Initiative

The Earth Charter Youth Initiative (ECYI) warrants further comment. It is a youth led initiative put together by an international core-group of young people from different countries committed to the Earth Charter and to bringing it to a larger number of young people worldwide. All members of the ECYI work on a volunteer basis. The ECYI objectives are to: (a) ensure that youth play an active role in promoting the values and principles of the Earth Charter; (b) work with youth organizations, networks and individuals to share the Earth Charter as a tool for promoting an ethic for justice, sustainability and peace; and (c) take the mission and aims of the Earth Charter Initiative and make them alive, relevant and applicable to young people around the world. Individuals and groups have been joining the ECYI with the only criteria being their commitment to actively promote the Earth Charter locally and internationally. There are approximately 200 youth members of this network from 30 countries, coordinated by a team of 5 people and facilitated by an overall coordinator, now based in Germany. The ECYI is functioning under the oversight of the Earth Charter Secretariat. (See also Chapter 7 on Youth.)

E) Partner Organizations

As noted above, partners are organizations that have been promoting the Earth Charter, supporting the Secretariat in many different ways, and using the Earth Charter in their programmes and/or policies and actions. Among the partner organizations collaborating with the Earth Charter Initiative are: the Association Pour la Terre; Boston Research Center for the 21st Century; Center for Respect of Life and Environment; Green Cross International; Institute Paulo Freire; IUCN Commission on Environmental Law; Soka Gakkai International; The UN University for Peace, The Humane Society of United States and the World Resources Institute.

F) Focal Points

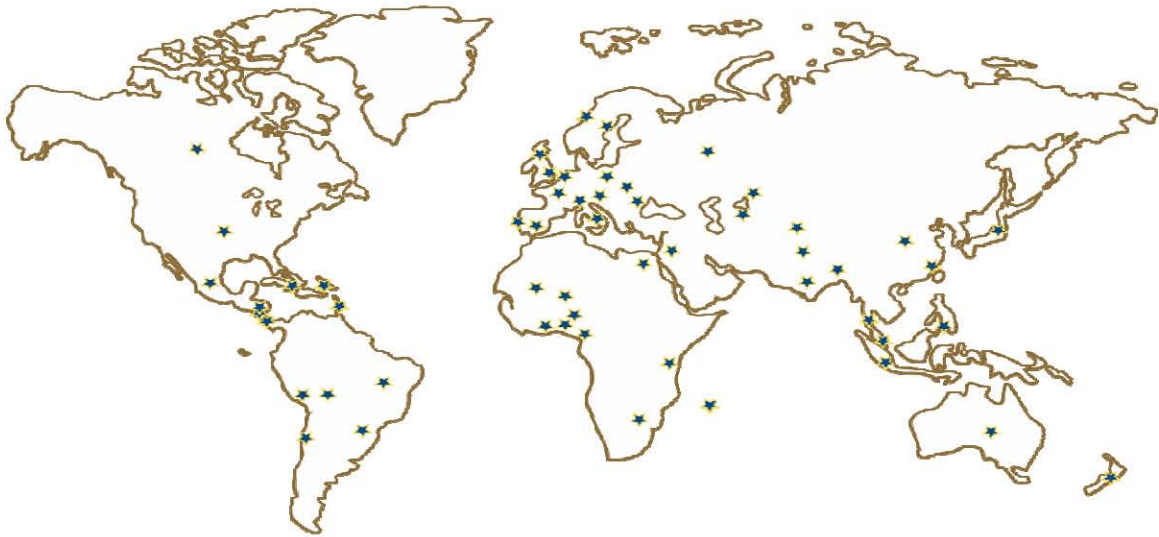
In 1997 the Earth Council, acting as the Secretariat of the Initiative started to invite groups to form Earth Charter National Committees comprising representatives of different sectors of society such as civil society organizations, community, educational, business, and government representatives. The original purpose for National Committees was to coordinate a consultation process and offer feedback on the Earth Charter drafts. Gradually, this role evolved to promoting the Earth Charter, translating it into local languages, seeking endorsements, and now incorporating the Earth Charter into different areas of activity.

Thus, since the year 2000 national committees gradually evolved into Earth Charter Focal Points. Focal points are organizations or individuals which promote and use the Earth Charter and represent the Initiative in their country. Out of the 69 existing focal points, the secretariat has Memoranda of Understanding with 18 of them with the purpose of establishing a set of agreements for the relationship. These organizations use their existing resources and infrastructure to act as a focal point.

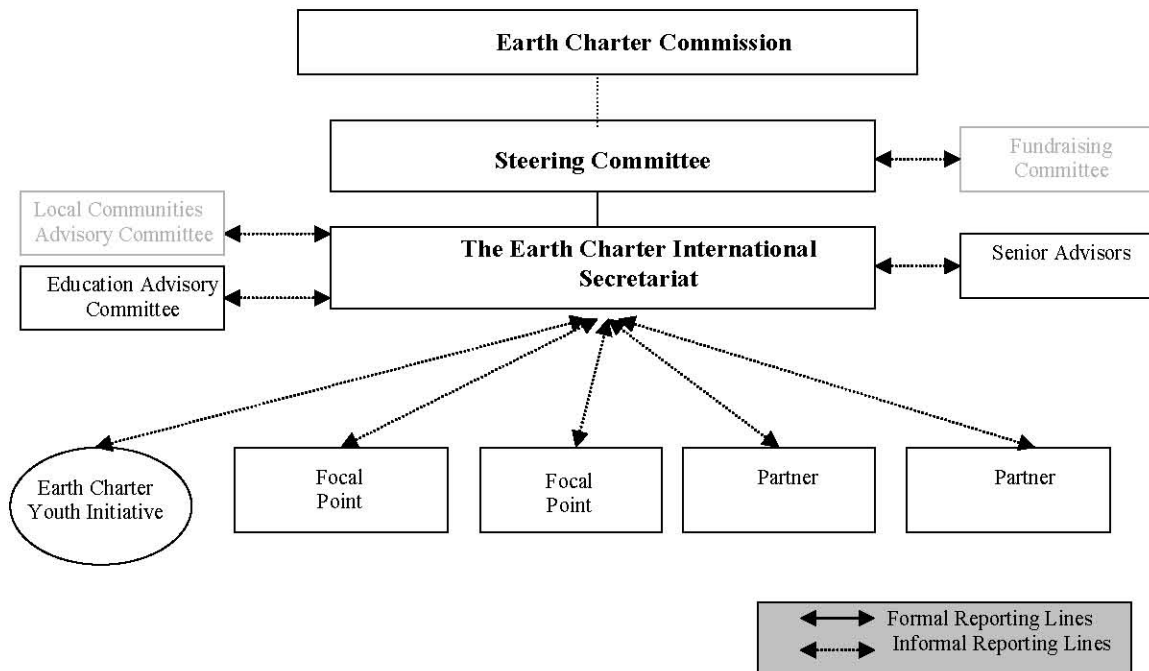
Naturally, some focal points are more active than others—for example, Armenia, Australia, Costa Rica, Holland, Mexico, Russia, Spain and the United States are very active. Activities range from incorporating the Earth Charter in their host organization's policies and programs to raising awareness on the Earth Charter and engaging other organizations and individuals in their region to endorse and use the Earth Charter. Focal points have translated the document into local languages when needed. Many have added the Earth Charter text to their website or simply added a reference to it; ten specific Earth Charter websites have been put in place by focal points in an effort to more effectively promote the Earth Charter message to their constituencies or country. There is an understanding that focal points report their activities on the Earth Charter to the Secretariat.

Below is a map identifying the location of Earth Charter focal points. See the end of this chapter for a complete list of Focal Points and partner organizations.

Earth Charter Focal Points Worldwide



Earth Charter Initiative Organization Chart



G) Conclusions and Recommendations

It has not been the intention of the Commission to have an over-centralized or large organizational structure nor to control the different efforts that are inspired by the Earth Charter. The current informal structure has allowed a number of organizations to feel part of the Initiative and to significantly contribute to its mission. This “loose volunteer network” has enabled groups to engage and have a sense of belonging, rather than feeling they are outsiders or are contributing to someone else’s initiative.

It has been difficult for the Secretariat to monitor all the efforts that have emerged, closely support them, or exert an appropriate degree of quality control. For example, major activities are undertaken without the Secretariat’s knowledge. Some groups have even raised funds independently, using as leverage the Earth Charter Initiative and logo.

Any organization or movement has, to a certain extent, a range of alternatives on how to function with regard to its level of centralization or control. Options range from a loose and decentralized *modus operandi* to a controlled and centralized management. Clearly, the Secretariat does not have the capacity in its current form to manage a tightly organized global network. Furthermore, such centralized control would not be welcomed by many of the partner organizations and volunteers. However, all those committed to the Earth Charter must accept something of the shared responsibilities regarding how the Initiative functions and is managed. It is critical that someone be responsible for ensuring that the integrity of the Earth Charter is maintained in all activities that purport to make use of and promote the Earth Charter. Also, it is difficult to imagine how the Earth Charter Initiative can continue as a global civil society movement for social reform towards sustainability without someone’s taking responsibility for the necessary catalyzing and coordination. But, where will the resources come from to ensure the ongoing functioning of the secretariat?

One option for the Secretariat is to strengthen and formalize its relationships with some key existing organizations and partners that have legitimacy, capacity and a stable structure. Such organizations could eventually act as Earth Charter “nodes” either to a specific sector like education or business or to a region. These “nodes” could function on behalf of the Secretariat in their specific fields.

The role of the Steering Committee must be strengthened and clarified. One option is to legally incorporate the Initiative so that the Steering Committee changes into a formal organizational board with legal and fiscal responsibilities (functioning as a board of directors). The evaluation process needs to consider questions such as the form of incorporation (presumably a foundation or not-for-profit) and the constitution of the new governing board’s membership.

As noted above, some partner organizations have been able to raise funds for their Earth Charter activities using the Earth Charter Initiative and logo as leverage. To the best of our knowledge, these activities have all been legitimate and have generated great benefit to the Initiative as a whole. The use of the logo has been largely based on prior consent of the Secretariat. However, in all cases, no proceeds have flowed to the Secretariat. The issue of using the Earth Charter as a vehicle for raising revenue is complex. However, the issue cannot be ignored in considering the future of the Initiative. Therefore, the assessment process needs to consider what kind of agreements should exist for the use of the Earth Charter and logo in fundraising activities.

When clearer priorities for the future have been identified and fundraising prospects have been established, the accountability of the Steering Committee, Secretariat and focal points must be strengthened and procedures for the periodic evaluation of related activities should be set in place.

H) Overview of Priority Areas from 2000 to 2005

The table below shows areas of concentration upon which the Secretariat has worked and how priorities shifted over the years.

Between the years 2000 and 2002 significant effort was given to dissemination and endorsement of the Earth Charter, then priority moved to seeing ways to implement the Charter in local communities and education and to a certain extent utilized among the youth.

MAIN ACTIVITES	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<i>PHASE I: Dissemination and Endorsement</i>						
Translating the Earth Charter						
Disseminating it broadly						
Seeking endorsements						
Seeking governmental support						
Implementing the Type II partnership						
<i>PHASE II: Implementation</i>						
By Educational Institutions (formal & nonformal)						
By Local Communities						
By Youth Groups						
By Faith Groups						
By Business						

Darker = highest priority

Mid-color = somewhat of a priority

Lightest = not a priority

Appendix I. List of Focal Points and Partner Organizations

Focal Points

AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Benin

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