

## Chapter VII

### The Earth Charter Youth Initiative

Michael Slaby, Earth Charter Youth Initiative Coordinator  
with contributions from Melanie Ashton, Dumisani Nyoni, and Renaud Richard

#### A) Introduction

Since its launch in the year 2000, the Earth Charter has been an inspiration and call to action for thousands of young people around the world. In addition, the drafting process was supported by youth activities in various countries. As a catalyst for these spontaneous activities, the Earth Charter Youth Initiative was created in 2000 as a network of youth organizations and individuals who share a common interest in the values of sustainable development as they are expressed in the Earth Charter. The Internet is used as the main means of communication and exchange of experience. Because the Youth Initiative has primarily depended on the enthusiasm of volunteers to fuel its activities, a lot of potential remains untapped. There are many more young people actually using the Earth Charter than those who are participating in the created network (such as Roots and Shoots, SGI, Earth Scouts etc.).

The ECYI was put together by a core-group of young people from different countries committed to the Earth Charter and active in bringing it to a larger number of young people worldwide. Individuals and groups who do not advocate hatred or violence can join the ECYI. The only criteria are actively promoting the Earth Charter locally and internationally. The aim of the ECYI is to have a cultural diverse network with a thorough understanding of the Earth Charter principles and values. To date, around 200 activists and youth organizations from more than 30 countries have joined the network and communicate through the e-group of [youth@earthcharter.org](mailto:youth@earthcharter.org)

#### The objectives of the Youth Initiative are to:

- Work with youth organizations, networks and individuals to share the Earth Charter as a tool for promoting an ethic of justice, sustainability and peace.
- Take the mission and aims of the Earth Charter Initiative and make them alive, relevant and applicable to young people around the world.
- Ensure that youth play an active role in promoting the values and principles of the Earth Charter.

Another objective of the ECYI is to expand its network in order to help disseminate the Earth Charter. This is done through networking and workshops.

The following pages will highlight the main activities and achievements of the ECYI.

## **B) Structure of the ECYI and Assistance from the International Secretariat of the Earth Charter Initiative in Costa Rica**

In 2000, it became apparent that the involvement of young people in the Earth Charter process had to be given greater attention and effort. A then 18-year-old volunteer from Zimbabwe, Dumisani Nyoni, was based at the Earth Charter Secretariat. Dumisani was tasked with developing a network of young people and organizations interested in working with and collaborating with the Earth Charter Initiative, and using the Earth Charter as a tool and guide in their work.

Using Internet technologies to reach out to thousands of young people and groups via the internet and email, information on the Earth Charter was sent out and an invitation made for young people to participate in the Earth Charter process globally and to seize the opportunity to ensure that youth were part of this historic movement. Many positive responses came through from young people all over the globe, inspired by the message of the Earth Charter and the promise of building a new platform for sustainability in the years to come based on a spirit of interconnectedness, global understanding and a shift in our ethical commitment to a more just and sustainable world.

What were apparent from the onset of founding the Earth Charter Youth Initiative were three clear guiding principles:

- That we cannot have a global dialogue about the future without including and involving young people in a meaningful way;
- That youth, when given the space, can engage with global issues with as much passion and commitment as the older generation. The purpose of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative is to provide that space;
- That it is essential to develop tools and resources to facilitate youth activism around the issues which the Earth Charter highlights.

In the past 5 years, a lot of progress has been made on these grounds as the Earth Charter Youth Initiative has grown. Tangible results have been achieved in several countries around the world, where young people have taken on the challenge to participate in this global dialogue and to make the Earth Charter relevant to their own communities.

Initially, the Earth Charter Youth Initiative was a network of young people and organizations supported by a volunteer coordinator to integrate and use the Earth Charter in their programs and activities. It can at times be a challenge to find tangible and practical ways to make the Earth Charter relevant in every context. The support of a youth coordinator was therefore invaluable to the success of the network in the early stages and will continue to be so in the on-going evolution of the initiative, with perhaps a full time coordinator needed at this stage to ensure continuity and momentum.

As the Network expanded, more youth became involved in carrying out the vision of the Youth Initiative. A brief yearlong strategy was developed, which has evolved into an annual practice. The core team of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative put together a strategy document that they

help to execute in partnership with the Earth Charter secretariat in San José, Costa Rica.

The Earth Charter secretariat in Costa Rica, although strapped for resources, has made efforts to support the Youth Initiative throughout this time. On occasion, partial funding has been made available to young people to participate and represent the Earth Charter at various events such as the WSSD PrepCom in Bali, Indonesia. Furthermore, the continued inclusion of the youth voice in the Earth Charter's website and publications has kept the perspective of young people present in the global work of the initiative. A lot of work still has to be done to generate adequate resources for the Earth Charter Youth Initiative to reach its potential.

In 2002, The ECYI received support from the International Secretariat, which employed Nicole Jiron Beirute as international youth coordinator. Under her guidance, several youth friendly Earth Charter materials were produced (see below) and the loose network of the ECYI was given a more organized structure. As a result of these efforts, a core-group of five volunteer individuals from at least three continents was established to coordinate the network.

Renaud Richard from France, who worked at the Secretariat from October 2002 to June 2003, was able to spend around 20% of his time on coordinating the ECYI. Inter alia he participated in the preparations of draft youth reports for the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, updated the youth section of the international Earth Charter website at [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org) and created the group mail of [youth@earthcharter.org](mailto:youth@earthcharter.org) as the main means of communication for the international network of the ECYI. This newly established e-mail network soon rose to around 100 youth organizations and individuals from some 20 countries and since then doubled its size to around 200 activists and organizations from some 30 countries. Although high in numbers, this e-mail facility is very scarcely used. There are maybe 10 to 15 mails sent per year.

From August to October 2003, Michael Slaby from Germany did an online-based internship for the Secretariat and spent 20 hours per week formulating a comprehensive funding proposal for the ECYI. He also strengthened its network and programs. Parts of this general and broad based proposal were sent to the Council of Europe's European Youth Foundation but could not reach acceptance. After his internship, Michael continued his effort to coordinate the ECYI on a voluntary basis. His studies allow him to spend around 5 to 10 hours per week on the tasks of:

- Answering requests of interested youth (for this purpose, the e-mail address of [youthcoordinator@earthcharter.org](mailto:youthcoordinator@earthcharter.org) was established),
- Maintaining and expanding the Programme of Earth Charter Youth Groups (see below),
- Updating the international homepage;
- Informing the network about current developments;
- Representing the ECYI at international conferences.



### **C) Youth Friendly Earth Charter Materials Produced**

#### Earth Charter Workshop Tool-Kit

This Earth Charter Workshop Tool Kit was compiled by Nicole Jirón Beirute. It is an instrument and guide to use when organizing an Earth Charter Workshop. It has different sections from which you can select the one most appropriate to your goals and activities.

#### PowerPoint Presentation on the Earth Charter and the ECYI

PowerPoint presentation on the Earth Charter, the Earth Charter Youth Initiative and the creation of Earth Charter Youth Groups, prepared by Hamza Alamoosh, Jordan.

#### ECYI Fact Sheet

The core facts about the mission, the aims, the structure, and the programs of the ECYI.

#### Earth Charter Youth Groups – Toolkit

Earth Charter Youth Groups. Why? What? How? ... and Resources!

A 5 page toolkit to help you start your own Earth Charter Youth Group!

+ Reports of successful Earth Charter introductory workshops, presentations, speeches, outreach programs and other youth activities

The materials mentioned above can be found at [www.earthcharter.org/resources/youth](http://www.earthcharter.org/resources/youth).

### **D) Youth Involvement in the Drafting Process (1997 – 2000)**

Severn Cullis-Suzuki from Vancouver, Canada was nominated as youth representative in the Earth Charter Commission, which oversaw the drafting process. Severn reached fame through the touching speech that she gave in front of the heads of states assembled at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)-the Rio Summit. At that time, Severn was 12 years old. At the age of 17, Severn participated in the Rio + 5 Forum and made sure that the concerns of young people were taken seriously in the process of drafting the Earth Charter. Inter alia, she was instrumental in the inclusion of principle 12c in the final version of the Earth Charter. This principle stresses the need to: “Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.” The launch of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative was inspired by this ethical principle.

### **E) The Launch of the ECYI in 2000**

#### Quote from the Annual Report 2000:

The Earth Charter calls on us to increase our responsibility regarding the inclusion of future generations, as it is appropriate that those who will inherit the Earth be given voice now. The following are examples of some projects developed through the ECYI to achieve this goal.

### Pole-to-Pole 2000

Pole-to-Pole was a nine-month journey made by 8 young adults seeking to initiate and support ongoing environmental and humanitarian projects throughout the world. The Pole-to-Pole team invited their audiences to pledge a shared vision of world harmony in action, by writing down their personal vows and entrusting them to the expedition. The team took these symbols of personal commitment (known as the Millennium Challenges) and brought them to their final destination, the South Pole, to show the world that individuals can really make a difference, step by step. On their journey south (through the Americas), the Pole-to-Pole team passed through Costa Rica and met with Dumisani Nyoni of the ECI. They agreed to partner and carried the Earth Charter flag with them to the South Pole where, on January 1, 2001, the flag was symbolically planted. “We too must carry the Earth Charter, step by step, and embed it deeply” expressed one of the team members.

### Youth Employment Summit (YES) Campaign, Education Development Center, USA

In September 2000, the Earth Charter Initiative connected with the Youth Employment Summit Campaign, a project of the Boston-based Education Development Center. Through this collaboration, a project was developed with the support of the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank focusing on the “promotion of youth led enterprises in off grid renewable energy.” The collaboration was inspired by principle 12 (c) of the Earth Charter.

By collaborating with the Earth Charter and launching the multi-year project focused on creating sustainable livelihoods, the YES Campaign shifted the emphasis of employment creation for youth to include environmental sustainability as a core piece of the Framework through which the vision of the global campaign is being executed.

An online database of effective practices in renewable energy has been launched ([www.yesweb.org/gkr/](http://www.yesweb.org/gkr/)). This database contains several publications and newsletters highlighting the importance of renewable energy and offering practical advice and research on generating jobs and promoting entrepreneurial opportunities that also take care of the planet we live on. Most excitingly, five entrepreneurs from Ghana, Malawi, India, Peru and Georgia were supported in launching renewable energy enterprises of their own, demonstrating that young people can indeed succeed in addressing economic needs and building sustainable communities.

The Earth Charter is a tool that helps to define important conversations around the global. It enables creative, practical solutions to emerge while at the same time keeping a focus on the essence of sustainable development. The experience of the linkages between the Earth Charter and the YES Campaign tell an important story of the power of coupling the core issues of sustainable community development and economic empowerment with the energy and passion of the younger generation.

## **F) Bringing the Earth Charter to Johannesburg: Events leading up to the WSSD (2001-2002)**

### Asia Pacific Earth Charter Conference

Over 20 young people participated in the Asia-Pacific Earth Charter Conference held in Brisbane from 29 November to 2 December 2001. The conference, organized by the Queensland Earth Charter committee, featured young people as members of the organizing team, as the presenters in the formal program, and as facilitators of workshops. The conference was a great success and provided young people from the Asia-Pacific Region the opportunity to network, learn more about the Earth Charter and continue the growth of the Earth Charter youth network.

### International Young Professionals Summit

The International Young Professionals Summit (IYPS) 2001 brought together 120 young professionals from around the world in order to highlight, discuss, inspire and facilitate action in relation to key issues (the themes of the Summit) which are currently facing humanity and its future. These issues included: poverty; social capital; environment; and sustainability. In bringing together international young professionals, including those already involved in efforts to address these social problems, the Summit sought to match specific problems with possible solutions. A key strategy for achieving this was through linking people with a working knowledge of problems with those in positions to develop and implement solutions.

Recognizing the synergies between the themes of IYPS and the goals of the Earth Charter, Melanie Ashton proposed an Earth Charter workshop to the organizers. The aim of the workshop was to introduce young people to the Earth Charter and encourage the meeting to endorse the Earth Charter and the delegates to pledge their support to it. As a result, the following Pledge of support was included in the official Resolutions document of the IYPS:

“The Earth Charter - Values and Principles for a Sustainable Future.” We, as delegates of IYPS 2001 wish to pledge our full support to this document. In particular, there are several elements of the Earth Charter that we believe are especially relevant to us as young professionals that we wish to re-affirm. These include, the now especially relevant need to promote a culture of tolerance, non-violence and peace, by building democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable and peaceful. We recognize the necessity to encourage and support mutual understanding, solidarity and co-operation among all peoples and within all nations. We re-affirm the need for social and economic justice through the eradication of poverty as an ethical, social and environmental imperative. We are highly concerned about the grave state of the majority of the world's people and re-affirm the need to guarantee the right to potable water, clean air and environment, food security, education, health care, shelter and safe sanitation.

We realize the effects of over-consumption, and re-affirm the need to adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard the Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights and community well being. We recognise that responsible and sustainable consumption of world resources is the responsibility of nations, communities and individuals. As young professionals, we view triple bottom line accounting and

socially responsible investment as a priority. Immediate action needs to be taken. We have taken it upon ourselves to initiate projects that respond to the issues and needs raised by the Charter, projects that involve young professionals and that will begin to contribute to the securing of a sustainable future. Pledging to the Earth Charter as a delegation is a symbolic gesture of solidarity and demonstrates our continued commitment, passion and integrity towards a sustainable future. Our commitment to the Earth Charter is also a benchmark in our lives of visual pro-active development and compassion for all life on earth.

As young professionals taking part in IYPS 2001, we pledge our full support to the Earth Charter and will strive to promote and disseminate the Earth Charter in our personal and professional lives. We will raise awareness, disseminate and encourage the Earth Charter and its adoption by local communities, organisations, governments and networks. We fully support the endorsement of the Earth Charter at WSSD 2002 and will urge our governments to endorse the Earth Charter.

#### The United World College's Youth Action Summit (UWCYAS)

This event was held in Utrecht, The Netherlands, in July 2002. 'Our Planet' was the main theme of the first week, during which the Earth Charter Youth Initiative was very involved. Five international members of the ECYI participated and used the Summit as their first personal meeting. For them, the Youth Action Summit was an incredible opportunity to accomplish the following:

- Start the process of consolidation of the Earth Charter youth network and its relationship with the whole Earth Charter Initiative.
- Start a network with other organizations, specifically International Youth Parliament, UNEP Youth Reporter, and others.
- Promote the Earth Charter through workshops and opinion exchanges during the meetings and the free time.
- Have the Earth Charter presented to governments at WSSD in Johannesburg by the official youth delegates of UWCYAS

#### UNEP Global Youth Forum in Denmark, Side event on the Earth Charter

The UNEP Global Youth Forum 2002 was held from 25 to 30 March, 2002 In Århus Denmark. The event was attended by over 120 young people from each continent and was considered a lead up event to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. At this event, the Earth Charter was presented at an evening side event. The event was an opportunity for young people unfamiliar with the Earth Charter to learn more about it and about how it can be used in young people's activities around the world.

#### PrepCom IV Indonesia - 27 May to 7 June 2002

The fourth PrepCom to WSSD was held In Indonesia. The Earth Charter Initiative was well represented and continued to stress the need to base political actions for sustainable development on a sound ethical framework The Initiative called on the WSSD to welcome the Earth Charter, and on individual governments to endorse it. This event Introduced more young people to the



Earth Charter, namely members of the Youth Caucus. Young people supported the efforts of the Earth Charter Initiative and the Youth Caucus committed itself to publishing and supporting the Earth Charter. Young people also participated in the Earth Charter Partnership working session, at the Bali Hilton Hotel on June 1 and 2 and In the Cultural event organized by the Earth Charter Secretariat.

#### World Summit on Sustainable Development, 26 August to 4 September 2002

The WSSD was held In Johannesburg South Africa from 26 August to 4 September 2002. Over 150 young people attended this event, forming part of the Youth Caucus. Three members of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative, Melanie Ashton, Linley Black, and Renaud Richard, attended. These young people worked with other members of the Earth Charter Delegation to promote the Earth Charter and coordinate the numerous side events. Additionally, they were active participants in the youth caucus, ensuring that young people were well informed about the Importance of the Earth Charter. As a result, the Youth Caucus supported the Earth Charter and included the following points in their final statement:

- Shared responsibility and interdependence and the prerequisite of prior and informed consent must be recognized.
- An integrated ethical framework of shared values, such as the Earth Charter, must be established to guide us toward the common good and effective implementation of the sustainable development agenda at all levels.
- Commitment to existing global governance agreements is essential.

### **G) The Programme of Earth Charter Youth Groups (2003-2005)**

#### Outline:

In April 2003, the ECYI launched the Programme of Earth Charter Youth Groups. A 5-page toolkit called “Earth Charter Youth Groups. Why? What? How? ... and Resources” was drafted and posted on several international websites. The Programme was developed to strengthen the international youth network and help youth from all over the world to build activities based on the Earth Charter. An Earth Charter Youth Group is an inclusive committee, group or network of young activists and youth organizations working to bring to life the vision of the Earth Charter in their communities, locally and nationally.

#### The general objectives of ECYGs are:

- To inspire people locally to adopt sustainable ways of living and to be active in projects related to sustainable development and the Earth Charter.
- To make the Earth Charter known and implemented in a broad public.
- To empower young people to take action and change the world.
- To enjoy life in giving joy to others!!!

Since April 2003, the following ECYGs have been created:

#### Sierra Leone

By autumn 2003, four local ECYGs of approximately 20 people had been created in the West-



African Sierra Leone, which is one of the poorest countries of the world. The Sierra Leonean population had to endure one of the most horrible and brutal civil wars in the last decade of the twentieth century, leaving thousands of them dead, traumatized, raped, or maimed. In the process of post-conflict resolution and reconciliation, the Earth Charter has been discovered by the Sierra Leonean youth as a guide to creating a culture of peace, understanding and toleration. Together, the four local groups form the national Earth Charter Youth Group-Sierra Leone. Its membership consists of a broad range of individuals, such as: representatives of youth NGOs, networks and umbrella youth organizations, pupils from different secondary schools, university and tertiary students, and ex-combatants.

They introduced the Earth Charter to hundreds of young activists at different workshops and set up programs of

- promoting a culture of peace
- having the Earth Charter used as an educational tool at schools and universities
- offering youth leadership training
- environmental protection
- media programs

In several workshops, they sensitized ex-combatants to the universal components of a culture of peace and helped to reintegrate them into their communities, where they sometimes were forced to commit atrocities during the times of war.

In one of their activities, the ECYG-Sierra Leone instigated the collection of garbage from the homes of residents of the Firestone Community. The litter was formerly disposed in the nearby Nikol Stream and had thus caused pollution and sometimes even led to quarrels among the members of the community because the water is also used for drinking and washing. The garbage collection created some form of employment for young people, helped to create conducive sanitary conditions in the community and also reduced the number of conflicts over the pollution of the river. The garbage is now deposited at the approved government's dump site Bomeh.

More information about the ECYG-Sierra Leone can be found at [www.ecygsierraleone.8m.net](http://www.ecygsierraleone.8m.net).

### Jordan

In Jordan, the "Black Iris Earth Charter Youth Group" was established in the complex of the Princess Basma Youth Resource Center, which is part of the Queen Zein Al Sharaf Institute for Development (Zenid) that serves as Jordan's national focal point for the Earth Charter Initiative. The group is named after the black iris of Jordan, a flower which is the national symbol for growth and renewal. It is coordinated by a core-group of seven young leaders from diverse social, ethnic and religious backgrounds affiliated to different youth organizations in Jordan. The broad membership of the group is mainly constituted of the students of various universities in Jordan.

To date, Black Iris has achieved the following:

- Developed a national strategy to disseminate the EC among youth of Jordan, aiming at

launching youth led initiatives based on the EC's integrated vision of sustainable development, justice and peace .

- Created Arabic EC materials.
- Started building a regional EC network with active youth in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, aiming at promoting a culture of peace in this large conflict area
- Introduced the Earth Charter to lots of governmental and non-governmental organization, including the Jordanian Federation of Women
- Made the Earth Charter one of the supporting documents of Jordan's National Strategy for Youth
- Contributed articles to the Youth Section in the Jordanian newspaper ALRAI, discussing topics such as international development issues, youth development issues and democracy
- Fostered discussions on youth participation guided by Earth Charter principles in the Jordan Forum for Youth and Culture, which is an umbrella organization for youth led initiatives
- Initiated programs of community service, such as: giving free lessons to orphans and non-privileged students at school and university levels, assisting youth with physical and social barriers and organizing projects to protect the local environment

### The Philippines

On the archipelago of Negros Occidental in the Philippines, the environmental youth organization entitled "Eco Trekkers Society" joined the ECYG-Programme in 2003 and started to use the Earth Charter in their local campaign against the introduction of genetically modified organisms. In these efforts, they organized expositions, workshops and local conferences to warn about the dangers of biologically engineered crops and used Earth Charter principle 5d as their ethical guideline. Thus, the Earth Charter has intensely been discussed in various local settings such as the Technological University of the Philippines in Visayas, on whose campus the Eco Trekkers are located.

Other activities include mountaineering, nature tours and local clean-ups. In a recent activity, the Eco Trekkers cleaned a coastline of 200 meters and collected 6 tons of litter. In their activities to disseminate the Earth Charter among NGOs, institutions and individuals in their area, the Eco Trekkers were able to reach their government, which considered using the Earth Charter in peace negotiations with rebel forces. One of the institutions which the Eco Trekkers encouraged to endorse the Charter is the national Youth for Sustainable Development Assembly, which consists of 9 Filipino youth-serving organizations. This network eventually included a workshop on the Earth Charter as one of the Programme highlights in its Nature Camp 2004 and thus reached several hundred young activists.

By calling themselves an Earth Charter Youth Group, the Eco Trekkers demonstrate their connectedness to other youth around the world who promote the vision of the Earth Charter in their respective local communities. For more info, see [www.freewebs.com/ecotreks/index.htm](http://www.freewebs.com/ecotreks/index.htm)

### *Earth Charter Youth Group – Mindanao*

Another ECYG was formed on the campus of the Mindanao Polytechnic State College (MPSC), in Cagayan de Oro, located on the Filipino archipelago of Mindanao. The group of twenty-two dynamic students aged 16 to 22 was created in October 2004 after their Biology Teacher introduced the Earth Charter to them and fostered a discussion about how they could use the Earth Charter to make a difference in their own community.

In one of their first activities inspired by the Earth Charter, this ECYG organized a local clean-up and collected 1.5 tons of garbage from a local coastline.

### Ethiopia:

In Jimma, the second largest city in Ethiopia, an Earth Charter Youth Ambassador encouraged teachers to use Earth Charter education material in their classes. Several youth organizations endorsed the Charter and are today using it as an ethical guide in their struggle against widespread threats of HIV, poverty and environmental degradation. In five different junior secondary schools, ECYGs have been created which focus on poverty eradication, tree-planting campaigns, waste collection, protection of human rights and the promotion of a culture of peace.

### Romania

In Constanta, Romania, the “Ovidius Teen Club” has been created on the campus of the local high school. The Club members heard about the Earth Charter in the discussions about how the school could participate in the UNESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. After linking the Charter to the club’s plans and projects, the teacher facilitating the club contacted the Earth Charter Youth Coordinator in early 2005 and communicated the interest of the club members to join the Earth Charter Youth Group program. Inter alia, the club runs projects such as:

- Protecting local natural reserves such as the Danube Delta,
- Protecting people against daily dangers such as food additives, electromagnetic radiation, alcohol, cigarettes and drug abuse,
- Resolving human conflicts and the generation gap and
- Finding solutions for environmental problems such as polluted water treatment and making paper out of algae.
- In their first brainstorming on the Earth Charter, the Ovidius Teen Club developed ideas for concise projects and activities relating to each of the sixteen main principles of the Earth Charter.

### Brazil

A group of students and professors from the Faculdades Jorge Amado, a Brazilian College, located in Salvador, Bahia, became an ECYG in early 2005. The students are majoring in International Relations and are doing research or implementing projects related to sustainable development, using the Earth Charter’s principles as a guideline for their work. Well known in their communities, they are now spreading their work throughout the neighborhood. Their activities include:

- Monitoring and evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals
- Identification of institutions that are implementing the MDG and the Earth Charter

- (data base + interviews)
- Development of donors and grantmakers database
- Seminars, short-term courses and workshops on the Earth Charter principles.

## USA

In the city of Bremerton, Washington, USA, the Next Generation Team of the non-profit organization Narrow Crossings has set up an ambitious Programme of forming a National Youth Forum for a Sustainable Future. They are currently planning for an event of exhibitions and activities to be held in New York, Seattle and San Francisco during the National Environmental Education Week in May 2006 and have elaborated a sophisticated funding proposal for this purpose, listing numerous renowned organizations as partners and supporters. The Earth Charter is used as one of their international references. The Next Generations Team applied for recognition as an Earth Charter Youth Group in April 2005. Currently, forms of partnership between Narrow Crossings and the Earth Charter Youth Initiative are being evaluated.

## **H) Other Earth Charter Activities**

In addition to the Earth Charter Youth Groups, various other youth organizations conducted dynamic activities to implement the Earth Charter. Here are a few examples:

### Earth Scouts

Earth Scouts is a co-ed youth organization launched at the 2002 Earth Charter Community Summit in Tampa, Florida and facilitated by the Institute for Ethics and Meaning. The Programme encourages youth of the age 3 to 17 to “Change the world one fun badge at a time!” Similar to the badge system of “normal” scout organizations, members of the Earth Scouts can earn a badge for each Earth Charter principle. Thus, the members are guided through a process of Earth Charter-related activities. The Earth Scouts encourages youth to explore their interdependence with the planet and humanity. Earth Scouts is more than just cleaning up a river or going on a hike—it is learning about how nature is dependent on our economic system and how economics are dependent on our culture and how our culture is dependent on us. And while the youth (and adults) are learning about this interdependence, they are enjoying the fellowship of peers while having fun.

### Earth Charter Concerts

The Earth Charter Concerts Season, organized by the Costa Rican Earth Charter Committee and celebrated at the Children’s Museum, started in May 2003. The season continued with a monthly concert for the next three months and concluded with great success.

The proposal for an *Earth Charter Concert Season* came up as an idea to promote the Earth Charter and sensitize Costa Rican youth to the Charter’s message. Until that moment educational efforts to promote the Earth Charter in Costa Rica had been through initiatives such as community workshops and training. The outreach of these initiatives had been very important. Nevertheless, no one had ever thought about the possibility of promoting the Earth Charter message through more informal initiatives and to larger audiences. Within this context, the idea of the *Earth Charter Concert Season* arose. This was an education proposal that aspired to attract, in one



venue, different kinds of young people and for them to join together with the same message, despite their differences. , each concert of the season brought together Rock and World Music, demonstrating that two groups that seemed irreconcilable could participate in the same concert and build jointly, in the midst of their differences, a whole new musical project. These concerts were an effort to offer opportunities to enjoy differences and see them, not as threatening, but as an opportunity to create something good.

#### Inclusive Leadership Adventures

Inclusive Leadership Adventures is a non-profit diversity education project in Canada, co-sponsored by Cowichan Valley Intercultural and Immigrant Aid Society and Canadian Mental Health Association – Cowichan Valley Branch. Both organizations have endorsed the Earth Charter and have their activities guided by the Earth Charter vision as they bring diverse people together in camp settings to explore, share, and celebrate social diversity and biodiversity.

Since autumn 2003, several Inclusive Leadership Adventures were conducted to explore the Earth Charter. Together with ECYI Coordinator Michael Slaby who made a lecture tour through the region of greater Vancouver, Vancouver Island and Salt Spring Island, the two Pole-to-Pole Representatives Renaud Richard and Dylan Spencer co-facilitated Advanced Training in Inclusive Leadership in May 2004. These trainings succeeded in their goal of moving beyond the words of the Earth Charter to develop deep emotional and intellectual connections. Participants left the Adventures with:

- A deeper understanding of the Earth Charter
- Appreciation of social diversity and biodiversity as gifts that enrich communities
- Inclusive leadership skills for acting in ways and guiding others to act in ways that respect and care for our diverse human family and all living beings in our Earth community
- Plans for local actions to take back to their homes, schools, neighborhoods and communities for implementing the principles of the Earth Charter. One of those plans has been elaborated by Kim Citton who then developed a Yoga Training based on the Earth Charter. In her sessions, she invites her students to connect the traditional yoga postures, which are named after plants, animals, structures and characters with corresponding principles of the Earth Charter and thus help to develop an “intrinsic” feeling of what these principles mean and stand for.
- Confidence that by sharing leadership locally, we are each contributing globally in ways that are making a world of difference for our human family and the larger living world.

#### **D) Expanding the Network: Partnerships with Other Youth Organizations**

During the last five years, members of the ECYI participated in several international conferences and were successful in establishing partnerships with other youth organizations and networks. However, given the weak situation of the ECYI in terms of stable coordination, much potential remains untapped. In the following, a few of these conferences and partnerships are depicted.

### Roots and Shoots

Another major youth organization that endorsed the Earth Charter is the Roots and Shoots youth Programme of the renowned Jane Goodall Institute. Roots and Shoots runs local youth chapters in various countries. Inter alia, the Earth Charter has been included into the educational guidebook “Lessons of Hope” that is used as the main educational tool for the groups. As with SGI, some forms of partnerships with the ECYI have been discussed but have not yet been realized.

### Soka Gakkai International Earth Charter Committee, Vancouver

A Soka Gakkai International Earth Charter Committee was established in Vancouver. The Committee, which is mainly run by young people, organized a major kick-off event for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development on May 7, 2005. This youth conference and exhibitions entitled “The World is Yours to Change” attracted more than 2000 participants and involved more than 30 local organizations. The Earth Charter was given a central role as an ethical guide and educational tool. Several different workshops, panels, and discussion circles were hosted and keynote addresses were given by renowned politicians and scholars. The organizations involved considered staying in touch after the conference and coordinating their activities for the Decade. The youth leaders of the SGI Committee now plan to invite other national and regional SGI structures to follow their example of forming Earth Charter Committees. Forms of closer partnerships between SGI and the ECYI were discussed at the Earth Charter in Action Conference in Urbino, Italy, in July 2003, but largely remain part of the untapped potential for the future.

### World Youth Peace Summit / European Peace Summit

In 2004, an official partnership was established between the ECYI and the World Youth Peace Summit, which was planned for October 2004 but was then postponed to 2006. The Summit will be organized by the Council of Religious Leaders that was established after the Millennium Peace Summit in New York in 2000. The aims of the summit are to form a global youth council to serve as a resource for the United Nations Security in the matters of world peace.

In May 2004, a European Youth Peace Summit was held in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. It brought together some 500 youth activists from Europe who developed an action plan and established a network. Members of the ECYI have participated in Sarajevo and are involved in the follow-up.

### Parliament of the World’s Religions, Barcelona, Spain, July 7 – 13, 2004

The Parliament of the World’s Religions held in Barcelona, Spain, from July 7-13, 2004, was a gathering of some 4,000 religious leaders, scholars, lay people and social activists from around the world. The Parliament’s panels and discussions focused on the topics of water, refugees, international debt, and religiously motivated violence. The Parliament put special emphasis on youth involvement.

ECYI Coordinator Michael Slaby organized a panel within the Parliament. The event, entitled “The Earth Charter: shared Values for Building a Peaceful, Just and Sustainable Future,” was

scheduled in the biggest venue at the Parliament and was attended by approximately 350 participants. Given its success and the interest shown, an international interfaith youth network was established. Michael joined this network and now makes links between the members of this network and the ECYI.

#### AGS Summer Institute on Sustainable Development, Braunwald, Switzerland

Also in July 2004, Michael Slaby hosted an Earth Charter Introductory Workshop at the Summer Institute on Sustainable Development - Youth Encounter on Sustainability (YES), Braunwald, Switzerland. The YES is a summer course organized yearly by the local Center on Sustainability at the Swiss Institute of Technology, Zurich. The local Center on Sustainability is part of the Alliance for Global Sustainability (AGS), a partnership between four technical universities: The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Tokyo, and Chalmers University of Technology. After the workshop, a partnership between AGS and the ECYI was forged. This partnership is becoming more concrete, as AGS is seeking the involvement of local ECYI members in some of their upcoming projects in Africa.

#### **J) Youth Activities at the Earth Charter + 5 Summit in Amsterdam**

The EC + 5 Summit in Amsterdam will be the first major personal meeting of 25 key members of the ECYI. In preparation of this gathering, international youth delegates have been selected for the purpose of ensuring a long-term planning. Thus, the summit will bring together the old and new leaders of the ECYI. Youth input for the thematic sessions will be prepared and a meeting between the ECYI members and Dutch networks for Sustainability will be prepared. Besides, several members of the ECYI contributed to the book “Towards a Sustainable World: The Earth Charter in Action” that will be launched at the event.

#### **K) Recommendations for the Future**

Bearing in mind that all the achievements documented in this report were reached without any major institutional or financial assistance—being mainly infused by the enthusiasm of a handful of volunteers—it can only be estimated what would be possible if the ECYI was given full-time coordination. The main programs depicted in the comprehensive funding proposal designed in 2003 are still important and worthy of funding.

##### 1. Establishment of Earth Charter Youth Groups in at least 15 countries over the next two years.

To make an impact at the local level, the ECYI requires the full engagement and involvement of youth based in each country. To promote the concept of Earth Charter Youth Groups, youths in at least 15 countries will receive technical support in developing well-coordinated and established youth groups taking action to promote the Earth Charter locally and nationally and to build partnerships. The main responsibility of securing funds for these initiatives will rest with the groups themselves.

Most of the support will be given in the form of well-printed Earth Charter materials which the groups can disseminate locally, as well as a technology infrastructure in the form of some web-space on the international website of the Earth Charter Initiative through which groups can disseminate information and network with one another. Direct financial support will be granted when possible only as seed funding to launch the Earth Charter Youth Group's activities.

It is important to note that nearly half of this goal has been reached even without any funding as ECYGs were created in seven countries. Given the high number of additional requests mainly coming from youth in Africa, there is a high potential which could be fueled through full-time coordination and seed funding.

2. Expand the local, national and global youth networks for sustainable development with the integrated framework of the Earth Charter

Many youth led organizations and youth networks are currently championing a variety of issues including environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development, peace and other specific areas that make up the broad concept of sustainable development. The Earth Charter's inclusive ethical vision recognizes that these problems are interdependent and indivisible and helps to shift from fragmented perspectives to address issues in a more integrated manner. Therefore, the EYCI will strive to engage existing youth-led organizations in using the Earth Charter as an integrated framework for the local activities of many youth groups around the world.

Thus, the ECYI will help to expand the local, national and global networks of young people active for sustainable development by bringing together youth NGOs, youth led organizations and networks as well as student groups and interested individual young people under the integrated ethical vision of the Earth Charter. In this, the ECYI will cooperate closely with the WSSD youth caucus, as a number of youths are members of both of these groups.

To facilitate the knowledge exchange, the youth section of the international website of the Earth Charter Initiative will be expanded and upgraded to enable young people to share experiences on undertaking locally-based projects that are in the spirit of the Earth Charter. In addition, a regular e-mail based newsletter will be developed to keep youth groups around the world informed on the progress of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative. The newsletter will also include information on tools and resources for promoting and implementing the Earth Charter, information about other youth led sustainable development initiatives and announcements of opportunities for youth participation in projects that are in the spirit of the Earth Charter.

*Concrete examples already exist of how the above activities can be achieved with high degrees of success (see [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org) ⇒ resources: youth). With the appropriate support, these activities can be scaled up and their impact broadened and deepened globally.*