

## **Climate Change and Rational Choices**

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I recently reread The Framework Convention on Climate Change hoping to find an inspiring call to action. After all, if the treaty is to succeed, it must situate climate change as a burning development issue. I was disappointed. The architects of the convention had constructed a treaty in the generic tradition. There were few attractive ornaments added to the basic framework. Then again that probably meant it could be sold faster to a wide variety of customers.

At the same time, just because the original drafters didn't pay attention to details doesn't mean we should miss the opportunity to rethink how we have gone wrong. Our search for answers leads us to question our basic assumptions about how we make decisions. The scientific data clearly indicates that increases in green house gases are undoing nature's careful ecological balance. Even when there are occasional doubts, nothing should prevent us from taking precautionary measures. Yet more than ever before, we, as a species, have fallen short of a romantic self image as rational beings. We fail over and over again to change our behavior even when we know what is in our best interest.

Confronting this irrational pattern and questioning the underpinnings of our motives is already progress. I am convinced that values, as much as science, lie at the heart of the climate change problem. That is one reason why the Earth Charter is so interesting. It is one of the few global initiatives that recognizes the need to reshape our basic outlook on nature.

For over a decade, the Earth Charter initiative has evolved to set forth fundamental principles for a sustainable way of life. Since the Earth Summit in 1992, thousands of individuals and NGOs have drafted and debated this document. The final version was launched in Paris last year as a "people's treaty." It sets forth a "values framework" for sustainable development and may be one of the essential missing elements to the climate change treaty.

The Charter is clear, to the point, and comprehensive. It notes that "We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future." It states that we must realize that when basic needs have been met, "human development is primarily about being more, not having more." The Charter calls for a change in our basic patterns of production, consumption and reproduction so as to safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights and community well being. This includes acting with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and relying increasingly on renewable energy sources.

Although technocratic solutions can provide some of the answers to the climate change problem, we also need to define a collective set of values that can put the issues into the context of the big picture. Hopefully, NGOs, governments and other actors in civil society will support the endorsement of this Charter by the UN General Assembly in 2002 at the tenth anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit. Dr. Soon-Young Yoon is an anthropologist.