

Earth Charter International Recommendations for the Zero Draft of the UNCSD (Rio+20) Outcome Document

Summary of Recommendations

1. Express responsibility to future generations by implementing the precautionary principle and establishing *Ombudspersons for Future Generations* at global, national and local levels.
2. Create a green economy based on *strong sustainability* and adopt alternative economic indicators to GDP that include social well-being and ecological integrity.
3. Acknowledge the fundamental importance of shared *ethical and spiritual values* in making the transition to a sustainable way of life.
4. Adopt a sustainable development goal focused on *sustainable production and consumption*.
5. Ensure that proposals for a new institutional framework for sustainable development, and related global governance reforms, include a *mandate of trusteeship for global common goods* on behalf all peoples, the greater community of life, and future generations.
6. Ensure that all have access to quality education for sustainable ways of living.
7. Make *Climate Justice* a guiding principle in efforts to address global climate change, ensuring that the benefits and burdens associated with climate change are distributed equitably, with special concern for the rights of the poor, indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable peoples.
8. Provide supportive mechanisms for a *Just Transition* – ensuring the right to sustainable development.

Introduction

Recalling the recommendation by the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission report) for creation of a “Universal Declaration on Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development” in the form of a “new charter” with principles to guide nations in the transition to sustainable development, and the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards to which all can aspire within Earth’s carrying capacity.

Recognizing that the adoption of such an ethical Charter was a goal of the preparatory process for the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and that, since then, too little progress has been made in implementing governments’ commitments to sustainable development.

Realizing that the need for a stronger global ethical framework to guide sustainable development has only increased.

Mindful that the Earth Charter was drafted and launched by a global civil society initiative under the leadership of the Earth Charter Commission, and that the Earth Charter has been endorsed and recognized by thousands of organizations including UNESCO and the IUCN.

Recognizing that the September 7 Declaration of the 64th Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference in Bonn articulates a broadly supported civil society agenda for the Outcome Document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

Recalling, as stated in this Bonn Declaration, ‘that the Earth Charter, together with the Culture of Peace, can play a vital role in helping to inspire renewed political commitment expected for Rio + 20 and to guide the transition to a sustainable, just and peaceful society with respect and care for the entire community of life.’

Affirming the recommendation by the European Economic and Social Committee that ‘the Summit [Rio+20] should recognize and support the Earth Charter as a means of inspiring commitment and action by individuals and organizations around the world.’

Affirming that the Outcome Document from Rio+20 should acknowledge the importance of a comprehensive ethical framework - as exemplified by the Earth Charter - as a guide for sustainable development and ensure that governments make good on past commitments to Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals, and other intergovernmental agreements.

We, on behalf of Earth Charter International and its network of supporting organizations and individuals, submit the following recommendations for inclusion in the Zero Draft Document:

Recommendation 1 - Express responsibility to future generations by implementing the precautionary principle and establishing Ombudspersons for Future Generations at global, national and local levels

As defined by the Brundtland Commission report, sustainable development requires we meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, within the limits imposed by the capacity of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. This universal responsibility for intergenerational equity is expressed in Earth Charter Principle 4 which calls us to *Secure Earth’s bounty and beauty for present and future generations*.

The Bonn Declaration calls for the establishment of Ombudspersons for Future Generations at global, national and local levels, who will advocate for sustainable development as envisaged and defined by the Brundtland Commission (‘... to enhance the well-being and prospects of present and future generations to meet their needs, and to serve as an auditor at the heart of governments and deal with citizen’s complaints’). As a comprehensive ethical framework, The Earth Charter provides shared values and principles that can help guide their work.

In taking responsibility for future generations, we must recognize the threat they face if too little is done to protect our environmental security. Reduced access to water, rising sea levels, management over degrading pastoral lands and the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor fanned by unsustainable development increase the risk that communities across the planet will be caught in the middle of conflicts associated with control of our dwindling natural resources.

Implicit in the call for Ombudspersons for Future Generations is a deep commitment to implementing the precautionary principle as adopted in the Rio Declaration and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, amongst other international agreements. The Earth Charter’s formulation of the precautionary principle is pro-active and progressive:

6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.

a. Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.

b. Place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm, and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm.

c. Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.

Recommendation 2 - Create a green economy based on strong sustainability and adopt alternative economic indicators to GDP that include social well-being and ecological integrity

The Earth Charter provides a strong definition of sustainable development, recognizing the three standard pillars [social, environmental and economic] but organizing them in a particular way. ‘Environment’ is not merely the resource base for human consumption, not just one of the three factors to be considered. Rather, it incorporates the greater community of life including human beings and the life-support systems on which we all depend. This shift to a broader life-centered perspective marks one key difference between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ sustainability. Furthermore, the social dimension (articulated in the Earth Charter in terms of principles for economic and social justice, democracy, non-violence and peace) represents a set of pre-requisites and goals for sustainable development rather than negotiable or merely optional considerations (Bosselman and Engel, 2010).

There are obvious classes of goods which are privately owned, traded on markets, and for which there is a real market price. Undoubtedly, for these goods, fixing market failures is a pre-requisite to advancing sustainable development (Bosselmann et al., 2011). Earth Charter principle 7d addresses one critical market failure, vis. *Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services into the selling price, and enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.* However, such pricing, and attempts to fix other market failures, must not disadvantage or bring harm to developing countries. Therefore, coupled to any market based mechanism introduced as part of green economic reform must be a commitment to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities; as articulated in the Rio Declaration and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, among other international agreements. For example, approaches to pricing greenhouse gas emissions must follow the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (see Recommendations 7 and 8).

The Bonn Declaration recognizes that market and institutional failures take the form of prices that do not reflect their true environmental and social costs, underinvestment in natural, human, built and social capital, harmful and perverse subsidies, restricted access to information about production technologies and their impacts, lack of democratic economic governance, increasing unemployment and inadequate indicators of progress. We support the Declaration’s call for replacement of the current inefficient, unsustainable and inequitable economic, monetary, financial and commercial models with policies that advance rather than detract from sustainable development goals and that build rather than deplete the stocks of natural and social capital on which human well-being ultimately depends. As noted by the Declaration (see also Bosselmann et al. 2011), where the current economy aids inequity, destruction and greed, it should be replaced by an economy that cares for and enables a flourishing Earth community inclusive of all people, the greater community of life, and future generations.

The Bonn Declaration calls for the establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating committee to create a framework convention on corporate environmental and social responsibility (CSR) for the accountability of corporate investments for all companies listed on stock exchanges worldwide (287-290).

We support this call and, informed by our partnership with the Global Reporting Initiative, recommend that the following Green Economy Coalition recommendations be adopted in this framework convention:

- Commit to develop a global policy framework that requires all listed and large private companies to consider sustainability issues and to integrate material sustainability information within their reporting cycle and in their Annual Report and Accounts – or explain why if they do not;
- Recognize the need for a process that builds on data available through sustainability reporting, leading to the development and adoption of macro-level, multi-disciplinary metrics such as the Sustainable Development Indicators that, beyond GDP, would allow a more comprehensive measurement of wellbeing, environmental health and the progress made towards a green economy; and
- Commit to develop and implement new ways of measuring national ‘wealth’ beyond money, specifically with new indicators on societal wellbeing and environmental health. GDP itself must subtract externalities and report net incomes per capita. UNCSD should reach agreement on a deadline to endorse common methods and practices, with a view to producing global standards, so that nationally defined indicators can be comparable at the international level and with appropriate tools for monitoring and assessment.

Recommendation 3 - Acknowledge the fundamental importance of shared ethical and spiritual values in making the transition to a sustainable way of life

There is wide international agreement that sustainable development requires economic development, social transformations, and environmental restoration and protection. In addition to these three pillars of sustainable development, there is a fourth pillar: a shared vision of ethical and spiritual values that inspires and guides cooperative action for change. Shared values awaken a sense of common purpose and build community spirit. In an increasingly interdependent world, achieving the environmental, economic, and social goals associated with sustainability requires worldwide collaboration, and cooperation is not possible without shared values and a sense of common purpose. The vision of a sustainable future as an inclusive social and ecological ideal that is good, right and just is what is needed to inspire strong commitment and drive change.

The emergence throughout the world of a new ethical and spiritual consciousness that supports the transition to a just, sustainable and peaceful world is one of the most promising developments of the last sixty years. The ethical and spiritual values associated with this new consciousness have been given expression in many intergovernmental and civil society declarations such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the World Charter for Nature, the Rio Declaration, and the Earth Charter. The Earth Charter identifies the basic spiritual challenge that the world community must address if it is to make the transition to strong sustainability when it states:

We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. This guideline is, of course, entirely consistent with the teachings of all the world's great wisdom traditions.

The values associated with human rights, cultural diversity, social and economic justice, a culture of peace, intergenerational responsibility, and respect and care for the greater community of life, are all part of what 'being more' means in the 21st century. In addition, the Earth Charter recognizes the importance of reverence for the mystery of being, compassion, love, hope, and the joyful celebration of life. 'Being more' in the spirit of these values and ideals is the only sure path to a sustainable world.

We might represent the four pillars of sustainable development as *People, Planet, Profit and Pneuma* (i.e. spirit) with the latter representing our possibility of awakening to a sense of wonder and interconnectedness with all life and of establishing, as the last Earth Charter principle (16f) states, ... *right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.*

Recommendation 4 - Adopt sustainable development goals focused on sustainable production and consumption

Earth Charter Principle 7 urges us to *Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.* Sustainable development must provide all with access to the resources necessary for a fulfilling life. The following recommendations from the Bonn Declaration spell out key targets for realizing the recommendations of Principle 7, including 7f which encourages us to *Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world:*

- By 2020, consistent with the Biodiversity Strategic Plan adopted at the 10th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the human ecological footprint is reduced so that it remains within the Earth's biological carrying capacity. In accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, we call on nations and populations engaged in wasteful overconsumption to reduce their impacts and help increase the consumption of vital goods and services for impoverished nations and peoples, so they also can enjoy reasonably high standards of living that provide equitable access to health care, decent work opportunities and education;
- By 2020, governments should promote production processes that reflect the best available technologies for eco-efficiency, recycling, remanufacturing, reuse of waste materials, product durability and longevity. Wasteful practices such as planned obsolescence are identified and eliminated. Public procurement standards and incentives reward leading corporations that share and disseminate best green practices worldwide. By 2020, the majority of the world's goods and services are procured by governments from sources certified by objective third parties as sustainably produced;
- Further, establish a set of Millennium Consumption Goals for the period 2012-2020 towards creating an intergenerational and internationally shared right to equitable consumption opportunities and ensuring quality of life and wellbeing of all people by 2020, while eradicating all kinds and levels of poverty, respecting animal welfare and embedding sufficiency based sustainable economies. (442-463)

Recommendation 5 - Ensure that proposals for a new institutional framework for sustainable development, and related global governance reforms, include a mandate of trusteeship for global common goods on behalf all peoples, the greater community of life, and future generations

Various options have been proposed for institutional reform in support of sustainable development including a consortium for environmental sustainability that strengthen UN CSD, creation of a new, specialized normative and operational agency, and creation of a new umbrella organisation for sustainable development with universal membership. All are legitimate options with advantages and potential for positive outcomes. Whatever proposal for institutional reform the world's nations agree to at Rio+20, a critical question is the mandate under which it is established. We recommend that a core component of the mandate should be a trusteeship function over global public goals and common goods on behalf of all peoples, the greater community of life, and future generations.

The first four principles of the Earth Charter provide one articulation of the necessary goals:

- 1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity;*
- 2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love;*
- 3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful; and*
- 4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.*

Global common goods include obligations for maintaining the integrity of planetary boundaries and the ecological wellbeing of all, overseeing markets to ensure that they are protective of non-market common goods, and ensuring impartiality between all interests – individual, civil society, corporate, and national.

The basis for these duties is well articulated in the Preamble of the Earth Charter:

Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

The notion of an international institution exercising a trusteeship function is not new. Indeed, under the auspices of the UN, a Trusteeship Council was enacted to act on behalf of states transitioning from colonisation to independence. This Trusteeship Council was mandated to speak for the yet-to-be state entities which had no legal standing or representation. The Trusteeship Council acted on behalf of entities that were not legally recognized. An obvious parallel can be drawn between the functioning of this Council and a global trusteeship function as part of a new or revised institutional framework for sustainable development.

Recommendation 6 - Ensure that all have access to quality education for sustainable ways of living

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was a major, and neglected, priority of Agenda 21. Tasked with coordinating the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, UNESCO's effort to promote ESD through formal educational institutions, as well as many non-formal and media based educational/advertising enterprises, is making an important contribution. However, universal access to quality education (let alone ESD) for both boys and girls, even at the primary level, is an elusive goal.

The Bonn Declaration noted that the shift to a sustainable society is deeply dependent on the educational system, and affirmed that education should address the material, social and spiritual dimensions of human development, and in its fullest sense, education must provide the space for value-based sustainable learning. There is an overwhelming need for the world community to reaffirm the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development as proposed in Bonn Declaration, 416-418.

The importance of access for all to quality education for sustainable development is articulated in Earth Charter principle 14:

Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

- a. Provide all, especially children and youth, with educational opportunities that empower them to contribute actively to sustainable development.*
- b. Promote the contribution of the arts and humanities as well as the sciences in sustainability education.*
- c. Enhance the role of the mass media in raising awareness of ecological and social challenges.*
- d. Recognize the importance of moral and spiritual education for sustainable living.*

Recommendation 7 - Make Climate Justice a guiding principle in efforts to address global climate change, ensuring that the benefits and burdens associated with climate change are distributed equitably, with special concern for the rights of the poor, indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable peoples

There is wide agreement in the international scientific community that anthropogenic (human caused) climate change is occurring as a direct consequence of the burning of fossil fuels, the destruction of forests, and additional activities that increase the concentration of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. There is also compelling evidence that climate change is already having a damaging impact in some regions and that it will cause great harm to people and to Earth's ecosystems and biodiversity. It presents a grave threat to present and future generations. The people who will suffer most are those who have done the least to bring global climate change about. They are the poor and to a large extent populations in the low-income nations in the global South, especially future generations in these countries.

In fulfilling its common but differentiated responsibilities with regard to global climate change, the international community has the moral responsibility to protect human rights and advance justice. Climate Justice employs a rights-based framework to focus attention on and address

issues of social and economic justice created by the harmful impacts of climate change on the environment and human development. Fundamental to Climate Justice are effective initiatives to curb global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and lowering atmospheric concentrations to safe levels. Climate Justice requires an equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens associated with global climate change, with special concern for the rights and sustainable development of the poor and all other vulnerable peoples, including indigenous peoples. Climate Justice also gives special attention to gender equality.

Recommendation 8 - Provide supportive mechanisms for a Just Transition – ensuring the right to sustainable development

There will be costs in making the transition to a low carbon, green economy in the pursuit of sustainable development. Some States and actors are better able to bear those costs than others and are more resilient to transitional changes. In the process of change, the most vulnerable must be supported and protected – developing countries must have access to appropriate financial and technical assistance, citizens and communities must also have access to education and training for sustainable ways of living. Institutions at all levels (national and international) must be democratic and accountable. As much as possible, decisions should be made by those most affected by them. Institutions must be transparent and participatory, enabling civil society to hold them accountable, with (as noted by Earth Charter Principle 13d) *...effective and efficient access to administrative and independent judicial procedures, including remedies and redress for environmental harm and the threat of such harm.*

Concluding comments

The Rio+20 conference provides an important opportunity for the world community to recommit to the values and principles of sustainability and forge new sustainable development initiatives. International cooperation between all sectors is critical if progress is to be realized. As noted in the concluding section of the Earth Charter *... Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership. The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance.*

The Earth Charter serves as a ‘road map’ to achieving a just, sustainable and peaceful future for all people and future generations. It addresses the strong relationships that exist between human health and wellbeing and the environmental challenges we face including climate change, a lack of water and food, the loss of biodiversity, and forced migration. The protection of Earth’s environment is a foundation of humanity’s survival.

Rio+20 must be seen as not a ‘one of’ event but the beginning of a new phase in our collective efforts to advance strong sustainability. To quote the concluding words of the Earth Charter:

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.

References

Bosselmann K. and Engel R. (editors)_(2010) *The Earth Charter: a framework for global governance*. KIT Publishers

Bosselmann K., Brown P. and Mackey B. (2011) *Enabling a Flourishing Earth: Challenges for the Green Economy, Opportunities for Global Governance*. Stakeholder Forum;
<http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=199&menu=45>

Authorship and Acknowledgements

This submission to the Rio+20 UNCSD Zero Draft Outcome document has been prepared by Earth Charter International on behalf of the Earth Charter network (www.earthcharter.org). The drafting team comprised the following members: Rick Clugston (Chair, USA); Ruud Lubbers (Netherlands); Brendan Mackey (Australia); Steven Rockefeller (USA); Alide Roerink (Netherlands); and Mirian Vilela (Brazil, Costa Rica). Recommendations were crafted following an international, internet based consultation with Earth Charter supporters. We are especially thankful for the comments and suggestions received from the many individuals and Affiliate organisations who participated in this consultation process.

Contacts: mvilela@earthcharter.org; Rmclugston@aol.com

