

EARTH CHARTER STUDY MATERIALS

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"The objective of the Earth Charter is to give inspiring expression to the most fundamental principles of an integrated ethical vision for our common future. These principles will have enduring significance for people of all races, cultures and religions, clarifying humanity's shared values and developing a new global ethic for a sustainable way of life." Maurice Strong, Chairman of the Earth Council and Co-Chair of the Earth Charter Commission

As Dr. Steven Rockefeller explains in his cover memorandum, the draft Earth Charter found below is based upon extensive consultations held among broadly diverse participants over the past decade. The Bahá'í International Community contributed significantly to the early work on the Earth Charter and has participated actively in international consultations since then.

The conference of Environment Forum will provide an excellent opportunity for interested Bahá'ís and others to contribute to the ongoing development of the Earth Charter. The results of our consultations will be shared with the drafting committee as they develop Benchmark Draft II for release in early 1999. Also after that will follow a process of consultation around the world on the Charter text, to encourage people to adopt the Earth Charter as their own before it is offered to governments for their consideration.

Please review the draft and reflect on the following questions from a Bahá'í perspective:

1. Which principles do you consider most important?
2. Are there essential principles missing?
3. Do you object to or find fault with any of the ideas expressed? If so, why?
4. How does the document hold up from a legal or scientific standpoint?
5. How could the document or selected parts of it be improved? (What specific recommendations for changes to the text or style would you make?)

MEMORANDUM

TO: Participants in Earth Charter Consultation Process

FROM: Steven C. Rockefeller,
Chair, Earth Charter Drafting Committee

SUBJECT: Update on Earth Charter Drafting Process

DATE: October 14, 1998

For over a decade diverse groups throughout the world have endeavored to create an Earth Charter that would set forth a shared vision of the ethical values and practical guidelines essential to ecological security and sustainable living. In March 1997 at the conclusion of the Rio+5 Forum in Rio de Janeiro, the Earth Charter Commission issued the Benchmark Draft Earth Charter. The Commission also called for ongoing international consultations on the Earth Charter in order to improve the text and to involve an increasing number of individuals and groups in the Earth Charter process. The Commission will issue Benchmark Draft II in February 1999. It is anticipated that another year of consultations on the text will follow and a final version of the Earth Charter will be issued early in the year 2000.

Over the past year and a half many comments and recommendations regarding the Benchmark Draft have been received from all regions of the world. The Earth Charter Commission deeply appreciates the time and thought that individuals and groups have given to the text of the Earth Charter. The Earth Charter Drafting Committee has begun to revise the Charter Preamble and Principles and to prepare Benchmark Draft II.

Attached is a copy of the most recent working draft of the revised Charter. It involves extensive changes including the addition of a number of new principles.

Some groups want a short Earth Charter with ten or twelve brief principles and others expect a more substantial document. In an effort to address these different concerns, the Drafting Committee has created a layered document and divided the Charter into three parts. Part I contains three principles, Part II nine, and Part III nine, for a total of twenty-one principles for the 21st Century. The three parts reflect levels of generality, not a hierarchy of values. All the principles are interrelated and interdependent. Each principle is stated as succinctly as possible in one sentence. Where further elaboration is required, sub-principles have been added. In addition, a Commentary on the principles, which will be issued with them, will provide a more extensive explanation for those who may want it. The three main principles in Part I or the twelve main principles in Parts I and II can be used as a short version of the Charter.

Part I states three general principles that provide the ethical foundation for preserving ecological integrity and building a just, peaceful, and sustainable world community. All the other principles in the Charter flow from these first three.

Part II provides an integrated vision of ecological, economic, and social values that are fundamental to caring for Earth. All the principles included in the Charter have an ecological connection. However, the principles in the Earth Charter do not focus

exclusively on the environment because the goal of ecological security is interrelated with humanity's social and economic goals.

Part III sets forth a number of more specific guidelines for the implementation of sustainability. These guidelines follow from Principles 4-8 in Part II, and especially from Principle 7 which is a call to live sustainably.

One can think of the Earth Charter with its tripartite structure as a Tree of Life. The first three principles are the roots, and the principles in Parts II and III constitute the trunk and the branches. Different groups or local communities can add their own branches.

If you or your group have comments or recommendations for the Earth Charter Drafting Committee, forward them to: Steven Rockefeller, at Post Office Box 648, Middlebury, Vermont 05753; e-mail: rockefel@panther.middlebury.edu; FAX: 802-388-1951. Additional information is available on the Earth Charter web site.

The Earth Charter

(Working Draft for Benchmark Draft II)

Preamble

At this unprecedented time of opportunity and danger, when life on Earth is being placed at risk, it is imperative that we, the People of Earth, declare our interdependence with and responsibilities to each other, the larger community of life, and the evolving universe. In the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms, we are one humanity and one Earth community with a common future.

Planet Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. With reverence for the sources of our being, we give thanks for the gift of life. We affirm that Earth's life support systems and resources are the common heritage of all and a sacred trust. Ensuring a healthy and beautiful Earth with clean air, pure waters, fertile lands, expansive forests, and plentiful oceans is a basic common interest of humanity.

The Earth community stands at a defining moment. With science and technology have come great benefits and also the ability to do great harm. Our patterns of production and consumption are degrading the environment, exhausting resources, and driving whole species to extinction. A dramatic increase in human numbers adds to the pressure on ecological systems. Injustice, inequitable disparities, poverty, lawlessness, and armed conflict deepen the world's suffering. The foundations of global security are threatened. Fundamental changes in our ways of living and relating are necessary. The choice is ours: to care for Earth and one another or to participate in the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Our priorities must be redefined, building on the work that has already

begun. We resolve to find new more just and sustainable ways of balancing self-interest and the common good, diversity and unity, freedom and responsibility, the economy and ecology, the needs of present and of future generations. In the quest for wholeness and happiness, having more is no substitute for being more - expanding ourselves intellectually, aesthetically, ethically, and spiritually.

The securing of human rights for all men and women is the foundation of freedom and justice and a prerequisite to creating socially and ecologically responsible communities. The realization of human rights and the protection of the biosphere are interdependent.

A shared ethical framework that is inclusive and integrated is urgently needed to guide deliberation and decision. Therefore, together in hope, and in solidarity with the community of life, we affirm the following principles and pledge ourselves to work for their implementation through individual, institutional, and collective efforts.

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. Respect Earth and all life.
 - a) Recognize the interdependence and intrinsic value of all beings.
 - b) Affirm faith in the inherent dignity of all human beings and in the human potential.
2. Care for Earth's community of life in all its diversity.
 - a) Accept the common responsibility to preserve and advance the common good, promoting the well-being of the planet and the whole human family, and
 - b) Let each individual, group, and nation embrace those distinct responsibilities that are rightfully theirs and that they have the means to fulfill.
3. Create a global partnership and secure justice, peace, and Earth's abundance and beauty for present and future generations.
 - a) Design and manage human affairs so that the Earth community as a whole is able to meet its basic needs now and in the future.
 - b) Be mindful that increased knowledge, power, and freedom bring increased responsibilities.

II. ECOLOGICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL FUNDAMENTALS

4. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems.
 - a) Conserve the biodiversity of land and sea, including the genetic diversity within species and the variety of ecosystems.

b) Conserve the ecological processes that sustain and renew life, ensuring the long-term biotic regulation of these processes.

c) Promote the recovery of endangered species and populations, and protect and restore their natural habitats.

d) Establish systems of interconnected nature reserves, including wilderness areas, and other management systems to protect Earth's biodiversity, life support systems, and evolutionary processes.

5. Prevent harm to the environment, and when knowledge is limited, err on the side of caution.

a) Stop activities that involve a threat of irreversible or serious harm even when scientific information is incomplete or inconclusive.

b) Give special attention in decision making to the cumulative, long-term, and global consequences of individual and local actions.

c) Recognize that even though attempts to remedy or compensate for harm are necessary, they are not a substitute for prevention.

6. Establish and defend the right of all persons to an environment supportive of their dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being.

a) Secure the human right to potable water, clean air, uncontaminated soil, and food security.

b) Promote gender equality together with racial, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic equality as a prerequisite to environmental justice and sustainable human development.

c) Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, and serve those who suffer.

d) Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and their related traditional sustainable practices.

7. Live sustainably by adopting patterns of consumption, production, and reproduction that respect and safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community rights.

a) See Part III, Guidelines for Implementing Sustainability.

8. Ensure that economic goals and the means of attaining them support and promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.

a) Eradicate poverty, generate productive and meaningful employment, strengthen local communities, and improve the quality of life by means of sustainable development.

b) Seek to make access to Earth's resources fair and just for all.

c) Reduce unnecessary wants and promote the equitable distribution of wealth.

9. Make the knowledge, values, and skills needed to build just and sustainable communities an integral part of formal education and lifelong learning for all.

a) Recognize and encourage the contribution of the artistic imagination and the humanities as well as the sciences in environmental education and sustainable development.

b) Empower men and women at the local level through education.

10. Support and establish access to information, inclusive democratic participation in decision making, and transparency, truthfulness, and accountability in governance.

a) Enable local communities to care for their own environments, and assign responsibilities for environmental protection to the levels of government where they can be carried out effectively.

b) Assure the freedom of association and the right to dissent on matters of environmental and social policy.

c) Construct systems of world public accountability for transnational corporations, regional and international organizations, and governments.

11. Practice nonviolence and be an instrument of peace.

a) Create a culture of peace and cooperation with integrated strategies to prevent violent conflict.

b) Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by harmonious and balanced relationships with oneself, other persons, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.

12. Treat all living beings with compassion, and protect them from cruelty and wanton destruction.

III. GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABILITY

13. Do not use renewable resources such as water, soils, forests, grasslands, and fisheries in ways that exceed the regenerative capacity of ecological systems.

14. Eliminate harmful waste and other sources of pollution.

a) Regard nature as a model, and ensure that any waste material can be either consumed by biological systems or used over the long-term in technical systems.

b) Redesign the life cycle of products, reduce the resources used, reuse, and recycle.

c) Do not introduce into the air, water, or soil wastes and substances that exceed the assimilation capacity of ecological systems.

d) Do not allow concentrations of substances in the environment that endanger the health of human beings and ecosystems.

15. Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as the sun, the wind, and biomass.

16. Advance and put to use knowledge and technologies that facilitate sustainable living and environmental protection.

a) Help to make new ecological knowledge and beneficial technologies available to people throughout the world, strengthening local capacity for sustainability.

17. Provide, on the basis of gender equality, universal access to health care, and secure the right to sexual and reproductive health, with special concern for women and girls.

18. Do not do to the environment of others what you do not want done to your environment.

a) Strengthen and enforce international and national law requiring that states take all reasonable measures to prevent activities under their jurisdiction and control from causing transboundary environmental harm.

b) Prevent transfer of environmentally harmful activities or hazardous materials from one community or nation to another.

19. Eliminate weapons of mass destruction, promote disarmament, and secure the environment against irreversible or severe damage caused by military activities.

20. Create mechanisms and procedures that promote environmentally sound and socially responsible decision making in all sectors of society.

a) Adopt local, national, regional, and international sustainability strategies.

b) Promote interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration.

c) Establish market prices and economic indicators that reflect the full environmental and social costs of human activities.

d) Implement environmental impact assessments.

e) Create and respect environmental protection standards.

f) Monitor human environmental impacts and changes in environmental quality.

g) Share and disseminate information on best practices.

21. Let the Earth Charter ethic of peace, equity, and prevention of harm govern the exploration and use of orbital and outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies.

The creative possibilities before us are great. Our task is the reinvention of industrial-technological civilization and the peaceful management of change. The challenge is ethical and spiritual as well as scientific and technical. A commitment of both minds and hearts is needed. Our best thought and action will flow from the joining of knowledge and compassion.

The engagement of individuals as well as governments is of fundamental importance. The arts, business, the media, the religions, the schools, the sciences, other nongovernmental organizations, and all civil society, including families and youth, have essential roles to play. Progress will require imaginative holistic thinking, a spirit of sharing and mutual support, and a willingness to make sacrifices for the larger good.

Our hope for the future is strengthened by the lives of the many men and women in all nations who in cities, towns, and agricultural communities are leading the way. Embracing the values in this People's Earth Charter, we can grow into a family of diverse cultures and vibrant communities that allows the full potential of all persons to blossom in harmony with the Earth community and the ever-changing universe.



In order to develop and implement the principles in this Charter, the nations of the world should adopt as a first step an international convention that provides an integrated legal framework for existing and future environmental and sustainable development law and policy.