

Fundamentals for a Sustainable Future

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It is a special privilege for me to participate in this ICLEI World Congress of Local Governments and speak to you today. It is particularly moving to be present here in Wittenberg, a historic site of social and ethical transformation. The spirit of reformation and change for which Wittenberg is so noted remains alive and vital today.

I congratulate Beate Weber, Mayor of Heidelberg, the Lord Mayor of Wittenberg, State Prime Minister Reinhard Hoppner, Jeb Brugmann and the members of ICLEI for their participation and initiative in organizing this event and other sponsors for their leadership and support. This is an impressive manifestation of the energy of local governments and the leadership needed to carry us to a sustainable way of life for all. I want to pay special tribute to Jeb Brugmann who has lead ICLEI in its Local Agenda 21 initiative through which more than 3000 cities and towns have adopted their own Local Agenda 21 based on Rio's Global Agenda 21. It is, indeed, the single most effective and encouraging example of follow-up and implementation of the results of the Earth Summit. Of special importance is its democratization of the intrinsic linkages between the local and global dimensions of the sustainable development challenge.

I am honored to be speaking with you today in this session on the "Fundamentals for a Sustainable Future." I welcome and applaud the example you are setting of creative leadership and responsible governance - an example that should inspire and enlighten other levels of government. This is very much needed if we are to work together toward achieving a better future.

It is now 28 years since representatives of 113 nations assembled in Stockholm, Sweden in June 1972 for the inauguration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. Stockholm was the beginning of "a new journey of hope". Before Stockholm only a few countries, primarily in the industrial world, had environmental ministries or agencies. Following, as a direct result of the Stockholm conference, most governments established environmental ministries or agencies and developed policies and legislation to deal with environmental matters. Despite progress in many areas following the Stockholm Conference, it became evident by the mid-1980s that, overall, the environment was still deteriorating and the population and economic growth largely responsible for this was continuing. In response, the United Nations General Assembly established a World Commission for Environment and Development. Its report "Our Common Future" made the case for sustainable development as the only viable pathway to a secure a hopeful future for the human community. This report also called for "a new Charter to guide State behavior in the transition to sustainable development".

Following that, the Rio Earth Summit held in June 1992, as an event itself, was clearly remarkable, indeed historic. Never before had so many of the world's political leaders come together in one place, and the fact that they came to consider the urgent question of

our planet's future put these issues under an enormous international spotlight. This was helped by the presence at Rio, both in the conference itself and the accompanying "Global Forum", of an unprecedented number of people and organizations representing civil society, and more than double the number of media representatives that had ever covered a world conference. Despite shortcomings, the agreements reached at Rio represent the most comprehensive programme ever agreed on by government for the shaping of the human future. And the fact that they were agreed upon by virtually all of the governments of the world, most of them represented by their head of government, gives them a high degree of political authority. But, as we have seen, it does not ensure their implementation for implementation depends on motivation, and it is at the level of motivation that we have been lagging.

To be sure, there have been many positive achievements, which demonstrate that the transition to sustainable development called for at Rio is possible. Nevertheless, we continue along a pathway that is not sustainable while the driving forces of social and ecological crisis persist.

Although there has been a significant increase in the awareness of sustainability issues, this is still evidenced far more at the level of rhetoric than of concrete action. So while, more and more leaders in industry and government are talking of change, overall the powerful forces of inertia continue to propel us along a pathway that is unsustainable. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that local governments and civil society become more and more involved in the process of working toward sustainability. Collaboration between civil society and local and national governments is integral in promoting change.

No nation can manage this system alone, neither can any of the main issues that affect the quality of life and sustainability of the human community; access to food and water, managing the pressures for migration, protecting the environment, meeting social needs, ensuring employment and livelihoods, and of course, maintaining peace and security - be managed in isolation. The principal message of the Earth Summit was that we must make the transition to a new global partnership in which all share equitably the benefits as well as the risks. As Rio made clear, this requires new dimensions of cooperation amongst the nations and peoples of our planet, and most of all a new basis for relationships between the rich, industrialized countries and the developing world.

The nations and peoples of the world have struggled for some time to find collective solutions to the crisis of which we have long been aware. We now need to build on these efforts and use this energy and knowledge to ensure the solutions and their implementations will be part of this new decade.

Widespread poverty, social injustice, inequitable economic disparities, violent conflict, and environmental degradation require new instruments and frameworks and mostly the commitment and motivation of each one of us with a deep sense of universal responsibility. In an interdependent world now experiencing a dynamic process of globalization there is an urgent need for ethical and spiritual guidelines that will lead to

fundamental changes in patterns of production and consumption, work ethics, educational practices, and governmental systems.

We have expanded the context in which we must view and deal with the challenge of protecting and improving the environment to embrace the complex system of relationships through which our economic aspirations and behavior must be reconciled with our environmental and social goals. What we have come to call sustainable development provides the larger framework for achieving a positive synthesis between these three dimensions of the development process. This is no mere passing phase, but a fundamental process of civilizational change, which is essential, if we are to move onto the pathway to a secure and sustainable future in the new millennium.

The challenges of moving onto this new pathway need to be guided by a set of principles for ecological security based on sustainable development. The Earth Charter, as an ethical guideline, is a vehicle for addressing these challenges and stimulating change.

I had very much hoped that agreement on an Earth Charter could be reached at the Earth Summit. But, at the Conference, it became evident that there was not the level of political will necessary to achieve agreement on such a far reaching charter, although it made progress in this direction by adopting the "Rio Declaration of Principles". Parallel and complementary to these efforts, a number of civil society groups proposed various forms of charters. But none of these efforts gave rise to an Earth Charter that would have the same universal support and value as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Following the Earth Summit, two international NGOs, the Earth Council and Green Cross International, with the support of the Dutch Government, joined forces with others to pursue the development of an Earth Charter but this time focusing on the involvement of civil society. In early 1997, an Earth Charter Commission, composed of distinguished individuals from every continent, was formed to oversee the drafting and consultation process.

The Earth Charter document is the result of a substantial consultation process for over four years. Steven Rockefeller has led this process in a remarkable way, in his capacity as Chair of the Earth Charter Drafting Committee (he is here with us today and I take this opportunity to congratulate Steven and his drafting team for the remarkable and impressive leadership role he has played, and is playing, in this process).

I believe the Earth Charter Initiative has involved the most open and participatory consultation process ever conducted in connection with the drafting of an international document. Thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations from all regions of the world, different cultures, and diverse sectors of society have participated. The Charter has been shaped by both experts and representatives from grassroots communities. It is an important expression of the hopes and aspirations of the emerging global civil society. It is part of a growing worldwide people's movement pursuing major challenges in our values and institutions in order to ensure a sustainable way of life and a better future for all.

In March 2000, a final Earth Charter was approved by the Earth Charter Commission at a meeting at the UNESCO headquarters. The approval of the Commission for the current document was an important step in the process, for it celebrated the accomplishment of a lengthy consultation process and consensus of a final text. The Earth Charter can now help us take the next step: putting theory into practice. It is time to take action and it is hoped that the Earth Charter document will serve to inspire and ignite energy toward concretely applying the principles of the Earth Charter.

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century. It seeks to inspire in all people a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family and the larger living world. It is an expression of hope and a call to form a global partnership at a critical juncture in history.

The document's inclusive ethical vision recognizes that environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development, and peace are interdependent and indivisible. It provides a new framework for thinking about and addressing these issues, recognizing that we need integrated solutions to our interconnected problems. The result provides the basic foundation for a more secure, equitable and promising future through sustainable development.

The Earth Charter document is now being circulated throughout the world as a people's proclamation and ethical framework for the promotion of awareness and commitment to fundamental principles of sustainability. This initiative is focusing on use of the Earth Charter as an educational tool in schools, universities, and other organizations and as a values framework for professional codes of conduct and local and national development plans.

Among the key purposes of the Earth Charter I would like to emphasize its use as a values framework for designing sustainable development plans at all levels and for preparing professional codes of conduct.

Many municipal and national governments are developing sustainability plans that will guide their policies and practices toward a higher quality of life and environment for their citizens. The Earth Charter can provide the orienting vision for these policies and practices

We also want to seek worldwide support for endorsement of the Earth Charter by the United Nations General Assembly in the year 2002, which is the 10th anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit, and the 30th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference. We need the active participation of people everywhere, and local governments, to ensure this.

The Earth Charter campaign functions multilaterally. National campaigns have been launched in over 45 countries and are being managed by National Earth Charter Committees that involves various sectors of society. Overall, national campaigns have been successful in this endeavor and continue to use the Earth Charter as a way to build

upon the principles outlined in Agenda 21, translating them into tangible measures at the personal and local level.

In many cases, local governments have been involved and taken an active role in the Earth Charter process. It is of utmost importance that the involvement of the political and governmental sectors be integrated development processes.

I take this opportunity to briefly share with you a good example: the municipality of San Jose, the capital city of Costa Rica, has developed an innovative project aimed to formulate its own vision of the Earth Charter, in order to integrate ethical principles and values into everyday work activities. This is part of a training program on sustainable development. Some 1800 employees of San Jose's municipality, involving police, administration, sanitation and health departments, over 80% of the total workforce, participated in this project. Training for middle managers was developed to encourage a greater awareness and more personal commitment to sustainability issues at the community level. Over the six-month duration of the project, 15 training sessions were held, attended by the majority of municipal personnel. One goal of the trainings was to ascertain the opinions of the participants regarding the moral attitudes, which should be shared by personnel of the city government on sustainable development.

Naturally, the success of the project will depend upon perseverance as well as continued training and orientation. Local governments play an indispensable role in the sustainability process and they can be creative and innovative in their strategies and methodologies for doing so and I am sure many of you here represent examples of good local authority practices.

I want to emphasize that we are not simply asking people to sign on to the Charter, but rather to use it as a basis for examining their own ethical and moral principles and applying them in their lives and organizations. The Earth Charter is the product of broad and extensive consultations, but it is not intended to be regarded as "holy writ" to which others are being asked to accept verbatim. Rather, people and organizations everywhere are being invited to use the Earth Charter as a basis for examining their own moral and ethical principles and to apply them in their own lives, their work and their organizations.

To build upon the motto of the GlobalCities 21, the transition to sustainable development requires basic changes or "transformations" in the attitudes, values and behavior of civil society, the private economic sector, and governments. Ultimately, sustainability will depend on the decisions each one of us makes regarding our lifestyles and patterns of consumption, production and reproduction.

In this respect, the Earth Charter campaign strives to generate awareness of the urgent need for cooperation and common values and goals, and to work to ensure that sustainability principles find expression in individual lifestyles, professional and organizational work ethics, educational curriculum, religious teachings, public policy, and government practices.

To further work toward this goal, we envision a link between ICLEI members and Earth Charter national committees where possible.

This link would facilitate the incorporation of the Earth Charter into certain relevant ICLEI activities, integrating and using the Earth Charter as a part of pilot projects and training activities. Wherever there is an existing Earth Charter process the local government ICLEI member is encouraged to join the country's Earth Charter process bringing its own contribution. Wherever there is no Earth Charter process the ICLEI member is encouraged to start such a process on their own.

To promote the active participation of local governments and municipalities in the sustainable development process, I envision the use of the Earth Charter within ICLEI Local Agenda 21 Initiatives as a tool for dialogue and guiding framework for project implementation.

This includes encouraging local governments and municipalities to endorse and adopt the Earth Charter as an ethical framework for sustainable development plans and programs, including City Council resolutions and hearings, public referendums and public school curricula when applicable.

As a conclusion, I would like to mention that through the political process, people are making it clear that they expect high standards of environmental, social, and economic values and responsibility from their leaders. After all, the ultimate goal of sustainable development is to enable people to achieve sustainable livelihoods. We know that such things as monumental as hunger and poverty are experienced at the level of people; and it is at the level of people that real change must begin.

Nations everywhere are now encountering the limits of governments - limits on their capacity to meet the expectations of their electorates, limits on the willingness of people to accept new taxes and their insistence on a greater degree of cost effectiveness, transparency and accountability on the part of their governments. This is directly related to the movement that has taken place towards more democratic forms of government throughout the world. It is a movement in which local governments will play an integral part. Local governments can reflect the diversity of culture and beliefs and serve to foster important and effective relationships with civil society groups and facilitate a process of change that is participatory in nature and regionally and culturally relevant.

Global sustainability will be built on the foundations of people power and local action. It cannot be built from the "top down." But the global framework must be supportive. We must make a transition to a new global partnership in which all share equitably the benefits as well as the risks. More effective and systematic mechanisms for engagement of civil society - business and other non-governmental interest groups - in intergovernmental fora on issues in which they are major actors.

It is key that local governments be truly representative and committed to promote change. Indeed, this change will be in effecting realignments within governmental structures so that they are truly just, participatory, democratic, sustainable and peaceful.

While such universal instruments as the Earth Charter and Agenda 21 do not in themselves represent total solutions to the kind of global problems we face, they provide a framework and impetus for practical action. And they have a significant influence over people's thinking, their motivation and therefore ultimately their behavior. And the process itself is an extremely important one in terms of educating people regarding their common interest and concerns, and the potential for uniting them in common action to meet these concerns.

I would now like to invite, and indeed challenge, the ICLEI council and its member associations throughout the world to take a lead in this process of promoting integrated ethical values to sustainable development and to make this a centerpiece of their Local Authority agenda as we move into the 21st century. I know of no other organization that brings together such a key constituency of local authorities which is better able to contribute to the articulation and acceptance of the Earth Charter as a primary moral and ethical cornerstone of the efforts of the local governments to establish a secure, equitable and sustainable future.

I encourage you to embrace the Earth Charter as your own instrument to promote ethical values and good practices and always keep in mind as individuals and in our professional work the need to foster our deepest sense of Universal responsibility; Social and Economic Justice; Ecological Integrity; And overall respect and care for the community of life.

I am persuaded that the 21st century will be decisive for the human species. All people and nations have in the past been willing to accord highest priority to the measures required for their own security. We must give the same kind of priority to civilizational security and sustainability. This will take a major shift in the current political mind-set. Necessity will compel such a shift eventually; the question is can we really afford the costs and risks of waiting.

Thank you.