



Building a Global Culture of Peace

by Steven C. Rockefeller

SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, the American people have been forced to come to terms with the reality of international terrorism, which is a form of barbarism that strikes at the very foundations of civilization. However, we make a mistake if we believe that terrorism by itself is the major global challenge we face today. It is only one part of a much larger complex of problems. Looking at the bigger picture can put the struggle against terrorism in perspective, and it can help us as individuals, organizations, and local communities find

intelligent and compassionate ways to respond to the crisis immediately at hand.

The only long-term answer to the problem of terrorism is to build a global culture of peace. This requires a worldwide partnership of all nations and all peoples. If this is our long-term objective, we must ensure that whatever military or other action we take to combat terrorism will prove in the long run to be a means to the end of creating a planetary culture of peace. Just as one cannot preserve and build a free and democratic society



by using authoritarian and undemocratic means, so one cannot build peace if the primary means are war and violence. Military action may be necessary in certain situations to defend against the aggression of another state or to stop terrorism and genocide, but other creative means are required to build peace.

Here lies the relevance of the Earth Charter to the events of September 11 and the challenges of the twenty-first century. This document culminates with a vision of peace, and the principles in

the Earth Charter identify the essential elements of a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace. Enduring peace means promoting environmental protection, the eradication of poverty, democracy, human rights, gender equality, respect for cultural and religious diversity, and nonviolent conflict resolution. This is the message of the Earth Charter.

We have entered a planetary phase in the development of civilization—what the historians call an era of global history. Diverse communities, nations, and cultures have their own stories, but more and more all of our lives are also part of one story. The U.S. has been the leader in the process of globalization, and yet we have not fully understood the ethical implications and practical consequences of living in the world we ourselves are actively creating. Americans are a proud and free people and a mighty nation, but we must also recognize that we are interdependent members of the larger human family and the greater community of life.

Our global interdependence is ecological, economic, political, cultural, and spiritual. There is not one major problem that we face—whether it be environmental protection, economic prosperity, the control of infectious disease, crime and drugs, or terrorism—that a community or nation can manage alone. Furthermore, if we want other nations to help the U.S. address problems like terrorism about which we are especially concerned, then we must be willing to work more collaboratively with them on other critical global problems like poverty, economic opportunity for all, global warming, and arms control. It is in our national interest to be caring global citizens, who work cooperatively with others for the common good.

IN AN INTERDEPENDENT WORLD where cooperative problem solving is a prerequisite for progress, we urgently need a shared vision of basic values that will provide a basis for worldwide partnership and an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. The mission of the Earth Charter initiative is to help establish such a foundation. If we are to create a secure world and better future for all, we must revise our idea of the

Photograph by Jason Houston. These flags, flown at a recent celebration of the Earth Charter, are inscribed with the Charter's principles—principles meant to inspire a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility.

good life and our understanding of right conduct, and we must do this together as global citizens. The objective is not to impose the values of one culture or tradition on everyone else or to create a new monoculture. The goal is to learn from one another and to find common ground through dialogue in the midst of our rich cultural diversity.

The Earth Charter is a demonstration that we can meet this complex challenge. It is a product of a decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural, interfaith dialogue on shared values. It sets forth a consensus on ethical values that is taking form in the emerg-

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ing global civil society. The ethical principles of the Earth Charter are interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life that provide a common standard for individuals, organizations, communities, and governments. Using the term "sustainable" in a broad sense, one can talk about building a sustainable global society. In this connection, sustainability includes all the interrelated activities that promote the long-term flourishing of earth's human and ecological communities. Finding our way to a truly sustainable way of living together is our hope for the future. It is the path to building a culture of nonviolence and peace.

AT THE HEART of the Earth Charter vision is an ethic of respect and care for all life forms and the greater community of life, of which humanity is an interdependent part. Our sense of ethical responsibility begins with an attitude of respect. Respect involves recognition, appreciation, and moral consideration. Caring involves feeling as well as thinking and acting—our whole being. Our caring is most profound and effective when it is inspired and guided by the integration of the head and the heart, knowledge and compassion, science and love. Communities that have lost their capacity to respect and care show the environmental and social effects of indifference, narrow

self-interest, short-term thinking, neglect, and abuse. The Charter challenges us to expand our moral awareness and to respect and care for all life forms and earth, our planetary home that has made the development of life possible.

At this juncture in human evolution, extending our sense of respect and care to embrace the whole human family in all its diversity, the greater community of life, and future generations has become an ecological and social necessity. We all have a role to play in implementing the ethic of respect and care, in achieving just and sustainable communities, and in building a global culture of peace. Here are some things we can do in the spirit of the Earth Charter to improve the state of our world:

- There is an urgent need for a new and deeper dialogue between Western culture and the Middle Eastern Islamic world. This is a good time for interfaith dialogue involving Christians, Jews, and Muslims and members of other religious traditions. The Charter can be used as a catalyst for exploring common ethical values in these exchanges.
 - We must let our government leaders know that we support a spirit of collaborative engagement in world affairs—not just with regard to terrorism but on the many fronts required to build a global culture of peace.
 - All of us can work to alter our lifestyles and to implement those Charter principles that are relevant to our organizations, businesses, and local communities.
 - Through the ballot box and our purchasing power in the marketplace, we all—as part of the emerging global civil society—have the ability to profoundly influence government and business in shaping world affairs.
- The global challenges before us are great, but if we unite behind the kind of vision affirmed in the Earth Charter, there are grounds for hope. Humanity has the knowledge, technology, and financial resources required to protect earth's ecological systems and to make progress in creating a just and peaceful world. With reverence for the mystery of being and all life, let us resolve to commit ourselves anew to this great work. 🌿