

# **Africa and Middle East Earth Charter Meeting**

Cape Sun Inter-Continental Hotel

Cape Town, South Africa, 1-3 December 1999

The African and Middle East Charter meeting in December 1999 proved to be a very productive and successful event. Twenty participants from various countries of Africa and Middle East regions gathered to add significant value and perspectives to the growing Earth Charter movement through the positive accomplishments of this meeting. Participants represented: Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, Mauritius, Senegal, Niger, Ghana and Jordan. The three-day meeting focused on discussions surrounding the text of the Charter and the International Earth Charter Campaign. Funding for the meeting was provided by the Earth Charter Fund.

## **Main Objectives of Meeting**

- To provide an added opportunity for groups in Africa and Middle East to contribute to the Earth Charter drafting process.
- To promote dialogue and collaboration among African / Middle Eastern Earth Charter groups.
- To strengthen the International Earth Charter Campaign in African / Middle Eastern regions and worldwide.

## **Summary of Activities**

The meeting opened on Wednesday, December 1, 1999 with a brief presentation of each participant and their work on the Earth Charter. This was followed by presentations from Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter Project Coordinator and Steven Rockefeller, Head of the Earth Charter International Drafting Committee. Ms. Vilela spoke on the overall Earth Charter Process at both national and international levels and Professor Rockefeller addressed the drafting process of the Earth Charter as well as the November 15, 1999 Working Drafting of the Earth Charter Benchmark II. Time was allotted for open discussion followed by a dialogue on the structure and style of the working draft.

In addition, there was an in-depth discussion on each section of the Earth Charter document. In this respect, Professor Rockefeller offered a comprehensive introduction to each part of the document to help initiate discussion on the content and wording of the Earth Charter.

This dialogue continued throughout the second day. Participants demonstrated passion in their discussion and shared the cultural context and issues inherent to the African and Middle Eastern regions. This regional meeting provided the opportunity for the Earth Charter to be discussed in length as well as a forum to dialogue about the weight and meaning of Earth Charter principles in the Africa and Middle East regions. The ability to foster this type of discussion was a powerful medium for discussing the need for social change.

The agenda of the last day of the meeting, on December 3rd, took the form of discussions on the

Earth Charter process in Africa and the Middle East with each participant presenting the status of this process, accomplishments and future plans in their respective countries.

## Some Points Raised on the Earth Charter Document

- Structure of the document

The need to have an explanatory note, as an introduction to the text, was raised. Steven Rockefeller informed the meeting participants that there is a commentary being prepared for this purpose.

- Principle #5: Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life. It was suggested to add a reference to the "effects of historical oppressions and exploitation."
- Discussions on Principle #12: gender equality versus gender equity

This was an issue with regards to the African tradition where the woman, in many places, still has the role to serve their family. This discussion served as an exercise for many of the participants to internalize this principle and incorporate it within their minds and hearts. The fundamental question was raised of whether the term "equality or equity" when referring to gender, should be used. An animated discussion followed and consensus was achieved when the debate was termed a "learning process" needing further analysis.

- Discussions on the term Indigenous Peoples of Principle 14(b)

As expressed by the participants, the term "Indigenous Peoples" in Africa is often not used and can be very misleading in particular within the French speaking countries, where it has a negative connotation. There was considerable discussion around this topic.

- Principle #7: Treat all living beings with respect and consideration, and protect them from cruelty and wanton destruction.

This principle generated a great deal of discussion. Strong remarks on the need of avoiding suffering to animals were made. Also, a need to understand and respect the traditions of certain African religions was emphasized, where in some cases the sacrificing of animals is viewed as a part of the cultural tradition.

A suggestion to add a supporting principle to Principle #7 on plants was made. This additional supporting principle would read as follows: "Protect plants and other organisms of cultural and other values." Discussion surrounding the word "cultural" and the need to clarify that this principle does not refer to human beings was addressed.

- Reference to the term "sustainable development"

The question of whether the term Sustainable Development should be used or changed raised. The majority of participants did not have issues with the term and it was agreed that the term should be used and implemented through the Charter.

- Principle #15: Integrate the knowledge, values, and skills needed for promoting sustainable development into universal education and life-long learning.

It was suggested that this principle should affirm the need and right of universal education.

- Additional comments and discussions

Other discussions and ideas addressed proposed changes and suggestions that further contributed to the refinement of the Earth. These discussions and ideas concentrated on the dilemma of the term and idea of sustainable development and its meaning, the issue of difference in wealth levels and its importance to the African reality, the need to avoid perpetuating suffering to people, the importance of providing access to education and the need to be aware of traditional values. In addition, themes were discussed in relation to spiritual knowledge and the need to respect and protect this knowledge because it advances similarly to the advancements of scientific knowledge. The need to make reference within the document to the historical impact of developed nation as a means to constantly evaluate our progress was identified.

Furthermore, inquiries on the legitimacy of the text or its translation was addressed in reference to unclear expressions such as "renewable resources", "minimize cruelty towards animals," the meaning of the words "cultural," and "levels of poverty." In addition, suggestions to add "principles" before each title were also discussed.

Summary of discussions in response to the question:

How is the Earth Charter process being developed in your country and what is the future plan for this process?

### **Burkina Faso**

Coulibaly Sambou of CONAGESE (the National Council for Sustainable Development) expressed that we all should be concerned with the development of the strategy to submit the Charter to the United Nations. He stressed that regional dialogues could prepare the groundwork and seek a common vision and position in Africa. The governments must be involved in the Earth Charter process within African countries in order to keep them informed and hold with it government's commitment to support the project.

Mr. Sambou explained the structure of the CONAGESE (the National Council for Sustainable Development of Burkina Faso) and its function of bringing groups together and working through specialized agencies and departments. CONAGESE is under the umbrella of the government of Burkina Faso and is a multi-stakeholder council. Starting in mid 1998, they have disseminated the Earth Charter throughout their network and their members. The outcomes of this initiative have been

sent in a report to the Earth Council.

Ousseni Diallo, representing Green Cross Burkina Faso shared that the Green Cross office has formed an Earth Charter Committee, chaired by a Former Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Some Philippe. It has the involvement and participation of several key people and organizations in the country such as a representation of the University of Ouagadougou, the IUCN and the CONAGESE. "We would like to continue expanding and reinforcing the Earth Charter process in Burkina Faso", expressed Mr. Diallo. In addition, Mr. Diallo presented Green Cross International's focus on an educational program for the implementation of the Earth Charter within schools through an international Youth Contest that has involved a significant number of children from various countries. "We are very pleased to say that a young boy from Burkina Faso won the prize of this contest," said Mr. Diallo.

Florent Ouedraogo shared that his organization AVD (Volunteer Association for Development) has 20 years of experience promoting participation and development in various activities and therefore, they could easily incorporate the Earth Charter in their activities. He informed the participants of the meeting that he belongs to several networks in Africa and elsewhere and he plans to introduce the Earth Charter within these networks. He also offered to help to spread the word in the sub-regions and identify key groups in neighboring countries that could join the Earth Charter initiative.

### **Ghana**

Prof. A.A.Yeboah of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research shared with the group that the Earth Charter process in Ghana was initiated through the Ministry of Science and Technology, in early 1999. Since then, the Earth Charter has been circulated to a number of stakeholders. The Ministry of Science and Technology has coordinated agencies throughout the country and has used the existing structure to promote the Earth Charter while calling for additional participation. Professor Yeboah also mentioned that strategies to incorporate the Earth Charter into existing projects have been developed. A report of these strategies and projects will soon be sent to the Earth Council.

### **Jordan**

Farah Daghistani Director of the Princess Basma Women's Resource Centre, informed the participants in the meeting that aside from some attempts in 1998, a strong Earth Charter process has not yet occurred in Jordan. However, the network of the women's resource center has approximately 120,000 members and she stressed that together with the Jordan Environment Society, they will help to promote the initiative in Jordan. She felt that the women's network would be a positive outreach for the Earth Charter. This network also works with young people and she felt that the Earth Charter could be introduced to them to see how they can incorporate it into their lives. The Earth Charter will also be used as part of their training manuals. Ms. Daghistani informed the group that they would focus on raising awareness, translating the document into Arabic and make efforts to organize a regional meeting for the Middle East in the year 2000.

### **Kenya**

Mr. Muta Mathai from the Green Belt Movement shared that in Kenya there are difficulties in networking since there is a fear of participating due to government control. "Therefore we need civic education and advocacy programs for the Earth Charter" said Mr. Mathai. However, throughout the year, they have invited people from different parts of the country to seminars and have integrated the Earth Charter in their work. In addition, the Green Belt Movement has also worked with information

and dissemination, acknowledging the need to build upon and intensify their efforts in this regard.

### **Mauritius**

Mr. Rajen Awotar of the Council for Environmental Studies and Conservation (MAUDESCO) informed the meeting participants that the first Earth Charter consultation meeting in Mauritius took place in June 1998 and they are continuously renewing their involvement and commitment to the process. In addition, representatives of the Earth Charter National Committee actively participated in the Earth Charter on-line discussion conference in October 1999. Mr. Awotar expressed his concern that there is a need to start planning how to lobby government/diplomats to form regional networks in Africa. He suggested communication among conference participants through an E-mail list might be a positive way to share information in this regard.

### **Niger**

Ms. Manou Ai of the National Council of Environment for Sustainable Development (CNEDD) presented the existing multi-sectoral structure of CNEDD that takes care of environmental issues in her country as part of the Prime-Minister office. In this respect, she is counting on solid governmental support for an Earth Charter process. This council is serving as the Earth Charter facilitator and promoting the process through its existing network and members. Ms. Ai expressed the need to translate the Earth Charter document into the local languages of Niger to reach a broader number of people as well as need of financial support for future activities.

### **Senegal**

Mr. Mbaye Mbengue Faye explained the multi-stakeholder structure of The Superior Council for National Resources and Environment (CONSERE) and the involvement of some of its members in the Earth Charter process in Senegal. He says that actions should be based on information and interactive dialogue, "We would like to organize meetings according to the sectors." He believes it is very important that a mechanism be put into place to evaluate and follow up on the Earth Charter, saying that in order to evaluate it we need to have indicators on: a) How has the process been undertaken? and b) what has the impact been in our society?

### **South Africa**

Ms. Chrisna du Plessis of CSIR Center of Scientific and Industrial Research expressed that at this time there was no Earth Charter process in South Africa but that through her tasks to promote sustainable development among decision-makers, she could include the Earth Charter and use it as a tool to promote sustainability. In addition, it will be possible to incorporate the Earth Charter in the agenda of some planned meetings.

Mr. Arthur Jacobs, Deputy Mayor of Cape Town, expressed the willingness of Cape Town local government to share information on the Earth Charter with other local governments in the country.

### **Uganda**

Ms. Pauline Nantongo of the Wildlife Club of Uganda commented that Uganda has several NGOs and NGO networks that could be further involved in the Earth Charter process. She stressed that the Wildlife Club of Uganda wants to use the Earth Charter as an advocating tool but is concerned as to how it can play an important role in the advocating process. She also expressed that all Ugandan NGOs are part of an NGO Forum, this being is a good venue to popularize the Earth Charter

principles.

## **Zimbabwe**

Mr. Emmanuel Kumbula of the Africa 2000 Network shared that in Zimbabwe the Africa 2000 Network facilitated an Earth Charter consultation during the first half of 1999 involving various groups. Discussion on the text and how to incorporate it into various organizations was addressed. The report of this was submitted to the Earth Council. Mr. Kambula shared that the Africa 2000 Network is planning a public hearing in the near future.

Minister Sithembiso Nyoni of Zimbabwe emphasized that the government should already be involved and this should be a future goal for the initiative. Her ministry will be running two workshops in the beginning of 2000 with women and youth and the Earth Charter could be integrated as a theme at this event. She informed that the Earth Charter will be part of the creation of a multi-stakeholder mechanism to achieve sustainable development.

## **Outcomes**

- The meeting reinforced the participation of existing African and Middle Eastern groups working on the Earth Charter process.
- The need to expand to other countries in the region and to network by sub-regions was clearly identified.
- It is necessary to find a coordinator for each sub-regional network. There are real and common issues to be shared and discussed. It is preferable to follow the language grouping and have at least one group in French and in English.
- Rajen Awotar has offered to facilitate the networking of all the islands starting with Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles, with possible expansion to other islands. He has offered to facilitate the coordination of English speaking countries. This involves the promotion, dissemination and seeking out of new partners and networks to contribute to the Earth Charter process.
- All of the involved participants in the meeting committed to future action to further enhance the Earth Charter process in their respective countries.

This gathering served to reaffirm the participation of the countries already involved in the Earth Charter process and the need to enhance Earth Charter activity within these countries as well as expand to reach countries that are not currently involved in the Earth Charter process. All of the representatives committed to continue promoting the Earth Charter in many ways, and in particular using existing structures accomplish this goal. The concern to start involving the governments in this movement in order to prepare the ground for the future presentation of the document to the UN was addressed and further discussion and strategizing for this is hoped to occur.

In addition to the representatives of the Africa and Middle East countries, Dr. Kamla Chowdhry, co-chair of the Earth Charter Commission, actively participated in the discussions. Dr. Brendan Mackey,

from the Australian National Earth Charter Committee and the Drafting Committee, also participated in the discussion. In addition, Mrs. Sithembiso Nyoni, Minister of State for Economic Ministries of Zimbabwe, a charismatic leader in her country, offered significant additional contributions to this gathering.

## • View the Earth Charter Document

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