

The Earth Charter: The Green Cross Philosophy

Rationale

1. The prevailing development patterns in both the South and the North are leading the Planet to an economic, social and environmental crisis which threatens the existence of human life and the integrity of Nature. These patterns have two main causes: 1) Poverty has not been eradicated, and the number of people affected by it is actually rising, and 2) ecological life-support and natural resource systems are being seriously damaged at local and global levels.
2. The economic crisis is augmented by Globalization and the uncontrolled global Free Market which takes capital and "brain power" from around the world for the benefit of a few rich and powerful countries.
3. The prevailing form of material economic growth now confronts two kinds of environmental limitations: source limitations (scarcity and destruction of natural resources) and sink limitations (saturation of the natural capacity for dilution and absorption of pollutants and wastes).
4. The Social crisis is illustrated by the worldwide growth of poverty, violence, injustice, unemployment, loss of individual rights, old age insecurity, an increase of fundamentalism, alienation, destruction of cultures and local communities, fear of new technologies, and general insecurity. All of these threats are strengthened by local and regional violence and conflict.
5. The environmental crisis is global and is evident everywhere: deforestation, desertification, natural resource depletion, and air, water and soil pollution. Man has the power to transform Nature, to alter the Biosphere with environmentally destructive technologies, and to destroy the Planet with weapons of mass destruction. The degradation of natural ecosystems is evident all around the world. The environmental limits of the Biosphere have been overshoot in many fields.
6. Two major sources of environmental degradation can be distinguished: On the one hand the prevailing patterns of economic growth in affluent or rich societies and the affluent sectors within the poor countries, and on the other hand, widespread poverty. These indications of unsustainable development and intolerable impoverishment are different but connected. No lasting progress against human or environmental impoverishment is possible until they are dealt with together.
7. The current course of development is thus clearly unsustainable. Current problems cannot be solved by piecemeal measures. More of the same is not enough. Radical change from the current trajectory is not an option, but an absolute necessity. Fundamental economic, social and cultural changes that address the root causes of poverty and environmental degradation are required and they are required now.
8. It is important to underline that there are no purely technical solutions to our global problems. Instead sustainable solutions are found through global value change -- technology meshed with (not separate from) a system of beliefs and values. Yet global value change does not consist of a single set of values, but

rather the sum of cultural diversity. Different, co-existing values are essential to maintain the creativity and inventiveness necessary for sustainability.

Principles

Respecting Democracy, Human Rights and the United Nations Charter, Green Cross proposes that the following principles be solemnly adopted and implemented by all nations.

Principle 1

Forging a Sustainable Civilization for Humanity

- (a) It is the vital responsibility of the current generation to create social and economic systems which respect the basic laws of Nature, eradicate worldwide poverty, and maintain permanent human sustainability on the Earth.
- (b) It is the duty of the present generation to maintain the conditions for the Sustainability of Human Life on the Earth in its entirety.
- (c) The blooming of a Sustainable Civilization requires the firm support of value and belief systems.

Principle 2: Co-evolution of Man and Biosphere

- (a) The Earth and its biodiversity, including the atmosphere, seas, fresh water, soils and forests, all have intrinsic value.
- (b) Sustainability of Human life on Earth at the global level can be assured if humanity develops in accordance with Nature's laws.
- (c) Human development co-evolves in balance, respecting the limits of the Biosphere.
- (d) Sustainability of Human life on Earth is the responsibility of everyone.

Principle 3: Protection of the Biosphere is in the Supreme Common Interest of Humanity

- (a) The protection of the Biosphere and the sustainability of Human life on Earth are fundamental values of Humankind. It is in the Supreme Common Interest of present and future Generations to respect these fundamental values.
- (b) Acceptance of the protection of the Biosphere as the Supreme Interest of Humanity should lead States and International Institutions, which aim to ensure sustainability and fairness across the globe, to elaborate and guarantee environmental rules which provide an adequate framework for all socio-economic activities.

Principle 4: Sustainability

- (a) New patterns of development must be ecologically, economically and socially sustainable.
- (b) Biodiversity and cultural diversity are necessary components of sustainability.

Principle 5: Fairness between Generations and Individuals

- (a) A necessary but not sufficient condition for social sustainability is a significant improvement in Fairness. Sustainability of Human life on the Earth requires Fairness between the succeeding generations and Fairness among the members of each generation.
- (b) Social and environmental sustainability highlights the need for Solidarity in relations between poor and rich regions, as well as between individuals.

Principle 6: Stabilization of the World's population

- (a) World population must stabilize. Such a balance can be reached through cooperation: an improvement in living conditions, quality of life, fairness, education and the eradication of poverty.

Principle 7: Zero-Growth of Material Economy

- (a) Even allowing for rapid technological improvements, resources are finite. A basic sustainable level of per capita material consumption will have to be reached in accordance with the Earth's natural resource constraints. This requires both increasing the material consumption of the people now living in poverty and the reducing material over-consumption by the rich minority. Full life-cycle accounting practices and resource and energy efficiency need to become integrated at all levels, and in all activities, of the economy.
- (b) Development is not synonymous with economic growth and includes qualitative transformations.

Principle 8: Growth of the Non-Material Economy

- (a) While long-term sustainability requires a zero-growth of the material economy, it also requires a vibrant and growing non-material economy. Cultural, artistic, psychological, informational and spiritual forms of growth do not have physical constraints and are therefore an unlimited mechanism for development.

Principle 9: Quality of Life

- (a) The goal of development is to increase the quality of life of the human population.
- (b) Quality of life embodies the satisfaction of material and non-material human needs which can be met through a variety of means within sustainable ecological, economic and social constraints.

Principle 10: Scientific and Technological progress

- (a) Technical and scientific progress should be re-oriented to aim at the creation of technologies which conserve natural resources through the promotion of non-material economic applications.
- (b) Technical and scientific progress must have as its priority to increase the quality of life of all members of Humanity.

Principle 11: Natural resource utilization and waste disposal

- (a) Non renewable natural resources cannot be extracted from the Earth at a faster pace than they are replenished by natural processes.
- (b) Wastes and pollutants must be recycled; their concentration in the Biosphere should not overshoot the limits acceptable for natural cycles to adjust.
- (c) All economic actors must integrate the protection of the Biosphere as the Common Interest of Humanity in their activities.

Principle 12: Precautionary Principle

- (a) Precaution must be the basic organizing principle of environmental management. Scientific uncertainty should be used for objective assessment and not as an excuse for delaying action.

Principle 13: Prevention of Environmental Damage

- (a) Protection of the environment is most effective when environmental harm is prevented rather than cured. End-of-pipe solutions are not sustainable and must be replaced by preventive action which stops problems before they arise. Prevention ensures a common inheritance for future generations.

Principle 14: Global Sovereignty

- (a) The protection of the Biosphere, as the Common Interest of Humanity, must not be subservient to the rules of state sovereignty, demands of the free market or individual rights. The idea of Global Sovereignty must be supported by a shift in values which recognize this Common Interest.

Implementation

1. The creation of an international body for the Sustainability of Human Life on the Earth. This body must have the independence and power to facilitate agreement between all societal actors to support the protection of the Biosphere as the Common Interest of Humanity.
2. The creation of conditions to maintain peace all around the world. Peace and political stability are necessary conditions for the creation of long-term policies for the sustainability of Human life of the Earth.
3. The creation of a partnership between all members of Society based on the development of communication Networks facilitated by emerging technologies.
4. To accelerate the implementation of a new social and economic system based on the respect of the existing limits of the Biosphere, priority must be given to Education and in particular, environmental education.
5. The priority must be to increase our knowledge on the Limits of the Biosphere through long-term International Research programs.

Moscow and Geneva

March 1997

The Green Cross Earth Charter Philosophy is a synthesis document elaborated by Green Cross National Organizations and by individual experts during the process of consultations launched in 1996-1997.