

The Earth Charter Launch
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When humanity reaches a new low, history has shown that someone or something happens. With the despair and degradation that accompanied colonialism, Gandhi happened in India, and Nelson Mandela happened in South Africa. Both Gandhi and Mandela changed the map of the world. With industrialization and globalization our society as a whole is in deep crisis. We read about its many manifestations in the papers. Besides the mutilation and degradation of the Earth, there is high unemployment, high poverty, high corruption, high pollution, high crime, and high suicides. The way we have used our Science and Technology has been severely disturbing. We need new visionaries, with a new vision of progress and development. In the last two or three decades as new visionaries, Maurice Strong has happened, and Michael Gorbachev has happened. They have helped initiate new thinking, new institutions, new ecological awareness, new movements, and are helping in the moral and spiritual transition that is necessary for developing a new framework of sustainable development. From them, as also from relevant others, we are learning that there can be no sustainable development or sustainable future without morality and compassion and spirituality.

Most changes that have altered the course of history have begun with individuals like them, who by their example and actions did what many thought impossible. Underlying each one is a moral conviction and a fearlessness that refuses to be subdued.

The Earth Charter is a document, which makes an appeal to humanity to move in the direction of sustainable living, of moral and ethical living, of compassionate and peaceful living, of enlightened living, and of pursuing technological change with a human face. How should we act, and how should we move towards sustainable and enlightened living? An attempt in answering these questions is what the Earth Charter is all about.

It is clear to us by now, that scientific and intellectual understanding of the problems of the Earth, and of humankind, are not sufficient for action. We have known for some time what is happening to the Earth, but we have been unable to move forward, and things have become increasingly worse. Some 10 years ago, Maurice Strong organized the Earth Summit, where 170 heads of government, and leaders of business and civil society, and thousands of others came. Much was discussed and promised, and there was much hope, but little seems to have happened. In the Earth Charter, besides scientific, technological and economic directions, you will also find there is a running thread of spirituality, of peace and non-violence, of the need for compassion for others. The Earth Charter pleads for a new vision, a vision that recognizes that we are all one human family with a common destiny in spite of our different social, cultural and biological diversity.

For this new vision, a new future, a turnaround has to take place. It seems to me that we, who have worked on the Earth Charter, who come from different parts of the world, from different

cultures, and from different faiths must set the pace of change starting with ourselves. Gandhi had said 'My Life is My Message'. We too, if we are serious about the Earth Charter becoming a reality, and a movement, must be able to say 'My Life and My Actions will be my message', and therefore above all we must first learn to live sustainably, and make the Principles of the Earth Charter as part of our life. If we want people of the North and of the South to follow the principles and precepts of the Earth Charter, we will have to show by our lives and actions what the Earth Charter is all about. To use Gandhi's words again: "You have to be the change you want others to be". Walking on this road will mean commitment, and courage, and fearlessness. In the last 3 centuries or so, we have separated the well being of humans, from the well being of the Earth. We need to reconnect and relink, if healing of the Earth and of humans is to take place, - And that is what the Earth Charter is all about - the healing of humans and the healing of the Earth.

The Earth Charter will mean that we have to modify our social, economic, and political institutions. For too long we have been at the mercy of those selling dreams of progress without a whisper of where it is taking us. It is 'dharma' i.e. the spirituality of the people that we must tap if we wish real change and real transformation to take place. Spirituality, however, seems to generate a degree of discomfort in many Western societies, where traditions of objective science separates the secular from the spiritual.

I know Maurice Strong and Mr. Gorbachev, and Mr. Steven Rockefeller, and many of our Earth Charter Commissioners, have already provided a boundless selfless service to accomplish the objectives of the Earth Charter. With the kind of dedication we have already witnessed, I am sure the Earth Charter will be an important instrument of change, of turning the corner, of a renaissance which will heal the Earth and the spirit of man.

We hope, as the Earth Charter document says towards the end, that 'ours will be a time remembered for the awakening of the new reverence of life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life'.

And today with the help of all of you, we stand firmly on this road to recovery. You and I, who are now at the crossroads of history, can play a part in bringing about this recovery.