

**THE EARTH CHARTER LAUNCH
THE HAGUE, THE NETHERLANDS
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Your Majesty, representatives of the Dutch Government, Mr. Mayor, dear friends of the Global Environmental Movement, dear members of the Council. On the face of it, I have survived so much that I don't need to worry anymore, but still I'm worrying today, and I am a bit nervous, because of the launch of such an important document. During almost fifty years in politics I have had to sign a lot of documents and the Earth Charter is above everything I have signed so far, and that is why I am a bit nervous.

Yes, it was right here in this very room six years ago in the seat of the Dutch Government that this initiative was born. The document that we are presenting today represents not only our worries connected to the environmental crisis that we are approaching, but also our hopes that with our joint effort we can overcome this crisis. And this declaration is the key to the part that we can take in the future to harmonize our relationship with nature; and the way to the Earth Charter turned out to be a hard one and we did our best. We can be proud of the results that our hearts and our brains have achieved.

The main difference of the Earth Charter from other documents is that this document is the result of the work, not just of a certain commission, not just of one group of people, it is the result of the thoughts, hopes and dreams of thousands and thousands even of millions of people. But the input of those who created this document word by word, and line after line should be noted among these thousand of people. There have been several versions, several drafts of the document, 10's drafts and the last draft was created on the basis of the vivid discussions at the beginning of this year. The Commission, representing different continents, different cultures, different religions got together and in a joint effort created this document, and I can say that situations like this, demonstrate that we can overcome any problem if we act similar to the spirit that we acted here.

It is quite symbolic that the idea of the Earth Charter and the presentation of the Charter take place in the same country, in the same land, this land of wonderful people and Your Majesty, please allow me, and to the people of The Netherlands, to express my deepest respect that we could set up this initiative here in this country. The work has been completed, and yet, the hardest work is still ahead of us.

The Charter is to help people to realize the real depth of the environmental crisis, and the Charter is to help people to realize that their position, that their actions will make all the difference and that their position, their actions will determine the change in our attitudes towards nature. We discuss a lot of topics, we hold a lot of conferences concerning the coming Millenium, but very often we forget the most important point of our agenda for

the 21st Century: the environmental issues, the environmental challenge. We all must realize this and then, only then, we can do a lot.

In the years of Perestroika, and these were the years where you heard words like, Perestroika and Glasnost, coming from the Soviet Union and suddenly, unbelievable things happened, and those things determined by future work in society. In those years of freedom, openness of democracy, the first demonstrations that took place all over the country were about environmental issues, and these were very powerful demonstration and we, the government, were forced to shut down 1300 enterprises because they were harmful for the environment. A nuclear test was suspended on demand of those demonstrations and the whole project to turn the water in the rivers from south to north was shut down as well. This is exactly what the new phase of work after the presentation is all about, we need people to believe in it, to trust it, we need people to understand what we call for but now it is the Charter, that calls for these issues, not us.

The Earth Charter is a very important document of moral, ethical and political importance. All those whose actions have environmental consequences: politicians, businessmen, researchers, military should coordinate their souls and actions with this Charter. We are talking about those things today and everything seems so clear and simple. Yes, a lot of things are simple. What people have to do, in accordance with the principles, with the values of the Charter, will probably turn out to be more difficult than the Perestroika change for all of us.

This concerns everyone, every single person. It concerns our personal life, the lives of our families, of our cities, of our regions. And it is quite amazing that in the developed western countries, we here call on for change, change in our consumer behavior more and more often, it is really amazing. But what will those three billion people say about this? I am talking about people whose daily expenses are less than two dollars. We cannot unite people in the spirit of the Earth Charter, without eradicating poverty and backwardness. We hoped that after the Cold War was over, all the resources that came free would be devoted to solving these tasks. But the reality is such that the assistance from the developed countries went down by 38%.

I was quite happy to hear from my friend Rabbi, at the assembly of the Green Cross, that The Netherlands is one of the countries that thinks about these issues and tries to enlarge the amount of help that is provided to those countries. But unfortunately not every country behaves in this way and it is up to us to solve. Unfortunately, until now, what globalization brought us is that the rich became richer and the poor became more numerous. What we have heard today and everything we heard during our meetings and during our discussions, during our work on the Earth Charter, prove that the problems that the Charter addresses, need new approaches and need new leadership and not just political leadership. All of us have to achieve and change a lot. Now we should revise the situation that is vividly described in Russia, that the writers keep on writing and the readers keep on reading, and everything stays just the way it is.

The Green Cross will participate in the realization of the Earth Charter and Rio in the practical way. I am talking about our major projects and our smaller projects as well, including the elimination of the chemical weapons and the freshwater project, etc. I am not going to take more of your time listing them all. I would also like to express our deepest gratitude to the people of The Netherlands and the Government of The Netherlands. Your Majesty, we sincerely hope that when times become harder for us, we can still count on your patronage. Thank you.