

**The Earth Charter Launch
The Hague, The Netherlands
June 29th, 2000**

**MAURICE STRONG
Co-Chair, The Earth Charter Commission
President of the Earth Council**

Your Majesty, Mr. Minister, Mr. Mayor, Your Excellencies, friends of the Earth Charter process. I have been privileged to have many high moments in my life of public service, but none that I value more than this moment, which brings to fruition a very important piece of unfinished business from Rio's Earth Summit. Whereas some of you will recollect, we tried to get the leaders of the world to accept an Earth Charter as a statement of moral and ethical principles to guide the conduct of people and nations towards the Earth and towards each other. They were not ready for it. Interested, but not ready. And they did agree on a declaration which moved us part way, along that pathway but also left us with a challenge to pick up this piece of unfinished business and put it in the hands of the people of the world, so they then could complete this work and bring it to their leaders.

Thanks to the enlightened leadership of then Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, of this very enlightened country, we were able to bring together two organizations: the one led by esteemed world statesman, who is our Co-Chairperson, Mikhail Gorbachev and the Earth Council, joined by so many others in this room, and many who are not in this room and I will not enumerate them all. We are paying our tributes to them consistently, but we want you to know that even without naming you all, there are too many to name, that we recognize that this work that we celebrate today, is the work of many, many minds and souls and hands. Literally hundreds of thousands of people around the world have been part of the process of contributing their insights, their thinking, to the formulation of the Earth Charter. Steven Rockefeller headed the Drafting Group, which zealously, carefully, conscientiously sifted these ideas, examined every one and did a masterful job of incorporating these insights into the Earth Charter, that is now before you.

I have to say a special word about Her Majesty, because her presence here today is not merely symbolic, as the Head of State that has provided the sponsorship of this occasion, but also, I know that Her Majesty has had a long and deep interest in, and support for these issues, for many years, and that has been an immense source of inspiration and encouragement to all of us.

Let me only make a point which has very much been on my own mind as I have worked with you to come to this point of celebration, and that is, that we are at a unique period of human history but we have not yet taken on the awesome implications of that. That literally the scale and intensity of human activities on this planet, and the level of population, has reached the point at which we are literally the principal agents of our own future. Our future, the future of life on our planet literally is in our hands.

What we do or fail to do, and I believe that will be decided in this generation, will literally determine the human future and the future of life on Earth, because we are affecting now, with our activities, the parameters on which life depends. We also must understand, with modesty, that the natural condition of our planet is not to have the conditions available that support human life. It is only for a very minute portion of our geological history that the conditions that nourish and make possible life have existed on this planet and now we are altering those. We now have lost our innocence. We know what we are doing to the Earth. We know how it is undermining our own future and the future of all life on this planet. We have knowledge, we have technologies that permit us to deal with these. So the real question is, why are we not? We are the richest civilization that has ever been known and yet we have more poverty than ever, more inequity. Surely it is a moral blight on our civilization that we permit this to exist. We cannot excuse ourselves by saying that we cannot afford it. So what is the problem? Surely we know a lot about implementation, but we do not have the motivation.

Of course, motivations are economic, of course motivations are personal and national self-interests, but at the deepest level, our motivations are rooted in our moral, ethical and spiritual being. And the Earth Charter is an attempt to bring the insights from people all over the world, from different nationalities, different religions and spiritual traditions. Bring them together in a common set of principles, which can help to motivate the kind of cooperative action needed to ensure the future of life on our planet. It is not, the Earth Charter is not a sacred writ, not something that we want simply people to sign on to. We want them to use it as a tool, to examine their own spiritual, ethical and moral motivational structures, to see how these can apply in practical ways to their own life, to the institutions they serve, to the governments and to international organizations.

So it is a means of challenging people everywhere to develop the moral and spiritual dimensions, and put them in the center of their lives and the center of their action processes: education, dialogue, discussion, action. This is what we want to challenge people everywhere to do. And, Your Majesty, your presence here, your receipt of the Earth Charter, will be a step in the new phase of the process by which we want to bring this now to people everywhere and present it to the leaders everywhere. So that people and their leaders can join in the process of making the Earth Charter a real basic foundation to the transition to a more sustainable, equitable way of life on our planet.

Thank you.