

The Earth Charter and Religion

The Earth Charter is the product of a decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values. Consultations on the Earth Charter began during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, but the actual drafting of the Earth Charter was conducted and completed as a civil society initiative. It is the purpose of the Earth Charter to articulate the consensus on shared values taking form in the emerging global civil society. Many religious leaders from diverse traditions participated in the consultation and drafting process.

The Earth Charter sets forth general ethical principles and strategic guidelines for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful world. The text of the Earth Charter affirms many values that are fundamental to the great religious traditions of humanity, including compassion, love, justice, care for the poor, environmental conservation, and peace.

The Earth Charter promotes the building of a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace. It strongly supports respect for cultural and religious diversity. The Earth Charter Initiative encourages all cultures and religions to embrace, in their own distinctive ways, the Earth Charter's ethic of respect and care for all peoples and the greater community of life. It is not the purpose of the Earth Charter Initiative to create a new world religion and the Earth Charter has not been presented as a "mystical revelation" as some have asserted. It is not the intention of the Earth Charter Initiative to replace the high ethical demands of the world's religions with some new ethical minimalism.

Different traditions and organizations affirm, celebrate, and promote the Earth Charter in many diverse ways. The Earth Charter Commission and International Council welcome a diversity of responses from religious organizations and groups. They do not identify the Earth Charter itself with any one response in particular.

In addition to its ethical principles, the Earth Charter recognizes the importance of the spiritual dimension of life and makes reference to several widely shared spiritual values, including the following: The Preamble emphasizes "that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more." It affirms the values of "reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature."

The Earth Charter, which seeks support across all boundaries of faith and culture, does not make reference to God or the Creator, because some religious traditions and many humanists do not use God language. However, some people in the Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu traditions and various other religious traditions choose to interpret the reference to "reverence for the mystery of being" as a summons to reverence for God. Other individuals and groups will not give this reference a theological interpretation.

The Earth Charter teaches respect for nature and Earth, our planetary home. The Earth Charter does not promote the deification or worship of Earth. The Earth Charter capitalizes Earth because this is the name of the planet. All the planets in our solar system have names. Astronomers, scientists in general, and many others use the names of the planets when referring to them. In addition, the use of the name Earth evokes the image of the planet in space as captured by the photographs of the astronauts. This image of Earth as a relatively small, beautiful, and fragile planet floating in space encourages the attitudes of respect and care.

The Earth Charter recognizes that all nations, peoples, and religions live in an increasingly interdependent world and that many urgent problems can only be managed and resolved in through global cooperation. Collaboration and partnership require common goals and values such as are found in the Earth Charter. There is a great need for the leadership and support of the world's religions in the effort to promote shared values and to build a just, sustainable, and peaceful world community.

Even though the Earth Charter advocates worldwide cooperation and global community, it is not the purpose of the Earth Charter to promote creation of a world government. The Earth Charter does state that "the partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance."