



Message from Steven C. Rockefeller

Celebrating Earth Charter+20

Monday, 29 June 2020



On June 29, 2000, the Earth Charter was launched at a special event at the Peace Palace in The Hague. It was the product of a decade long, worldwide, cross-cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values for the 21st century. The initial proposal to draft an Earth Charter is found in "Our Common Future," the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, and an effort was made to craft and adopt an Earth Charter at the United Nations Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Governments could not reach agreement on principles for the Charter, but Maurice Strong, the secretary general of the Rio Earth Summit, did not abandon the visionary project. In collaboration with Mikhail Gorbachev and Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers and Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, he restarted the undertaking as a civil society initiative in 1994. After two years of research and international consultations, an Earth Charter Commission was formed to oversee the drafting of the document and an international drafting committee was created. Hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals around the world became involved in the ongoing consultation and drafting process. The inclusive and participatory nature of the process gives credibility to the claim that the Earth Charter stands as a declaration of universal values.

The launch of the Earth Charter occurred as world leaders were preparing to attend the United Nations Millennium Summit. It was the hope of the Earth Charter Commission and supporters that the UN General Assembly would adopt or recognize the Earth Charter. However, the UN General Assembly has never adopted a document that it had not drafted, and it has not endorsed the Earth Charter. Nevertheless, the Earth Charter has been endorsed by UNESCO, the World Conservation Congress of IUCN, and over 7,000 other organizations worldwide. To date, no other intergovernmental or civil society document has replaced the

Earth Charter, and the Charter is more urgently needed than ever as an ethical guide to the way forward.

For me personally, what has been most meaningful and inspiring regarding my experience with the Earth Charter over the past twenty-five years has been the opportunity to come to know and collaborate with so many truly exceptional women and men from many different nations and cultures. They have given me hope in the face of all the challenges before us. As we celebrate the Earth Charter, share stories about what has been accomplished and our experiences, and recommit ourselves to the great work that lies ahead, let us also share a moment of silence and with deep gratitude remember the open hearted, farsighted women and men who made the Earth Charter initiative possible and provided essential leadership. Many of these brave, visionary souls are no longer with us. Among those who have died, I would like to note those who served on the Earth Charter Commission and at the Earth Council where the Earth Charter Secretariat was based. They include: Maurice Strong (Canada), Ruud Lubbers (Netherlands), Kamla Chowdhry (India), Mohammed Sahnoun (Algeria), Wangari Maathai (Kenya), Henrietta Rasmussen (Greenland), Mercedes Sosa (Argentina), John Hoyt (USA), and Maximo Kalaw (Philippines). Each in his or her own unique way was an extraordinary human being and inspiring example.

On this occasion, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to Mirian Vilela, who has over two decades provided outstanding leadership as executive director of the Earth Charter International Secretariat, which is based at the University for Peace in Costa Rica, established by the United Nations. Special thanks also go to Kartikeya Sarabhai, who today chairs the ECI Council and ECA board, and to his colleagues on the Council and at ECA.

Each nation has its own special challenges that its citizens must address. At the same time, we are citizens of an emerging global community that includes all life on Earth. The resurgence of nationalism and the current criticisms of globalization don't change that. The coronavirus pandemic and the related global economic crisis have, as well as the global

warming, heightened our awareness of the interdependence of all people's and nations. In the words of the Earth Charter, "we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny...The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life." The Earth Charter principles clarify in broad outline what this call to action means. Adoption and pursuit of the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals would be a major step toward implementation of the Earth Charter principles. There is no time to waste.

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