

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Miriam Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action.

I have the pleasure to start the Earth Charter podcast series with a conversation with Steven Rockefeller. Steven became involved in the Earth Charter Initiative around 1995. He is a member of the Earth Charter Commission. He chaired the Earth Charter Drafting Committee between 1996 and the year 2000, and chaired the Earth Charter International Council for several years. Thank you so much Steven for joining us in this conversation. I'd like to start by asking you to share with us a little bit about your own journey in becoming interested in nature, spirituality, international affairs and the Earth Charter.

Well, first of all, Miriam, it's a special honor to be interviewed and I'm very happy to be able to have this conversation with you. For over 25 years I've been very deeply involved with the Earth Charter Initiative and the roots of my involvement go way back. I was raised in a family that had keen interest in international affairs and this goes back to my grandfather and really my great grandfather. My father was very very interested in international affairs, particularly in relations with South America and Central America.

So I grew up in a family where thinking about global issues and so forth was just part of regular dinner table conversation. I also grew up in a family that took the Christian religious tradition quite seriously. And when I was a child we had prayers every morning. My father let prayers and we attended church regularly. I became very interested in religious issues and this concern was deepened as I grew up and became aware of the great gulf in the world between the rich and the poor, between the privileged and the disadvantaged.

And I became very troubled about this and when I was in college I was in the 1950s and of course in the 1960s American societies sort of exploded with a whole series of cultural revolutions. There was the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement, the Anti-War Movement and the establishment in America which was basically a white Protestant Anglo-Saxon male world came under attack and this deepened my religious question. And let me just say one other thing about my family and their interests. My grandfather was keenly interested in the environment and he became a leading conservationist and helped create five national parks in the United States, including the Teton National Park.

And so conservation was again a major theme in family activity and discussions. And two things happened there. One, as a child we were taken into the outdoors a lot, particularly off the coast of Maine, a very beautiful area with islands in the ocean. And I spent a lot of time as a child sailing and camping and so forth on islands and also we were in the Rocky Mountains. And my family had a ranch in Jackson Hole in Wyoming and we spent sometimes summers out there and I had my first job working as a chore boy when I was 14 on my grandfather's ranch in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

And I got my social security number and my first paycheck and so forth when I was a boy. But that experience in the mountains had a very profound impact on me. It was really a spiritual experience and I felt the lure and magnetism of the mountains and the whole natural world. And this was very important to my own spiritual development. So environmental conservation and then a very deep personal connection with the natural world were part of my childhood experience.

This is wonderful to hear Steven.

Indeed, we cannot underestimate the value of our outdoor experiences in nature, especially during our childhood, be it in the mountains, oceans, forests, or any other environment as a way to cultivate our connection with nature.

And when I felt troubled, distressed, discouraged, when I was dealing with problems in my life, where I went for solace for peace was back into the world of nature. And that's where I felt sustained and held and so that coupled with my own early childhood experience with the Christian tradition, led me to be very interested in religion.

And then under the impact of the 1960s with all the social turmoil, I decided to go to theological seminary to sort out a lot of these issues and questions. And my father was going into politics and he ran for governor first in New York State in 1958 and I participated in that campaign. And I became very interested in the values that underlie American democratic culture and life. And one of the things that I was most concerned about in going to seminary was trying to understand the values that were at the foundation of American culture and democracy and so forth.

And at the same time I was always interested in where environmental values fit in. And of course in the early 1960s people were really focused very much on the environment. Although Leopold wrote his wonderful essay, *The Land Ethic*, in 1949 he couldn't find a publisher initially for it. And that says a lot about where people were on that front. And then Rachel Carson in 1963 published *Silent Spring*. And this was really a wake up call. And the beginning of the development of the American environmental movement in a serious way. And so that also had an impact.

So you talked about your experience in the mountains and the ocean as spiritual connection with nature. Can you share with us any specific powerful experience you have had with nature or in nature?

When I was 18 I worked for the National Park Service in the Teton Mountains in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. And my job was building trails. I was on a trail crew. And we lived all summer back in the mountains in a camp at 9,000, 10,000 feet. And all summer long we just cleared and built trails.

One Sunday when we had a day off we went to my grandfather's ranch. And it was about a 20 mile hike from my grandfather's ranch through the mountains climbing about 5,000, 6,000 feet. And then making your way through the mountains back to my camp where we were working. And I got the idea that night, late Sunday, that I would just instead of going

back around to the National Park Service headquarters and taking the Scherder Road, I would just hike in the afternoon and walk this 20 miles to my camp.

And of course this meant going up to almost 11,000 feet and walking through snow fields and so forth. But I had been this way a couple years before on horseback and I figured well I could just do this. So I set out and we climbed up to about 10,000 feet to the camp of one of my friends. And I left him there in his camp and by then it was 9 o'clock at night and it was dark. And I set out through an area, a very high elevation, not realizing that it was still covered with snow. And that the spring thaw had not really cleared it up. This was, you know, maybe early July.

And as I made my way through this trail in the mountains, the trail all of a sudden disappeared in the snow. And I became lost because there was no trail to follow. And I realized I was walking on snow under which melting water was running. And this was beginning to get very dangerous. And this melting water was running about 300 or 400 yards and then dropping off a cliff down into a valley that happened to be called Death Canyon. But as I was walking along in the dark, all of a sudden the memory flashed in my mind of a ridge that came through this area.

And I could dimly see it through the darkness. So I headed across the snow to it and took my ice axe and I climbed the ridge. And as I came up on the edge of the ridge, this was at about 10,500 feet, there was a cross mounted in a pile of stones. And the cross was actually marking the boundary line between the National Park and the Targi National Forest. And it was pure luck that I happened to come upon that cross. But there it was in the gray sky, this cross in the night sky. And at that point it was maybe about 10, 30, 11 o'clock at night.

So I curled up and spent the night there lying on this rocky ground next to this marker. Because I figured that when the sun came up, I would be able to see a path from that marker back to the trail. Because somebody had walked out there and built this pile of stones and put this sign and this marker. But it really saved my life that night. Because if I had kept going over that ridge, I might have fallen 300, 400 feet. And I could have, who knows what might have happened. But anyway, when the sun started to come up around 4.35 o'clock, the first rays of light, I was able to see where I was and what was happening.

And I made my way back onto the trail. And at 6 o'clock that morning I stumbled on a pair of campers, a man and a woman, that were camped there. And they were cooking breakfast. And I was like a ghost, you know, that came out of the darkness. It was early, you were dumbfounded. I mean, where did you come from? And they gave me coffee and some scrambled eggs. And then I had about 5 or 6 miles to walk to my camp. And the people at my camp had kept a fire going all night for me. Anyway, I made it. But the important thing there was that that encounter in the darkness with that cross had a certain spiritual power.

And it really saved my life that night. So it was a combination of both Christian symbolism and this experience in the outdoors in nature. You know, it had quite an impact on me. And this was again one of the reasons. I set out on this spiritual quest later in my life.

Oh, what a nice story. This was certainly a special and unique experience. Do you have any other example you could share with us of a specific time that you remember was life changing?

When I was 20 years old, I spent a summer, about 2 and a half months, on a cattle ranch in the interior of Venezuela, in the Yanos. The nearest road was 150 miles away. There was no electricity. We slept in a little hut with a grass roof and we slept in a hammock. And it was a cattle ranch that had not been used for probably close to 75 years. And my father had bought it. Actually very cheaply because it was so remote. And the job on the ranch was riding out and roping these wild cattle, cutting their horns and branding them. And it was a truly extraordinary situation. And the Yanos is a just stunningly beautiful part of the world.

Huge expanses of savannas with rivers lacing through them and along the rivers, jungles filled with holler monkeys and anacondas and crocodiles in the river. It was extraordinary. So that was a remarkable 2 and a half months. And it almost tempted me to come back to Venezuela because I was very interested in birds. I've been all my life in ornithology and birds. And it almost tempted me to come back to do a field guide on Venezuelan birds because there was no good field guide on Venezuelan birds. And Roger Torrey Peterson had just published in the United States his field guide to the birds of North America. And sometimes I look back and sort of wish maybe I'd taken two years and gone and done that. But it was a great experience.

Tell us a bit more about your interest in birds. I've always been fascinated by birds.

And I had an uncle on my mother's side, a man named George Clark, who was president of the flower club in Philadelphia in the United States. And he was a first-rate bird ornithologist. He could identify any number of birds simply by the verb the song. And when I was about 11 or 12 years old, he took on me under his wing and he started taking me out on birding trips. And all my life this has been one of the great joys for me. And if you ask me why birds, I can only say they're magical, they're beautiful, they're little gems in the woods. And when you become aware of birds and birds song, a whole other dimension to your experience outdoors begins to take place. You're aware of something going on that many people are just not aware of, all this bird life around them in the woods and so forth. So that's been a great source of joy for me all over the years. I love nothing better than taking my binoculars and heading out into some wild place.

Thank you for sharing this with us. Now, can you share with us a bit about your spiritual path? How did you move or enter into a realm of world religions, philosophy and ethics?

So those are some of the experiences from my early life. I mean a spiritual connection with nature, growing up with an international perspective and concern, deeply troubled by the issues of social justice, economic justice in the world, and then going to seminary to try to get all this sorted out. And the wonderful thing about that experience was it plunged me into the history of western philosophy, the history of western theology, and then I went on from Union Theological Seminary to Columbia University and studied the history of the world religions.

And so that took me out into beyond the Christian tradition to begin to understand and appreciate the perspective of other cultures and other traditions. So all of that was really helpful when I went into the earth charter drafting process because I had spent 30 years studying philosophy and world religion and had this global perspective. So all of that was very, very, very helpful. And it was an enormously exciting time to go into the field of religion and philosophy and theology because all of these eastern traditions were being studied and discovered in the 1960s and 70s in the United States.

So I became part of all of that and we really felt we were on the frontier of an awakening of a new global ethical and spiritual consciousness in the 1960s and 70s. So a very, very exciting time. It's important for me to go back in my family history because my great grandfather and great grandmother were Baptists and very close to fundamentalists in their religious beliefs. My grandfather, this is John D. Rockefeller Jr., grew up in that household. No dancing, no going to the theater, no drinking and so forth.

And in the course of his life during his 20s and 30s, he abandoned the very strict fundamentalist orientation of his mother and he embraced a very liberal brand of Protestant Christianity. I mean, he was a very devoted Christian and he, you know, I can remember vividly as a child his saying grace at meals and the deep sincerity of his prayers and so forth. But he became very religious, very liberal in his religious views. And he said, for example, what is really needed is people to embrace a strong, ethical set of values that would enable people from all religious traditions to cooperate in dealing with the problems of the world.

And he was very impatient with denominational battles over theology and liturgy in the Christian church. And he even was reluctant to contribute financially to a Christian group if they would not cooperate and collaborate with other Christian groups. And he created in New York something called the Inter-Church Center, which is up by Riverside Church, which he built. He paid for it and created that big church up there. And next to it is the Inter-Church Center. And the vision for the Inter-Church Center was that it would become the headquarters of the leadership of the most important Christian denominations in the United States.

And if they were all up there in one building together, they would work together and collaborate. And that dream was only partially been fulfilled. So that liberal view of religion and this impatience with denominational sectarian squabbles and battles was something that, even though we didn't talk a lot about it, I sort of imbibed that. So that's the first thing. It's important to say that my orientation in religion has always been quite liberal.

I turned to Buddhism in the 1970s because I was looking for training in meditation. I had become very interested in mysticism and I could not find anybody among the Christian leaders that I know that could be helpful to me in all of this. And I was deeply influenced by people like Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich and their theological visions and so forth. But I wanted a spiritual practice. And one day at Columbia University I found Philip Clapp Caplow's book, *The Three Pillars of Zen*. And the whole book was about meditation.

It wasn't some secret that you had to join a monastery to be instructed in. It was right there. That was the whole point of Zen Buddhism, was spiritual practice and meditation. So I said, well, I'm going to look into this. So I went through about 15 years of formal training in Zen practice at Philip Caplow's center in Rochester, New York. And I never saw any contradiction between my liberal Christianity and my Buddhist practice. I saw them as complementary. And of course there are theological issues that, you know, I mean, if you have to sort out between Buddhist philosophy and Christian theology and there are issues there.

But increasingly for me, the religious life involves the quality of your relationships with yourself, with other persons, with the larger world of nature and the great mystery that is this universe that embraces all of us. And the principle of reverence, use Leonardo Boff's language of the ineffable mystery with a capital I and a capital M is absolutely fundamental.

What is this mystery, great mystery and faith?

Faith for me means deep trust that in spite of all that would lead you to say no to life, that would lead you to despair, you say yes to life. If you have faith, it's that big yes deep in your gut to the world in spite of everything that would lead you to say no. That you can trust somehow, that deep down the world does make sense. There is ultimate meaning in this life. Faith is not first and foremost about believe, I believe this, I believe that. That's a secondary thing.

We all need to find a way to express the trust we feel in the universe, in life. So, you know, we embrace certain beliefs, but the beliefs are intellectual. Faith comes out of your gut and out of your heart and faith is really a gift. Somehow we're held at a very deep level and we're able to trust in spite of all the bad experiences we have in life. So, you know, in meditation practice for me and spiritual practice is opening yourself up to this mystery of trust and faith. And getting in touch with your own deeper, deeper self.

That quiet center that's underneath all of the ideas and everything that's constantly flowing through our mind, creating anxiety and worry and anger and frustration and all these different things.

So, what is very important for me in Buddhism is it gave me a really good spiritual practice. And that, that has just been a priceless, invaluable gift. And at the same time, I have deep roots in the Christian tradition, in Christian ethics, in the teachings around social justice that come out of the Christian and Jewish tradition. And so, you know, I'm a kind of Christian Buddhist. But again, I come back to the point that for me, the divine is not something way out there. The divine is, there's a transcendent dimension, but the divine and the sacred is also among us.

To use the language of one of the mystics, it's the beyond in the midst. It's somehow present among us. And when we open up to each other and are able to build a good relationship, the sacred is there.

And I think we, you know, Matthew 25 talks about Jesus explaining that when you have shown compassion and kindness to the least of human beings, the person, the poor, the

person in prison, whatnot, you have shown compassion to me. And I think that we have to recognize today that the least of these is also all other species. It's the animals and plants that are also part of our community of life.

How about faith and belief systems? How do they relate?

I like to think about faith as a deep trust in the ultimate meaning and purpose of life. It's the great yes inside your heart to the world. Belief is a secondary phenomenon in the development of religion. First there's an experience and then people try to put it in words and they wind up with a belief system. And the belief system is a way of celebrating and communicating values that people believe in. And it's a way of defining a group who share that experience and share then the beliefs. So the belief system becomes important in terms of the identity of a group and defining oneself or against others.

It seems the experience and skills you acquired in the spiritual path you had certainly helped you in your task as the chair of the Earth Charter draft in community. Many people including me talk about the incredible capacity you have to listen to others.

I did know that it was absolutely critical in giving the drafting process credibility that we listened to all these different voices. And then my job really was to be sort of a sponge that could absorb all of this and then let it turn around and try to come out in some coherent form.

I think my training in Zen Buddhism deepened my power of concentration and I've always been able to concentrate with intensity. So I can sit in the middle of Grand Central Station and write and read. All this going on doesn't bother me at all. So some of that, this ability to focus and listen is just by our own ability to concentrate. Which can be disturbing to people sometimes if I'm just totally focused on something and something else. They want me to focus on something else. But it was very important I think for all of us in the drafting committee to listen really intently and try to understand perspectives that we didn't initially understand.

And to think them through. And so part of the whole experience for me was a real education in a lot of issues that I had in some cases, you know, but not thought through in great detail. So it was a real educational experience for me. Well I'm generally interested in what people think. And during the earth charter drafting process I was always looking for a new idea, a fresh perspective. Something that would expand my understanding of what the issues were for people in local communities or in different cultures or different regions.

And so I was genuinely fascinated by all of it. I mean I just loved being in the midst of these conversations and dialogues. And I think just meeting the people from around the world. I mean this was one of the great joys of the whole earth charter experience. It gave you a way of walking into all sorts of different situations, culturally and nationally and so forth. And meeting people that otherwise you might never have an opportunity to meet and sit down and talk with. So I genuinely enjoy it.

One of the important things when you're in a different culture from your own or you're meeting people from another dimension of life that, you know, whose experience is different, is that you're just emptying your mind and you listen and pay attention and discover who they are and what they are. I think the problem comes with all of us as human beings when we start out by imposing our ideas on people and making assumptions about what they think or what they are or what their values are, rather than just being open to meet them and engage with them.

And, you know, I think a warm smile goes a long way in making a connection with people. And I always remember the Dalai Lama once in a talk saying that smiling is a form of spiritual practice for him. That he finds that if he greets people with a big warm open smile, you know, all sorts of things would happen. But if you approach someone with a dour face and, you know, a long face and you're grim and uptight, then, you know, the other person pulls back and nothing happens. So I think part of the key is just to be open and meeting people that are very different from you is actually enormously exciting.

I mean, sometimes it can be unnerving. I mean, you know, in the world today we really need that kind of openness to each other. And listening becomes part of the work of building relationships and then being able to talk and communicate. Also, just listening to silence spiritually is very important. And that requires a lot of concentration because you have to let go of all the ideas that are flowing through your mind. Let them just run and then sit quietly and be able to attend to silence. And so, you know, paying keen attention to a bird singing is also a kind of meditative practice because it focuses your mind.

I mean, meditation is about bringing your mind to a sharp focus and centering on that. So something like bird watching or even something like fly fishing where a person is concentrated on a tiny little fly dancing on the water. You know, they forget everything else. And sometimes someone will come back from an experience like that 10 hours and you would think they'd be exhausted, but they're energized. And the reason is concentration, letting go of everything else, just floats away. So, you know, all those things are interrelated, I think.

I mean, listening requires that concentration. You use the term everybody has their own song. And that's a nice metaphor in a sense, you know, to listen for the song in another person. I mean, that's actually a beautiful metaphor.

Yes, I can relate to that. For me, it has also been a great joy and experience. Steven, did your involvement with the Earth Charter changed in any way your world view?

I don't think the Earth Charter experience dramatically changed my world view, but it deepened it and expanded it. It didn't really change it because I was moving in this direction from all my academic work in philosophy and religion and so forth. So I've been deeply engaged, you know, in the debate about what kind of a world view we need in order to address the problems of the world. And again, I was raised in a family that was grappling with global problems. And my father was deeply interested in political issues and economic and social issues. So, you know, I sort of grew up, you know, oriented in that way.

But the Earth Charter experience gave me a chance to clarify a lot of things, to test ideas, and to learn, you know, how people in different parts of the world were thinking about this emerging new world view that all of us in the Earth Charter were trying to clarify and describe in as simple a way as we could. And so I think this was part of the excitement of it, was this crystallization and clarification of these ideas that were all swimming around in my head in different ways. But, you know, I did learn a lot, particularly from the international law people, about how to clarify principles and simplify these ideas. And then in dialogue, we were able to develop our own distinctive formulations for the Earth Charter.

Let's turn to the origins of the Earth Charter. Can you tell us a bit about the history of the Earth Charter? Where does that come from and how do you see that as part of the evolving movement of global values and ethics?

The Earth Charter Initiative has deep roots in the development of global ethics since World War II. And these roots run all the way back to the founding of the United Nations in 1947 and the issuing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

What is significant here is the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is really the beginning of the post-Second World War development of global ethics. And I believe that when the history of the 20th century is written, one of the most important themes will be that the human family, after World War II and the disaster that it was, began to seriously come together, trying to agree on universal values, shared ethical concerns that would lay the foundation for peace and development.

And human rights became one of the principal elements of this new emerging vision of universal values and shared ethical concerns. So when the United Nations Charter was drafted, the three big themes from an ethical point of view in the Charter are a concerned commitment to human rights, a commitment to cooperating, building peace, and then economic and social development. Those were the three big themes. There was no mention of the environment or conservation. However, in 1948, the IUCN was created. IUCN, that's the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

And today, IUCN is the biggest international environmental organization in the world. And it has about 80 governments that are a member of it and over 800 non-governmental organizations. And at the Fontainebleau Conference, when IUCN was founded, there was a proposal and wide support for the drafting of a World Convention for the Protection of Nature. And this was later described as a World Charter for the Protection of Nature. So that's 1948. So there was a group of people already then beginning to think we need something like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that deals with the environment.

But the fact of the matter was that nobody really did much about drafting this World Convention for the Protection of Nature for 30 years. Now what caused IUCN finally to turn to the job of drafting this World Charter? It was the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment that took place in 1972. And the Stockholm Conference is important for really two reasons in this story. Number one, it put the environment on the international agenda, on the agenda of the United Nations together with human rights, peace, and development.

And so that was very important. And the second thing is the first article in the Stockholm Declaration states that all human beings have a right to a healthy environment. So this idea of the right to a healthy environment began to emerge and here you see a connection between human rights and a concern about environmental protection. So after the Stockholm Conference, IUCN got together with the Environmental Law Center in Bonn in Germany and began drafting what became the World Charter for Nature.

The World Charter for Nature is really a very, very important document. It was finalized, launched, and adopted by the United Nations in 1982, 10 years after Stockholm.

Why is the World Charter for Nature so important?

Two reasons. Number one, it elevated the principle of respect for nature in the international thinking about the environment. It basically made clear that the first principle of environmental ethics is respect for nature. And in the preamble of the World Charter for Nature, it is explained that all life forms have value quite apart from their utilitarian value for people.

And as a result, all life forms are worthy of environmental moral consideration. So this was a major step forward and the World Charter for Nature was overwhelmingly endorsed by the UN General Assembly. However, part of the drama here is that most governments walked away from the World Charter for Nature. And they basically turned their back on this principle of respect for nature. And this was very important for all of us when we were drafting the Earth Charter because one of the goals was to bring that principle back and reassert it right up front.

And I'll have more to say about that. But at the same time, IUCN was engaged in drafting the World Charter for Nature. It was also working on the first World Conservation Strategy. And it was doing this in partnership with UNEP, United Nations Environment Program, which had been created after the Stockholm Conference, and with the World Wildlife Fund. And the World Wildlife Fund had earlier, back in the 1960s, drafted a World Wildlife Charter. But it didn't develop the ethical principles very extensively.

However, this first World Conservation Strategy, which was released and launched in 1980, is important for two reasons. Number one, it attempted to bring together the development and conservation movements. And it came up with the concept of sustainable development. So the first time that this concept of sustainable development was put on the international agenda was in 1980 by IUCN in the World Conservation Strategy. Very important. In addition, in the World Conservation Strategy, there is a call for a new ethic that embraces plants and animals, as well as people, and also reflects an ethical concern for the needs of future generations.

This call is in the World Conservation Strategy issued by IUCN in 1980. Indira Gandhi wrote the introduction, and in it she highlights this threefold ethic. And she describes the urgent need for a sense of responsibility for our fellow human beings, other species, and future generations. Now there is the seed of the ethical vision that eventually gets articulated in the Earth Charter. But it was going to take a long time to get those three elements all pulled together.

It is interesting to see these documents actually opening the way for new thinking, such as bringing together these three different levels of responsibility. What came after that?

With the World Conservation Strategy issued with the World Charter for Nature drafted, the United Nations organized what became known as the Brunmann Commission, the World Commission on Environment Development, which was chaired by Gro Harlan Brunmann. And they issued this extraordinary document, which was their report entitled Our Common Future in 1987. And this is one of the most important documents in the whole history of the development of environmental conservation and sustainable development.

And we can say here that there are several things that are very important. That it took a further step developing the whole concept of sustainable development and bringing the subject of conservation, environmental conservation, and economic and social development together to integrate in this concept of sustainable development. And this really put the notion of sustainable development on the UN agenda. And from then on, sustainable development became a big organizing idea, like human rights or like democracy.

Very, very important concept. And the key document there is the Our Common Future. Now what about the ethical side of this? What is emphasized in the Brunmann Commission report is intergenerational responsibility, responsibility to future generations. The report also puts a lot of emphasis on the eradication of poverty. It's absolutely fundamental to dealing with the environment as well as dealing with all the human social justice and economic justice issues. There was not a lot of emphasis on the moral responsibility of human beings to other species.

There's one sentence in the Brunmann report that says we have human beings have moral obligations to other species as well as all human beings. But the real emphasis in the Brunmann Commission is on future generations. So you have the World Charter for Nature elevating respect for nature, but everybody sort of walks away from that. And then you have the Brunmann Commission elevating intergenerational responsibility is the key. And when Grohl-Harlem Brunmann went around promoting the commission report, she always emphasized this new ethic of intergenerational responsibility.

But then there's another thing that happens. In the late 19- oh no, let me just say this further about the Brunmann Commission report. And as at the conclusion of it, they recommend that a new charter be drafted that would contain principles for the transition to sustainable development. And that idea of a new charter is where the Earth Charter idea came from. And also they call for a hard law convention that would eventually translate the new charters principles into a hard law treaty. And Maurice Strong was appointed to serve as the Secretary General of the Rio Earth Summit, the UNSET, the United Nations Conference on Environment Development in 1992, held in Rio.

He took that recommendation from the Brunmann Commission report to create a new charter and called for that Rio Earth Summit to draft this Earth Charter.

So there are close links between the World Conservation Strategy, the Brunmann Commission report, our common future, and the regional idea of the Earth Charter.

Let me go back to one other very important development in the late 1980s before the Rio Earth Summit. At IUCN, they decided they wanted to update the World Conservation Strategy in the light of what had been done by the Brunmann Commission.

So they organized themselves to prepare a second version of the World Conservation Strategy. And that second version was published in a report under the title, Carrying for the Earth, a Strategy for Sustainable Living. It's a wonderful document. But what's especially significant from the point of view of the Earth Charter is they created an ethics working group to develop a set of ethical principles as the foundation for the Second World Conservation Strategy. And they asked Professor Ron Engel, who was teaching at Meadville-Lombard Theological Seminary, to chair this ethics working group.

And this is how I became involved in this whole saga in the development of global environmental ethics. Ron Engel asked me, because I was teaching at Middlebury College and we had met at various conferences and so forth. If I would join the ethics working group and help with the drafting of these principles, that would be the foundation for the World Conservation Strategy. And the first principle that was articulated by the ethics working group is the principle Respect and Care for the Community of Life.

And of course that became foundational principle for the Earth Charter. But that's where that principle was drafted. And so that also was a very important development. And at that point I then began to meet people at IUCN and became acquainted with Parvez Hassan, who was the chair of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law, and also with Nick Robinson. And with Song Li, who was also a member of the IUCN Commission on Environmental Law, and others working in this field. And this again became very, very important for the development of the Earth Charter. Why?

Because the second recommendation in the Roman Commission report was to draft a hard-law convention building on the Earth Charter. So Parvez Hassan and Nick Robinson and Wolfgang Berhene from the Environmental Law Center in Bonn started working on this hard-law convention before the Charter had been drafted. And this became very important because here was a group of scholars deeply engaged with international environmental law trying to synthesize all international environmental law. And this would become very, very helpful to those of us drafted in the Earth Charter to have the benefit of all that international law knowledge and talent pulling together the whole world of international law.

Steven, what do you think is the main added value of the Earth Charter in the midst of so many other declarations and movements?

It's the ethical vision that is contained in the Earth Charter document. What the Earth Charter does is highlight the fact that the decisions we make regarding environmental conservation and sustainable development are not just practical, economic issues. They are ethical issues that regard our vision of what kind of people we choose to be and what quality of life we choose to create on this planet.

And as I was saying earlier, science cannot tell us what is right and wrong and what is good and bad. We have to make a decision as human beings. Using our head and heart, we have to use our will and make a decision. We have to choose the way forward. And the Earth Charter highlights that this is an ethical choice regarding what is a good life versus what is a bad life.

If you want to put it that simply. So it's the emphasis on ethics, elevation of the importance of ethics and then the ethical vision itself, which is this integrated, coherent vision.

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