

Welcome to Turning Conscience into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian 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 and form action. So today I am very pleased to welcome Christine von Weizsacker.

Christine is a biologist, author, researcher, activist. She has contributed with the crafting of many United Nations policy and new language around biodiversity issues. She has participated in the negotiations of the real process on sustainable development since 1992 and has been nominated and appointed as the expert for the major group on women in the negotiations leading up to the real past 20. Since 1994, Christine has participated as an NGO representative in the negotiations of the Convention on Biodiversity Convention and its protocols, the Cartagena Protocol on Biodiversity.

So thank you so much, Christine, for joining us today. Well, thank you for inviting me. The beauty here is that Christine and I worked together. Also back in the late 1997, 1998, 1999, in the drafting of the Earth Charter. I really learned so much from you during those days. Thank you. Well, in former times when I was still a scientist, I addressed the issue of information theory from a slightly different angle from biology and definitely the creativity is with a listener. So whatever you made of it, the creativity is yours.

Thank you so much. But Christine, as I mentioned to you, I carry your voice with me for the past 20 years. In many of my conversations, I can hear your voice. So thank you. So let me ask you a question that relates to non-state actors' involvement in the United Nations negotiation processes. So you are very much part of the real 92 process and many of the subsequent ones. So how do you see the evolving process of non-state actors in such UN policy-making processes? Do you think it is effective or has it evolved forward or backwards in the past 30 years?

What's your take on it? Well, like many things, it has evolved and in some ways backward and in other ways forward. The importance of civil society actors in international negotiations, the mere numbers involved has been growing tremendously. But on the other hand, if I look back at the negotiations prior to real plus 20, it was clear that in a way very much initiated by the major group women, there are nine major societal groups following advising on the real process. By that major group, all the other major groups, farmers, youth, children and youth, Indigenous peoples, scientists, local governments, NGOs, they joined.

But for business. So eight of the nine major groups made proposals for the text. But the one major group that was not agreeing with that text proposal, business, not only could block the inclusion of the work in the zero draft for real plus 20, but also was the one major group mentioned most often saying, but also with the involvement of the private sector, etc. So there is a power asymmetry again between the major groups. Business are not so badly off. Business is very much heard with the debt crisis and financial crisis of governments and of the United Nations, hoping for money.

And therefore, it's a difficulty and also, I think civil society has to be very careful not to undo the separation of political powers between the legislative, meaning the parliament, the executive, the government and the courts of law, the maintenance of the rule of law. Very often in international affairs, civil society actors talk to business actors and override the parliament's, the government's and the courts of law in developing countries. So probably the conversation there is in a vertical way, not so much in a horizontal way, especially when it comes to indigenous people and youth and bringing them to the table together with the business people.

But you were talking specifically for the real plus 20 process. Now I'm talking in general, it is very important that civil society does not undo the structures of democracy and does not become too dependent on funding by the private sector. And this sometimes happens. So it's not an easy way forward. There are, on the other hand, Fridays for Future and others who were not running a huge infrastructure and had to maintain the huge infrastructure from the very beginning and therefore run into a dependence.

So it's a big picture, I think, with an overall growth of citizen speaking, but not alone due to something that was decided in Rio and that is the Rio principle number 10, which is also called the democracy principle of Rio, giving citizens access to information, participation and access to justice. So and it means timely access to information. It means effective participation and affordable access to justice, which is basically for the Western, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It's the Aarhus Convention and recently negotiated for Latin America the Escazu agreement, which didn't come into force yet.

And if there is a difficulty, it needs 10 parties to come into force. You have nine and the timing is slowed down by the COVID-19 crisis. So the United Nations will have to decide whether it prolongs the time until the 11 agreements can come in. Yeah, but we are all hoping that the last one more country will come in June to ratify and make it a real agreement. So in general, there is also an additional structure that helps civil society at the national levels and also at the international levels.

Well, I think there is an issue of the civil society knowing how to participate, knowing how to influence and advocate in how to articulate and make use of the spaces in one hand. And another one is to have the opening of governments to really understand the importance because the reality is that non-state actors brings a lot of knowledge also in the process. Not only knowledge, but also capacity to implement policies. Yes, but then, and therefore I think the Earth Charter is very important because it formulated concerns.

And just let me give you one example. Our great dependence on what the Earth can give us, all the rich diversity of ecosystems, was formulated in different ways. It was formulated as ecosystem services. And also by others, it was formulated as mother's gift to nature. And these two formulations, you could say they more or less describe the same, but they don't. One is very close in its wording to economic thinking. And also there was a report, the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity called TEEB report, which express these services in dollars.

So services, resources articulate the specific language. And on the other hand, it was the countries of the Andean pact that insisted that it should be complemented with nature's

gifts to people, that it has a gift character and is not merely involved in economic considerations. Even more so since the poor of this world have their livelihoods given directly by mother's nature's gifts to people or by ecosystem services, not via the market. So the expression in dollars is not what really appropriately describes the quality of their livelihoods.

So the choice of words, and this is what we had to learn overall, these processes, the choice of words preforms the way forward. And it's very important how you choose your words. Absolutely. And I learned that a lot from you. So you were part of the Earth Charter drafting process in the launch. So could you share with us some highlights of your experience in crafting some specific language words in it, maybe some of your own learning from it? Well, I mean, overall, I had the pleasure of learning a lot.

So between the philosophers, ethicists, moral theologians from all religions and countries and the lawyers, because it was also time where the draft covenant on environment and development was being promoted by IOCN. And the similarities and the differences is one thing I enjoyed seeing more of it. Secondly, let me just tell you one story. Perhaps the last problem in the formulation of the Earth Charter was how you deal with the fact with a conflict between Hindus and Buddhists who asked for compassion with animals.

And the Inuits and the Northern tribes in North America who said, well, sorry, in our region, we cannot grow vegetables and we cannot give the members of our tribes the obligation to learn about Buddhism and Hinduism. We have the language of respect. And there was this last meeting at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris when this difficult question was talked about. It took days. And the solution was in listening to each other, in listening to the concerns, in understanding. So at the end of the day, you have compassion in the first three principles and you have in the principle on behavior towards animals, the language on hunting was complimenting by the language on domestic animals and the language on non-target species.

So as to take away that fashionable idea in those times that it was the poor Inuit who killed the seal babies and were very guilty. And this was one of the main concerns. And it's part of their survival culture to hunt animals, but without unnecessary suffering. And it also gave a direction to the other people around the world, how you deal with your domestic animals and how you have bycatch and non-target animals suffering from what you're doing. So it took away that lonely aggression against the tribal customs as they understood it.

And that was a solution. And I think it improved the whole of charter, moving up compassion to the first three principles and then deal with the overall treatment of animals and not only of the hunting tribes. And all of that required a lot of listening, listening to the different ones. It's the pleasure of listening. Some people think preaching is a nice thing, but actually in preaching you don't learn anything you. And the curious people, of course, like to listen. So I would like to talk a bit, if you could share with us a few things in terms of a bridge between the biosafety protocol and the earth charter.

If I could look at the metaphor, I would say that you, Christine, you were the bridge between the biosafety protocol and the earth charter drafting because I remember well

that you were very much part of the working group and process that was drafting the biosafety protocol around between 1996 and the year 2000, which then became the Cartagena protocol on biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity. So this happened more or less in parallel to the earth charter drafting process. So you could feed both process.

So could you share with us some of your own learning and what you brought from one process to the other? Well, one important aspect, of course, was that the whole Convention on Biological Diversity is one of the strongest formulations of the precautionary approach of Rio, of the Rio process, of the Rio principles. And the whole biosafety protocol negotiations are based on Article 19.3 of the Convention and try to turn it into an internationally legally binding protocol. A protocol is exactly that, that you take part of the Convention, which by some is considered soft law into hard obligations by those countries who become parties to it.

One of the important early decisions was whether it was only biological diversity or also risks to human health that would be considered. And the earth charter is full of the links between the earth and all the beings on it, be they biological diversity or human beings. And so this was an important aspect. Secondly, the earth charter implicitly talks about scientific progress and the necessary knowledge. But in that knowledge, you also need to know what can go wrong. Because the unwanted so-called side effects may be larger than the planned effects.

It happened quite often. So risk assessment becomes a major task. And then you had the question of liability and redress. You know if something goes wrong, the poor always are the victims. They pay the price. They suffer. The rich can buy their way out. And so rules on liability and redress are placed into that biosafety protocol. And also socioeconomic considerations may be taken into account, again linking people and the rich biological diversity on earth. Meaning that if a country, for instance, would decide on a sustainable agriculture strategy, a real sustainable agriculture strategy, including the rich diversity of cultivars, the health of the soils, the water, and the people living on the land.

And come up with a sustainable agriculture policy. And if the release of a genetically modified organism would undo or violate this policy and strategy, they could ban it. In the context of liability and redress, of course, that was elaborated later in the Nagoya Kuala Lumpur supplementary protocol on liability and redress. Again, turning those soft formulations into hard law and basically saying whoever is the operator of a release of genetically modified organisms should provide financial security so that the victims were not the only ones to suffer, but would get liability and redress.

This is still something that is very difficult for the researcher or the companies that are funding such research to understand. Because they argue that, I guess they argue that they never know what would be the consequences before they develop something. Well, if you develop something and have no idea about the consequences and consider scientific innovation and a scientific publication, the God that runs the earth, then you are not going to do technology assessment properly. And then you're going to release.

And then the others. And in most cases, it's the poor somewhere else who have to carry the consequences. So in a way, it's also an attempt at justice to say you have to do sound technology assessment before the release. And the importing countries are the ones to do the assessment, not the operator, not the company profiting from the release. It's a difficult one. And unfortunately, very often, the formerly six now, more or less, only three big actors in the field. And it's three to four actors that really run the show mostly.

And they are very powerful companies. They very often have as the operator a close to bankrupt small company in the importing countries, which never will be able to carry the load of liability and redress. So it's an ongoing difficult task. But it has to do with the justice that the earth charter tries to promote. It has to do with the polluter pays principle of Rio. It has to do with the precautionary principle, which asks you to know as much as you can and base yourself base any release of genetically modified organism on the best knowledge available and not just on promises.

I would like to hear from you, Christine, on the uniqueness of the earth charter as a document. Recently I came across the world view or the knowledge or the contribution of Alexander von Humboldt. And I was wondering whether there was so much linkage between the earth charter world view and his contribution in terms of his research and his views.

But in terms of would you link that his world view to something related to the earth charter and what do you think is the uniqueness of the earth charter as a document?

Well I mean the uniqueness of the earth charter is that it's not based on a unique source. So I'm very glad personally that Alexander von Humboldt is being rediscovered also in Europe, not only in Latin America. And that there are books about him and the way he went into areas that were unknown, territories unknown, people unknown as a decent man. But there are hundreds of cultural sources that feed into the earth charter and for me it's always heartwarming to see how easy it is to identify decent people.

Let's simply call them decent people in all walks of life, from all cultures, from a representative of a powerful country to the representative of traditional healers around Lake Titicaca. At the end of the day it doesn't need a diploma in intercultural dialogue and relations but it's easy for people to identify other decent people and they're so helpful. Sometimes even in a slightly funny way let's say during the biosafety protocol negotiations somebody said to me, well have you noticed how strategically I went to the toilet in order not to break consensus during the negotiations?

Because yeah he was a representative from the environment ministries but the mandate he had of course was from all the ministries and so he would have had to break consensus if he had been there. Even that is a creative way to contribute decently. Wonderful, this is a wonderful example. Thank you, thank you so much and I agree, I like the way you put it in terms of the uniqueness being the richness of voices behind it. Okay so there are a number of key principles that are crafted in the earth charter but that we also find in the real declaration.

I would like you to speak about them for someone who doesn't understand what it is. So the first one is on precautionary, so the precautionary principle which is a principle 15, the principle 15 of the real declaration and principle 6 of the earth charter. What does it mean precautionary principle? And how is that important and what are the difficulties in understanding and applying it? Well it says in case of threats of serious or irreversible damage lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

So to put it bluntly none of us would be here unless our ancestors had applied the precautionary principle. And one of the bones of contention is of course if you have scientific certainty and consensus then you prevent damage. It's also in the earth charter prevention is also there but in most cases human knowledge is incomplete. It may be even complete in one field but incomplete in many other disciplines and fields. The people talking about a program had not thought about, had not thought important because they think they are the dominant ones to decide.

So interdisciplinarity is at the root of the precautionary principle. There are certain difficulties. One is that the precautionary principle for instance applied in Europe, applied in the Convention on Biological Diversity, in the Katakana protocol on biosafety and its annex, a very strong foundation in the precautionary principle. It is in the earth charter. However although formally it was not so, some countries including the United States of America more and more replace the precautionary principle by something that they call the sound science principle.

Meaning unless there is a full causal chain knowledge and unless there is scientific consensus the state must not act. That explains perhaps the difficulties even of Obama during the climate negotiations in Copenhagen that the state must not act unless there is full scientific certainty. It could be resolved in two ways either by applying the precautionary principle saying if there are credible indications of serious or irreversible risk you may act and not postpone measures or you can say invest all the money in the world on scientific research and until we have it all we are halting the world and then act when we have the full picture.

The letter of course is slightly nonsensical. Unfortunately the sound science principle gives economic advantages to the countries not applying the precautionary principle at least at short notice and economics very often is at short notice. Therefore within the EU there are and not only there there are attempts to pull the teeth of the precautionary principle by saying well we also have the innovation principle which is also to be considered meaning innovation saves humanity and therefore precaution has to step back a little.

So the it's a never ending story many concerns like democracy like rule of law like anti-racism like women's rights like human rights they have to fought all over by every generation in all countries again and again it's an evolutionary process you don't have it and put it on into your bank account.

No wonder is so difficult for people to apply and understand because it does have some difficulty in terms of governments or companies to either they have their hands tied or

they can move ahead but there's always going to be they have always to move ahead with some precaution in terms of what are the consequences of what they are doing.

I mean you cannot ask the future. You cannot ask future generations therefore things that pose serious threats serious or irreversible threats on them should not be done they never had been asked. If somebody does a difficult mountain climb it's a personal risk also involving his or her family but not all future generations of the earth and that's a difficulty. Secondly we do have a new challenge with the precautionary principle because new genetic engineering technology like CRISPR-Cas9 and gene drives there are attempts to take them out of the framework of international framework on biosafety and to say they are safe because we know what we're doing but at the end of the day there are so many publications that you actually can see that they don't exactly know what they are doing so again why not apply the precaution principle.

So for someone who doesn't have not heard much or doesn't understand what are the issues behind the GMOs the genetically modified organisms what are the issues behind? Well the issues behind them of course is also questions of power questions of the person what is science and which types of knowledge do we appreciate which other types of knowledge do we neglect or negate it is about do we want a technology-centered discourse saying we have a new tool how can we save the world with it instead of saying let's discuss what we want in terms of agriculture what we want in terms of health and what different approaches and tools are suitable to it so to me having a purely technology-centered discourse and not a problem-oriented discourse means firstly that you give a privilege to certain disciplines and forget about the others secondly that you forget about what the meaning of technology really is the Greek word means a suitable tool for a well-defined end if a society doesn't talk about the ends the earth charter does talk about the ends what do we want what do we go there and then how do we get there then if they don't talk about the ends if they don't talk about their values and aspirations and simply give the game all over to the toolmaker you have a high-tech society which is basically an enemy to what technology really means.

It's interesting if for some people argue that GMO seeds are stronger and therefore the farmer won't need so much to use pesticides. What would you do? Well I'm always saying let's have a closer look and also let's look at the technological alternatives there are very good examples of push and pull systems that need no pesticides at all. There are experiences that the tonnage of pesticides applied on the soil did not go down but went up in GMO using countries so I always plead for a closer look by many eyes and then let's discuss it.

The whole Cartagena protocol on biosafety on GMOs does not ban GMOs it simply sets a stage and probably I think so we did not have huge disasters because of the Cartagena protocol and its precautionary approach. So the people wanting to promote promote earn get the glory and the dollars may not be the only ones who make for a friendly future.

Great thank you so much. The GMOs discussion is very closely related to the precautionary principle but also maybe to many others but one is polluted peace principle. Can you speak to that a bit what does it mean polluted peace principle can you give us an example and of course it relates to principle 12 of the real declaration and some of the principles

are decorated in their charter such as principle 17. What does it mean? It means that in the natural course of events the victims pay they pay anyway I mean if you do something wrong the victim will pay and it takes quite a societal effort to make the polluter pay.

They pay their lives they pay with their health their lives. Yes their health their lives their social context their land their cultures they lose so they they pay and nobody has to do great things at the multilateral intergovernmental level to make them pay it takes all these efforts and justice basic justice efforts at the national and international levels to have the polluter pay those who caused the damage should pay and not those who fall victims to the damage they pay automatically so unless you have the polluter pays principle you will have an seriously unjust system.

And let me just in addition say that the polluter pays and the precautionary principle are closely linked because if the polluters know they have to pay and if they have to in order to be able to do so get insurance on what they are planning to do and then the underwriting insurance companies the big ones will do their assessments and calculate the price then they will know the actual environmental and human price that their project may cause they may refrain from it so in a way the polluter pays principle and the precautionary principle are closely linked if the polluter has to pay and if they have to provide financial security meaning insurance.

Yeah sure so the environment and social human costs of many of the actions patterns of production are not visible enough or there it's easier to close the eyes not to see the social and environmental consequences or costs of an undertaking.

Exactly I mean we have a recent example the fights about the polluter pays for the damage that glyphosate may have caused between Monsanto Bayer and the victims around the earth. So you see the dimension of it and you see if the polluter really has to pay they are going to be very careful and do a technology assessment that is not just public relations propaganda.

Thank you so much how about principle on environment democracy principle 10 of real declaration and principle 13 of the Roussat articulates that idea. Yes well people raise their voices there are in Europe they were farmers uprisals without a principle supporting them.

It's less violent and makes for good conflict resolution if you have democracy meaning a voice and for having that voice you indeed need information on what's going on.

You need to be able to raise that voice and be heard and unless and if the powerful act against their own decisions and their own laws you have access to justice and can again have a legal say and change things. I have seen this so many times and unfortunately even in countries that are parties to legally binding agreements on principle 10 like the all those convention parties they don't inform their public about the rights they have.

Yeah it's a way to sideline environmental democracy. Well it's maybe because it's too complicated to deal with well-informed people. Well if that is exactly what decency what earth charter what international agreements mean is that the powerful cannot have their

way all the time and so to bind it back makes for social peace and makes for better projects because you hear all the different concerns all the fields that need to be addressed if a project is proposed not just by the people who have the technology that they want to apply on certain things and even if it's for saving the world. I mean to put it bluntly even some very good meaning people trying to save the world with the products of their expertise are attacked by what I call the Atlas syndrome. You remember in Greek mythology there is that giant Atlas that carries the weight of the world on his shoulders.

It doesn't make him listen to other people. It doesn't make him flexible nor light-footed and if you try to save the world all on your own you are already an agent of destruction an agent of the voice of against the voices of the others against the joy in the otherness of the others you are carrying it all alone and it may be good also for scientists and of very good will to let to listen to others to inform them to slow down on the project democracy takes time to ensure participation and to even allow them to go against you if you violate legislation things that were agreed on earlier. Yeah by listening to you talk about precautionary principle the issues behind the GMOs and political principles etc it comes to my mind the vision of the key actors around it or to make it happen. One is the governments that needs to design these policies and implement and force them to the national level companies that need to understand and and write to it the communities so the people the civil society individuals and the importance of the the UN or the international community and international instruments so all these different actors need to be orchestrating and it's not such an easy process. Now how do you see the interaction among all these different actors to make sure these principles are moved forward? Well one important aspect is being formulated and it's implicitly in the earth charter and also in the Rio declaration is the subsidiarity principle meaning that you address a problem at the lowest governmental level structural level where it can be resolved and I call it the anti-global pothole convention principle. I mean imagine you go out of your house you see a pothole in the street and instead of going to your neighbour saying let's put some gravel in it and call the town authorities.

You call the town authorities but they say let's see what is the problem of other towns. They find out that all towns have that problem in the whole country so instead of addressing the issue they say let's see what other countries whether they have a pothole problem you contact all other countries they say yes we all have a pothole problem and then you negotiate a intergovernmental international global pothole convention it takes if you're lucky six years if you're not so lucky 30 years and until it's implemented you're dead and the pothole in front of your house is not mended so other problems like let's say the heavy indebtment of developing countries which hampers their useful intervention in the covid crisis they cannot be addressed at the village level at the level of my street they need to be addressed at multilateral levels internationally and therefore it's an art to see how the different levels play with each other you may go wrong if you go to the local level only and tell people even if it's difficult in your town to arrive at sustainable consumption and production patterns you have to solve the problem irrespective of the asymmetries of power of the market trends worldwide worldwide of the investors preferences and then the people fail or you go to the global level and try to mend a pothole to find the right level and to build up the consensus and listen to the voices below is I think a deep challenge and every international negotiation faces it but you cannot be a

wholly sustainable development person all on your own you will not be able to manage it

Yeah thank you so much for the example of the pothole it's very clear how we sometimes lose track of where we should be focusing let's let's talk about the biodiversity agenda so the biodiversity convention of 92 then it moved to the asia biodiversity targets and now the new biodiversity agenda that's being negotiated biodiversity beyond 2020 what do you think are the current challenges and major steps forward that are required in that agenda?

Well I think the major challenge is the fact that we are losing biological diversity from the level of species to the level of ecosystems to the level of landscapes and this is not being stopped it was not stopped by the convention and its parties it was not stopped before the IHE you had another 10 years program which also failed and now you have the IHE targets and except for a two or three where you are doing not so badly you failed them and now the new global biodiversity framework is being negotiated for the post 2020 next 10 years and all the indications and also the new study of IPBES that's the intergovernmental science policy interface between on biodiversity and ecosystem services it's in parallel to the world climate council.

It says well actually unless you stop the drivers of biodiversity loss you're not going to win the game what are the drivers the drivers of biodiversity loss are basically land use and sea use drivers we're losing fish we're losing soil we're losing by taking up all the ground for humans you you destroy ecosystems. There are ways to friendly align ecosystems and sustainable use but the big monocultures the big tradeable goods grown on land are really quite dangerous for biodiversity. Now unfortunately and its invasive alien species its pollution and pollution also of the soil we always soil is the forgotten next continent which we destroy and which goes at a terrible rate. The best work on it is done by the UN convention to combat desertification they have such a huge body of knowledge about the importance of soil and what does hurt soils.

But unfortunately, the ministries in charge of the Convention on Biological Diversity are the environment ministries, all the drivers, and they are in charge of conservation. All the drivers of that biodiversity loss are in other ministries: agriculture, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, transport, you know.

Of course, the argument has been, we need to address the livelihood of people. You sure? Yes. But, but yes, exactly.

Now, if, and many environmentalists, of course, complain that the environmental Sustainable Development Goals are so far back, but if you look at the first two Sustainable Development Goals: eradicate poverty. Now, if the poor live on direct ecosystem services, soil, water, and they cannot buy it on the global market, then you know that you cannot have a good pro-poor strategy unless you have clean water, which is an ecosystem service, and yes, you have fertile soils, and unless you fight climate change, and unless you

maintain the lakes, rivers, and oceans where poor people get their proteins from in forms of fish, etc.

Second one: fight hunger. I mean, what are people going to eat? What are the poor going to eat? If they had enough money, they could eat whatever is grown on the earth, but they don't. They have to live on what the local ecosystems give them, or they have to rely on food relief, which is not a very adorable option for them.

So, I think that there were AGRA was formed to modernize agriculture in Africa with all the modern tools, with pesticides, with new seeds, with irrigation. And the fact is that hunger has increased, and poverty of the locals has increased and was not fought back.

So one has to question those cheap attempts to say, we calculate the world food production, and we calculate the world food hunger, and we put that junk of food into the hungry mouth of world hunger. Things are more complex than that.

And if I remember correctly, at least the numbers I still have in my memory, is that 70 percent of the hungry are fed by local farmers, mainly farming women. So why would you want to make life more difficult for those who actually feed, and kick them out of the picture by modern promises? We have to innovate. People want to improve. But who is doing the plans on innovation and improvement?

And there again, you have the Atlas syndrome of the person with the global, not pothole problem, but hunger-solving technology. That may not be the right way to do it.

It's wonderful.

So, in terms of the current challenges of biodiversity agenda, is really to stop the loss of biodiversity, and none of the instruments have managed to do so. To stop the loss, to stop subsidizing what was called perverse, stop perverse subsidies, stops massively subsidizing that which destroys biodiversity. All the efforts in the environment ministry on conservations are futile if you don't stop these much larger investments in destruction of biodiversity.

So probably that is the real challenge for the Global Biodiversity Framework that we're facing now. And in a way, it's exacerbated by the COVID crisis, because if you think that diaries stressed ecosystems in close contact with people living under atrocious health and socioeconomic conditions, and you bring them together closely, that this is not going to give rise to zoonoses of many kinds. Zoonoses means diseases jumping from animals to humans.

Part of prevention of the next crisis is these fighting poverty and hunger, looking for these decent health systems, and preserving the friendly relationship between people and their ecosystems.

And also, this study that I mentioned before, the IPBES study, showed that actually not traditional protected areas form the largest part of intact ecosystems, but those ecosystems

with friendly local people and cultures that take care of them form by large the majority of intact ecosystems.

So we have to think of global and local, of the knowledge that counts and the knowledge that doesn't count, in a new way. And I think the Earth Charter, and the process by which it was formed and by which it continues furthest, this very much, and I'm so thankful for it. Thank you.

So we come to our last question to you. Not long ago, you gave a presentation in which you mentioned an intriguing idea. You said, we have to act with island, island, islands of knowledge. We have to act with islands of knowledge in a ocean of not knowing. What do you mean by that?

Well, as I mentioned before, we do not know it all. We do not know the interlinkages. We do not know the web of life. We do not know the knots in the hammock on which we can comfortably lie together. And meaning, we cannot wait until that idea of a total knowledge of everything that we need to know in order to get to sustainable, to sustainability.

The world will not wait. People cannot wait. So we have to act on the basis of the best available knowledge. And the best available knowledge is also knowledge not tainted by conflicts of interest, not tainted by asymmetries of power.

And people living on islands are still able to travel to other islands. But traveling to other islands, you need navigating tools. And as you invited me before to talk about subsidiarity, about precaution, about polluter pays, about respect for human rights, about the joy in listening to others, these are navigation tools to travel into the unknown.

And I think one other navigating tool is, unless you look at the victims, at those who are suffering, who are maimed, who are hungry, who are poor, you're not going to learn what's going wrong in your society. They are an incentive to learn, and to learn early before everything collapses.

So the attention to the voices unheard, the attention to the poor, is also a great navigating and learning tool for all of us.

It's a wonderful way of ending our conversation. Very insightful, pristine, and very inspiring to hear you, as always. Thank you so much.

Well, thank you for listening. I was mentioning listening many times, and well, you had the questions, I had to talk. But basically, I'm curious. I like listening. I have a joy in people who surprise me. There are some people who don't have that joy.

And I think, at the end of the day, also in all the stress, and all the destruction, in all the lack of peace, unless we maintain the joy of gifts, we're going to go into despair, and everyone for himself or herself, mostly himself, sorry, and the rich will buy their ways out. But this will be not with peace, not in community. And I hope so much for that joy indeed.

Thank you so much, Christine.If you like this episode please share it and support our movement by making a donation this podcast is developed by earth charter international as part of our work as UNESCO chair on education for sustainable development with the earth charter for more information visit our website at [earth charter.org](http://earthcharter.org)