

The Earth Charter Benchmark Draft¹

18 March 1997

Earth is our home and home to all living beings. Earth itself is alive. We are part of an evolving universe. Human beings are members of an interdependent community of life with a magnificent diversity of life forms and cultures. We are humbled before the beauty of Earth and share a reverence for life and the sources of our being. We give thanks for the heritage that we have received from past generations and embrace our responsibilities to present and future generations.

The Earth Community stands at a definite moment. The biosphere is governed by laws that we ignore at our own peril. Human beings have acquired the ability to radically alter the environment and evolutionary processes. Lack of foresight and misuse of knowledge and power threaten the fabric of life and the foundations of local and global security. There is great violence, poverty, and suffering in our world. A fundamental change of course is needed.

The choice is before us: to care for the Earth or to participate in the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. We must reinvent industrial-technological civilization, finding new ways to balance self and community, having and being, diversity and unity, short-term and long-term, using and nurturing.

In the midst of all our diversity, we are one humanity and one Earth family with a shared destiny. The challenges before us require an inclusive ethical vision. Partnerships must be forged and cooperation fostered at local, biological national and international levels. In solidarity with one another and the community of life, we the peoples of the world commit ourselves to action guided by the following interrelated principles:

1. Respect Earth and all life. Earth, each life form, and all living beings possess intrinsic value and warrant respect independently of their utilitarian value to humanity.
2. Care for Earth, protecting and restoring the diversity, integrity and beauty of the planet's ecosystems. Where there is a risk of irreversible or serious damage to the environment, precautionary action must be taken to prevent harm.

1. The Earth Charter Benchmark Draft is printed below as it appears in Newsletter Number 8 of the BOSTON RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE 21ST CENTURY, at EC-1, EC-4 (Spring 1997).

3. Live sustainably, promoting and adopting modes of consumption, production, and reproduction that respect and safeguard human rights and the regenerative capacities of Earth.
4. Establish justice, and defend without discrimination the right of all people to life, liberty, and security of person within an environment adequate for health, and spiritual well-being. People have a right to potable water, clean air, uncontaminated soil and food security.
5. Share equitably the benefits of natural resource use and a healthy environment among the nations, between rich and poor, between males and females, between present and future generations, and internalize all environmental, social and economic costs.
6. Promote social development and financial systems that create and maintain sustainable livelihoods, eradicate poverty and strengthen local communities.
7. Practice nonviolence, recognizing that peace is the wholeness created by harmonious and balanced relationships with oneself, other persons, other life forms and Earth.
8. Strengthen processes that empower the people to participate effectively in decision- making and ensure transparency and accountability in governance and administration in all sectors of society.
9. Reaffirm that Indigenous and Tribal peoples have a vital role in the care and protection of Mother Earth. They have a right to retain their spirituality, knowledge, lands, territories and resources.
10. Affirm that gender equity is a prerequisite for sustainable development.
11. Secure the right to sexual and reproductive health, with special concern for women and girls.
12. Promote the participation of youth as accountable agents of change for local, bio-regional and global sustainability.
13. Advance and put to use scientific and other types of knowledge and technologies that promote sustainable living and protect the environment.
14. Ensure that people throughout their lives have opportunities to acquire knowledge, values and practical skills needed to build sustainable communities.
15. Treat all creatures with compassion and protect them from cruelty and wanton destruction.
16. Do not do to the environment of others what you do not want done to your environment.

17. Protect and restore places of outstanding ecological, cultural, aesthetic, spiritual and scientific significance.
18. Cultivate and act with a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the Earth community. Every person, institution and government has a duty to advance the indivisible goals of justice for all, sustainability, world peace, and respect and care for the larger community of life.

Embracing the values in this Charter, we can grow into a family of cultures that allows the potential of all persons to unfold in harmony with the Earth Community. We must preserve a strong faith in the possibilities of the human spirit and a deep sense of belonging to the universe. Our best actions will embody the integration of knowledge with compassion.

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In order to develop and implement the principles in this Charter, the nations of the world should adopt as a first step an international convention that provides an integrated legal framework for lasting and future environmental and sustainable development law and policy.