

EARTH CHARTER: THE MOST MODERN DOCUMENT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The mission, history, principles and contents of the Earth Charter initiative, considerably contributing to the formulation of sustainable development as strategy of development of the postmodern society on global scale are thoroughly elucidated. The value of Earth Charter to be actively utilised in educating academic communities for their role in promoting sustainable ways of living in the society is discussed.*

Keywords: sustainable development, Club of Rome, World Commission on Environment and Development, Rio Summit, Earth Council, Green Cross, Earth Charter

INTRODUCTION

The Earth Charter adopted in the year 2000 is nothing as an international treaty but rather a “soft” international agreement (similarly like the General Declaration of Human Rights) reflecting the vital interests of the global human community to promote the transition to sustainable mode of living and creation of a global society based on a shared ethical framework and respect for Earth as the common home of mankind. In comparison with the General Declaration of Human Rights addressing the relationships of individual and society, the Earth Charter is more wider and far-reaching document (that can be considered as a civil society initiative), addressing beside generally the same relationship also the relationship of humans to the Earth, involving respect and care for the whole community of life. This means that the Earth Charter reflects in a complex way that what could be considered as “human ecology” in the true sense of this term, this means not only inter-human relations but also care for conditions of life for humans and for all living beings.

The Earth Charter that celebrated the ten years anniversary in June 2010 is by no doubt the most recent milestone in the history of awareness of all global problems the modern industrial societies pose (starting with the Club of Rome report “*Limits of Growth*”) but at the same time a document showing ways ahead, as can be clearly seen from stressing its mission and mainly from careful detailed analysis of its contents.

The mission of the Earth Charter initiative

The mission of the Earth Charter is nothing less than to promote the transition to sustainable ways of living and to a global society founded on a shared ethical framework that includes:

- respect and care for the community of life,
- ecological integrity
- universal human rights,
- respect for diversity,
- economic justice,
- democracy, and
- a culture of Peace.

Brief history of the Earth Charter

The way to the Earth Charter can be very briefly illustrated by the main milestones, associated at the beginning with the societal awareness of global problems stemming mainly from economic development of ever growing population and threats to environment, in the first line of the limited sources, their asymmetric exploitation, limited carrying capacity of the Earth, and growing disproportion between rich North and poor South. At the later stages, it is possible to see efforts how to solve these problems that are associated with formulating strategies, mainly on the concept of sustainable development as the strategy of development of the post-modern society, to which no alternatives exist.

Main milestones on the way to the Earth Charter can be briefly shown as follows:

- 1972 – The Club of Rome issued the Report “*Limits of Growth*” – the first consistent critical review of global problems.
- 1987 – The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) launched “*Our Common Future*” Report with a call for a “new charter” to set new norms to guide the transition to sustainable development. This book contains the first consistent definition of sustainable development.
- 1992 – Earth Summit – UN World Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro adopts a couple of important international documents, among them the most important *Agenda 21*.
- 1994 – Maurice Strong (Secretary General of the Rio Summit) and Mikhail Gorbachov acting through organisations he founded (Earth Council and Green Cross International), supported by the Dutch Government developed Earth Charter as a civil society initiative.
- 1997 – At the Rio+5 Forum, 1st *Benchmark Draft of the Earth Charter* is released as a “document in progress” leading to vivid international consultations.
- 2000 (March) – The Earth Charter Commission came to consensus on the Earth Charter at a meeting held at UNESCO HQs in Paris.
- **2000, June 29 – *The Earth Charter* is inaugurated in ceremonies at the**

Peace Palace in The Hague.

- 2002 – Efforts to have the Earth Charter formally recognised at the Rio+10, i.e. at the World Summit in Johannesburg.
- Over following years, thousands of endorsements representing millions of people including numerous associations and institutions (like UNESCO), supports from heads of states, etc.

Briefly on the contents of the Earth Charter

The Earth Charter consists of Preamble,

Four Chapters:

- I. Respect and care for the community of life,
- II. Ecological integrity,
- III. Social and economic justice,
- IV. Democracy, nonviolence, and Peace.

These Chapters contain 16 Articles with 61 paragraphs.

The Charter is terminated by “The Way Forward”

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Earth Charter is a “soft” global legal document of the worldwide civil society and as such, it has been endorsed by UN, a couple of IGOs, governments and in the first line by many NGOs and academia in order to share values it presents. Full text that is accessible in 50 languages [1] contains the most recent formulation of the sustainable development as the strategy of development of the post-modern societies. The sustainable development is here presented in the most complex mood, for which the Earth Charter can be considered at the same time as an important document of human ecology. The Earth Charter possesses a remarkable approach associated with its implementation, reflected by the slogan “It starts with one” that means actually “start at yourself”.

In spite of the Earth Charter’s values, it is however not yet well known and therefore not utilised even by those devoted to all facets of sustainable development in education and practice. It is therefore worth to be endorsed by our institutions and concerned individuals.

For the intellectual and ethical values, the Earth Charter should be disseminated and widely actively utilised in appropriate ways in education on all levels of the educational system, in the first line in our academic communities as well as in the broader outreach in influencing decision-makers, industrial and other organisations, media, and population.

REFERENCES

<http://www.earthcharter.org>