

# THE EARTH CHARTER



A declaration of fundamental principles  
for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful  
global society in the 21st century

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Tommy Short\* (USA)  
Mary Evelyn Tucker (USA)  
Mirian Vilela (Brazil)  
Erna Witoelar (Indonesia)

+ Founding Organization - Green Cross  
International

\* Founding Organization - Earth Council Alliance

<sup>^</sup> Youth Representative

**EXECUTIVE STAFF**

Mirian Vilela, Executive Director, Earth Charter  
International and Centre for Education for  
Sustainable Development at the UPEACE  
(Costa Rica)

**THE EARTH CHARTER COMMISSION**<sup>2</sup>

**Commission Co-Chairs**

Mikhail Gorbachev, Russia  
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A.T. Ariyaratne, Sri Lanka  
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Awraham Soetendorp, The Netherlands  
Pauline Tangiora, New Zealand / Aotearoa  
Erna Witoelar, Indonesia  
Kamla Chowdhry, India (In memoriam)

1 The Earth Charter International Council oversees the activities of the Earth Charter Initiative.

2 The Earth Charter Commission has authority over the text of the Earth Charter document.

# What is the Earth Charter?

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental ethical principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century. It seeks to inspire in all people a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the whole human family, the greater community of life, and future generations. It is a vision of hope and a call to action.

The Earth Charter is centrally concerned with the transition to sustainable ways of living and sustainable human development. Ecological integrity is one major theme. However, the Earth Charter recognizes that the goals of ecological protection, the eradication of poverty, equitable economic development, respect for human rights, democracy, and peace are interdependent and indivisible. It provides, therefore, a new, inclusive, integrated ethical framework to guide the transition to a sustainable future.

The Earth Charter is a product of a decade-long, worldwide, cross cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values. The Earth Charter project began as a United Nations initiative, but it was carried forward and completed by a global civil society initiative.

## Origin of The Earth Charter

The Earth Charter was created as an initiative of global civil society and is the product of the most open and participatory worldwide consultation process ever associated with the drafting of an international declaration. Many thousands of people and hundreds of organizations contributed to the drafting process. The drafting of the text was overseen by the independent Earth Charter Commission, which was convened by Maurice Strong and Mikhail Gorbachev with the purpose of developing a global consensus on values and principles for a sustainable future. The Commission continues to serve as the steward of the Earth Charter text, and the Commissioners act as ambassadors for the Earth Charter itself.

The Earth Charter was completed in March 2000 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris and launched in a special ceremony at The Peace Palace in The Hague, the Netherlands, on 29 June 2000. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands attended the ceremony.

The Charter has since then been formally endorsed by thousands of organizations representing millions of people, including the UNESCO Conference of Member States, the World Conservation Congress of IUCN, national governments and their ministries, national and international associations of universities, and hundreds of cities and towns in dozens of countries. It has also been endorsed by many civil society and political leaders, Nobel Peace Prize winners, and heads of state.

### *Shared Global Values ... for Our Common Future*

At a time when major changes in how we think and live are urgently needed, the Earth Charter challenges us to examine our values and to choose a better way. It calls on us to search for common ground in the midst of our diversity and to embrace a new ethical vision shared by growing numbers of people in many nations and cultures throughout the world.

# The Earth Charter

## Preamble

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

### Earth, Our Home

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

### The Global Situation

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable.

### The Challenges Ahead

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

### Universal Responsibility

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.

## I. Respect and Care for the Community of Life

### PRINCIPLES

- 1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.**
  - Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.
  - Affirm faith in the inherent dignity of all human beings and in the intellectual, artistic, ethical, and spiritual potential of humanity.
- 2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.**
  - Accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people.
  - Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.
- 3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.**
  - Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.
  - Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible.
- 4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.**
  - Recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations.
  - Transmit to future generations values, traditions, and institutions that support the long-term flourishing of Earth's human and ecological communities.

**In order to fulfill these four broad commitments, it is necessary to**

# II. Ecological Integrity

## PRINCIPLES

- 5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.**
  - a. Adopt at all levels sustainable development plans and regulations that make environmental conservation and rehabilitation integral to all development initiatives.
  - b. Establish and safeguard viable nature and biosphere reserves, including wild lands and marine areas, to protect Earth's life support systems, maintain biodiversity, and preserve our natural heritage.
  - c. Promote the recovery of endangered species and ecosystems.
  - d. Control and eradicate non-native or genetically modified organisms harmful to native species and the environment, and prevent introduction of such harmful organisms.
  - e. Manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forest products, and marine life in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration and that protect the health of ecosystems.
  - f. Manage the extraction and use of non-renewable resources such as minerals and fossil fuels in ways that minimize depletion and cause no serious environmental damage.
- 6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.**
  - a. Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.
  - b. Place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm, and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm.
  - c. Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.
  - d. Prevent pollution of any part of the environment and allow no build-up of radioactive, toxic, or other hazardous substances.
  - e. Avoid military activities damaging to the environment.
- 7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.**
  - a. Reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials used in production and consumption systems, and ensure that residual waste can be assimilated by ecological systems.
  - b. Act with restraint and efficiency when using energy, and rely increasingly on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.
  - c. Promote the development, adoption, and equitable transfer of environmentally sound technologies.
  - d. Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services in the selling price, and enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.
  - e. Ensure universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction.
  - f. Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

- 8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.**
  - a. Support international scientific and technical cooperation on sustainability, with special attention to the needs of developing nations.
  - b. Recognize and preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom in all cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human well-being.
  - c. Ensure that information of vital importance to human health and environmental protection, including genetic information, remains available in the public domain.

# III. Social and Economic Justice

## PRINCIPLES

- 9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.**
  - a. Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.
  - b. Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.
  - c. Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.
- 10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.**
  - a. Promote the equitable distribution of wealth within nations and among nations.
  - b. Enhance the intellectual, financial, technical, and social resources of developing nations, and relieve them of onerous international debt.
  - c. Ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labor standards.
  - d. Require multinational corporations and international financial organizations to act transparently in the public good, and hold them accountable for the consequences of their activities.
- 11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.**
  - a. Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.
  - b. Promote the active participation of women in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social, and cultural life as full and equal partners, decision makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.
  - c. Strengthen families and ensure the safety and loving nurture of all family members.
- 12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.**

- a. Eliminate discrimination in all its forms, such as that based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic or social origin.
- b. Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods.
- c. Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.
- d. Protect and restore outstanding places of cultural and spiritual significance.

## IV. Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace

### PRINCIPLES

#### 13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.

- a. Uphold the right of everyone to receive clear and timely information on environmental matters and all development plans and activities which are likely to affect them or in which they have an interest.
- b. Support local, regional and global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.
- c. Protect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and dissent.
- d. Institute effective and efficient access to administrative and independent judicial procedures, including remedies and redress for environmental harm and the threat of such harm.
- e. Eliminate corruption in all public and private institutions.
- f. Strengthen local communities, enabling them to care for their environments, and assign environmental responsibilities to the levels of government where they can be carried out most effectively.

#### 14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

- a. Provide all, especially children and youth, with educational opportunities that empower them to contribute actively to sustainable development.
- b. Promote the contribution of the arts and humanities as well as the sciences in sustainability education.
- c. Enhance the role of the mass media in raising awareness of ecological and social challenges.
- d. Recognize the importance of moral and spiritual education for sustainable living.

#### 15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.

- a. Prevent cruelty to animals kept in human societies and protect them from suffering.
- b. Protect wild animals from methods of hunting, trapping, and fishing that cause extreme, prolonged, or avoidable suffering.
- c. Avoid or eliminate to the full extent possible the taking or destruction of non-targeted species.

#### 16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.

- a. Encourage and support mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation among all peoples and within and among nations.
- b. Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.
- c. Demilitarize national security systems to the level of a non-provocative defense posture, and convert military resources to peaceful purposes, including ecological restoration.
- d. Eliminate nuclear, biological, and toxic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.
- e. Ensure that the use of orbital and outer space supports environmental protection and peace.
- f. Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.

## The Way Forward

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Such renewal is the promise of these Earth Charter principles. To fulfill this promise, we must commit ourselves to adopt and promote the values and objectives of the Charter.

This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision. We must deepen and expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom.

Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals. Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership. The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance.

In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations, fulfill their obligations under existing international agreements, and support the implementation of Earth Charter principles with an international legally binding instrument on environment and development.

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.





Action projects around the world, inspired by the Earth Charter, are contributing to the realization of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, the UN Decade for Education on Sustainable Development, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the betterment of human rights, and the empowered participation of youth in local action and global governance.

Please visit our website for information on resources and opportunities for getting involved and taking action in support of the Earth Charter and its vision of a just, sustainable, and peaceful world.

# Earth Charter Initiative

"The Earth Charter Initiative" is an extraordinarily diverse, global network of people, organizations, and institutions that participate in promoting and implementing the values and principles of the Earth Charter.

The Initiative is a broad-based, voluntary, civil society effort. Participants include leading international institutions, national governments and their agencies, university associations, non-government organizations and community-based groups, city governments, faith groups, schools and businesses – as well as thousands of individuals.

## Earth Charter International (ECI)

Earth Charter International (ECI) is the coordinating body for the Earth Charter Initiative. ECI consists of the ECI Council and Secretariat. ECI exists to advance the Earth Charter Initiative Mission and Vision.

ECI coordinates a global network of regional Affiliates and partners, as well as initiates a wide variety of projects and activities aiming to stimulate ever-greater efforts to ensure a just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful world for coming generations.

### *Mission Statement*

**The mission of the Earth Charter Initiative is to promote the transition to sustainable ways of living and 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.**

### **The Initiative goals are to:**

1. Raise awareness worldwide of the Earth Charter and to promote understanding of its inclusive ethical vision.
2. Seek recognition and endorsement of the Earth Charter by individuals, organizations, and the United Nations.
3. Promote the use of the Earth Charter as an ethical guide and the implementation of its principles by civil society, business, and government.
4. Encourage and support the educational use of the Earth Charter in schools, universities, faith groups, local communities, and many other settings.
5. Promote recognition and use of the Earth Charter as a soft law document.

### *What does endorsement of the Earth Charter mean?*

Endorsement of the Earth Charter by individuals or organizations signifies a commitment to the spirit and aims of the document. It indicates an intention to use the Earth Charter in ways that are appropriate given the situation and to cooperate with others in working for the implementation of its principles. Endorsement builds support for the Earth Charter Initiative and social change. See the website for further information on endorsement.

## SELECTED INTERNATIONAL ENDORSEMENTS

African Women's Development and Communication Network, Kenya  
Arab Office for Youth and Environment, Egypt  
Associação Portuguesa de Educação Ambiental - ASPEA, Portugal  
Australian Centre for Environmental Law  
Bellagio Forum for Sustainable Development  
The Club of Budapest  
National Council on Environment and Sustainable Development, Portugal  
The CORE Trust, United Kingdom  
Consejo Estatal de Ecología de Michoacán, Mexico  
Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions  
The David Suzuki Foundation, Canada  
Development Alternatives, India  
Environmental Defense, United States  
Fundación Mundo Sostenible, Mexico  
Fundación Valores, Spain  
Fundación Cultura de Paz, Spain  
The European Environmental Bureau  
The Ministries of Environment in the Nations of Brazil, Costa Rica, and Honduras  
The Government of Mexico  
The Government of the Republic of Niger  
Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Youth Council  
The Green Belt Movement, Kenya  
Green Cross International  
Grupo de los Cien, Mexico  
Grupo Xcaret, Mexico  
Instituto Paulo Freire, Brazil  
International Consortium on Religion and Ecology  
International Council of Local Governments for Sustainability - ICLEI  
International Institute for Environment & Development - IIED  
Inuit Circumpolar Conference - ICC  
The Jane Goodall Institute  
Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development  
Kehati, Indonesia  
LEAD International  
Lenting, Indonesia  
Millennium NGO Forum (a group of a 1000 NGO's)  
The Ministry of Youth, Egypt  
The National Center for Human Rights Education, United States  
The National Center for Youth Development, Nigeria  
National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development, Netherlands  
National University, Costa Rica  
National Wildlife Federation - NWF, United States  
Natural Resources Defense Council, United States  
Pro-Natura, Italy  
The Senate of Puerto Rico  
The Senate of Australia  
The Parliaments of Tatarstan, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Kalmykia, Russian Federation  
Physicians for Social Responsibility, United States  
Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden  
Third World Academy of Sciences - TWAS, Italy  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - UNESCO  
United Nations University  
University for Peace, Costa Rica  
The US Conference of Mayors  
Vitae Civilis, Brazil  
The Wilderness Society, Australia  
World Conservation Union - IUCN  
Women & Environment Development Organization - WEDO  
World Federation of Engineering Organizations  
World Resources Institute, United States  
WWF International

# Decentralized Expansion strategy

“Decentralization for Scaling Up” is a strategy to enable the massive expansion of the Initiative without having to grow the central administration, and to allow for a vast number of self-organizing efforts to multiply and grow.

In support of this new strategy, a set of *Action Guidelines for Decentralized Expansion of the Earth Charter Initiative* were developed. The Action Guidelines are a resource designed to help people conduct Earth Charter related activities in ways that are in harmony with the values and principles of the Earth Charter. The purpose of the Action Guidelines is also to ensure a certain measure of consistency in how decentralized actions on behalf of the Earth Charter are carried out. Following these guidelines, any person, organization, or community can make use of the Earth Charter and put it to work in appropriate ways corresponding to their capacities and opportunities. The twelve points of the Action Guidelines can be found in the Earth Charter website.

## Areas of work

ECI and its partner organizations are especially active in the following six areas of work which were chosen because they provide significant opportunities for using the Earth Charter strategically to advance the transition to sustainable ways of living:

**Education** Given the importance of education to the Initiative's mission, an Earth Charter Center for Education for Sustainable Development at the University for Peace has been created as well as an education task force. Its purpose is to promote the use of the Earth Charter in schools, colleges, universities, and non-formal education programmes throughout the world and to contribute to education for a sustainable way of life.

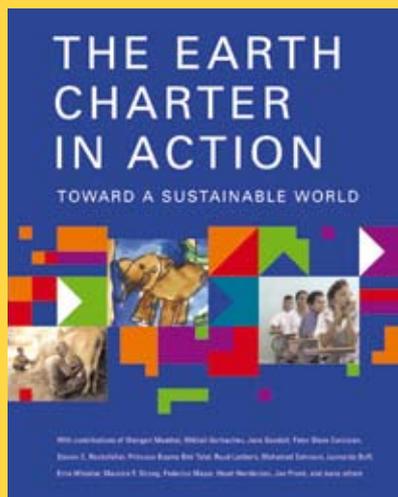
**Businesses** The Earth Charter is increasingly considered by business actors as a useful tool to inspire and support internal sustainability initiatives. ECI encourages companies to adopt the highest possible standards of ethical performance and use the Earth Charter as a guiding framework.

**The Media** ECI seeks to influence key people in the field of media organizations (TV, print media, advertising and entertainment), including entrepreneurs, corporate executives, journalists, advertising agencies' creative directors, screenwriters, TV producers and news editors that shape the content of the media. The intention is to have the Earth Charter utilized as an instrument to sensitize the public on the vision for sustainability.

**Religion** The Earth Charter has been formally endorsed or publicly supported by many religious organizations, representing most major faiths and traditions. Leaders and scholars from many traditions also participated in the drafting process of the Earth Charter. There is a continuous effort to reach out to inter-faith groups and further engage them with the global challenges of our time.

**The United Nations, Law and Ethics** ECI works with partner initiatives to promote the use of the Earth Charter Principles in framing international conventions, codes of ethics, legislation, and standards of organizational practice and reporting.

**Youth** There are Earth Charter youth groups around the world using the Earth Charter in creative ways. The purpose of this focus area is to further engage, expand, and empower the Earth Charter Youth Initiative (ECYI) network.



Cover, *The Earth Charter in Action*. Peter Blaze Corcoran, Mirian Vilela, and Alide Roerink, Editors. KIT Publishers, The Netherlands, 2005.



*The Earth Charter in Action* is filled with inspiring words, photographs, and art from around the world. Authors include A. T. Ariyaratne, Leonardo Boff, Jane Goodall, Mikhail Gorbachev, Wangari Maathai, Steven Rockefeller, HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and Erna Witoelar.

## How you can participate in the Earth Charter Initiative

1. Disseminate the Earth Charter and raise awareness about it.
2. Endorse the Earth Charter and encourage endorsement by organizations to which you belong.
3. Encourage your local and national government to use and endorse the Earth Charter.
4. Make financial contributions in support of the Earth Charter International.
5. Help the work of any of the six focus areas identified by ECI.
6. Start an Earth Charter study group and explore how to use the Earth Charter and apply its principles in your home, workplace, and local community.
7. Make use of the Earth Charter:
  - a) **in public events, conferences, and workshops**
  - b) **as a values framework** for creating sustainable development policies and plans at all levels
  - c) **as a soft law instrument** to provide an ethical foundation for the ongoing development of environment and sustainable development law
  - d) **as a guide in assessing progress towards sustainability** through audits and reviews
  - e) **to modify and improve your organization mission statement, codes of conduct, programmes,** activities and publications of business and professional organizations
  - f) **as an educational tool** for developing understanding of the critical choices facing humanity and the urgent need for commitment to a sustainable way of life
  - g) **as a map** to explore the major issues associated with globalization and sustainable development
  - h) **as a catalyst for multi-sectoral, crosscultural, and interfaith dialogue** on global ethics and important social and ecological values and their interrelationship
  - i) **as a call to action and guide to a sustainable way of life** that can inspire commitment, cooperation, and change

In addition, ECI seeks volunteer translators, project sponsors, communicators, and contributors of all kinds. For more information on this, please see our website or contact us.

**The Earth Charter International (ECI) encourages everyone to contribute to the goals of the Earth Charter Initiative. Your active participation and support are needed.**

For more information please visit our website:

[www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)

or contact us at

Earth Charter International Secretariat and  
Earth Charter Center for Education for Sustainable Development at UPEACE

C/O University for Peace  
P.O. Box 138 - 6100  
San Jose, Costa Rica  
Tel. (506) 2205 9000  
Fax. (506) 2249 1929  
e-mail: [info@earthcharter.org](mailto:info@earthcharter.org)



[www.EarthCharter.org](http://www.EarthCharter.org)