

# **The Earth Charter Task Force on Religion, Spirituality, and Ethics**

## **Plan of Action**

### **Co-Chairs**

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### **Purpose and Scope**

This Task Force aims to engage a broad range of individuals, institutions, and organizations concerned with religion, spirituality, ethics, and the Earth Charter. It intends to assist such individuals and groups in integrating the Earth Charter with their efforts toward creating a just, peaceful, and sustainable future for the Earth Community.

In particular, the Task Force is reaching out to:

- 1) Leaders of religious institutions and communities
- 2) Scholars and theologians of the world's religions as well as ethicists
- 3) Individuals and organizations interested in linking religion, spirituality, and ethics to issues of sustainability

### **Background:**

There is a widespread recognition that along with science, economics, and policy the world's religions, spiritual perspectives, and ethical values can play a catalyzing role in moving the human community toward a sustainable future. The vast majority of the world's peoples draw inspiration and guidance from their religious beliefs and practices while many outside of formal religious institutions rely on particular spiritual paths.

For millennia the world's religious, spiritual and ethical traditions have provided ethical grounding for the shaping of various cultures throughout the world. From the indigenous traditions to the axial age religions arising in the last 3.000 years, humans have oriented themselves to the mystery of existence, to relations with other humans, and to nature itself.

The Earth Charter recognizes the immense contributions that have been made by religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions. Indeed, the Earth Charter affirms the rich multicultural and multireligious expressions present in the human community. While respecting this remarkable diversity, it also invites the world's religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions into dialogue with the emerging global ethics represented in the Earth Charter.

The Charter was drafted with a spirit that calls individuals and institutions to help create the foundations for a common future. Thus, there is a recognition of shared although differentiated responsibilities for the flourishing of the Earth Community. During the drafting process of the Charter, scholars and leaders of the world's religious and indigenous traditions were able to give comments on the drafts of the Charter in various venues around the world.

One of the most constructive venues was at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions during a 3 year conference series on world religions and ecology. Coinciding with the Earth Charter drafting process from 1996 to 2000, these conferences brought together over 800 scholars and representatives of the world's religions who gave feedback on the various drafts of the Earth Charter. It was a mutually beneficial process: As the world's religions are taking a larger role in environmental and social justice issues, they also recognize their contributions to an emerging global ethics in the Earth Charter.

In the global Earth Charter consultation, theologians, experts and religious organizations from Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Indigenous, Islamic, Jain, Jewish, and Shinto traditions shared their visions for a just, sustainable and peaceful world. Apart from these inputs, a broad range of religious and interreligious texts, statements and declarations were reviewed and used as a basis for the Earth Charter's inclusive global vision of shared values and common goals for sustainable living.

### **Strategy**

The Task Force is building on this collaborative work to further engage the religious, spiritual, and ethical communities in realizing the aspirations of the Earth Charter. To this end it is foregrounding research, education, and outreach.

### **Tasks and Activities:**

#### ***Research and Development***

- 1) The Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE) will assist in producing a book on religious perspectives and responses to the Earth Charter.
- 2) The Forum on Religion and Ecology will utilize its website to foreground the Earth Charter and relevant articles.
- 3) The Forum on Religion and Ecology is compiling the responses of the world's religions to climate change. It will post these on its website and illustrate the links to the Earth Charter.
- 4) Michael Slaby's Guide on Religion and Climate Change will be revised and posted on the Earth Charter website.
- 5) The Guide on Religion and Climate Change will be translated into German, Dutch and Spanish and made available online. The Ecumenical One World Initiative's project of creating an Earth Charter network of religious institutions involved in education for sustainable development has recently been included into Germany's National Plan of Action for the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development. The German translation can therefore use the official UNESCO / DESD, which will give it a greater legitimacy in its outreach to religious institutions.
- 6) A narrative on the religious contributions to the Earth Charter drafting process will be completed and posted on the Earth Charter website.
- 7) The Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values will launch a multimedia project with Chief Oren Lyons and others based on the Native American ceremony of "the

Feather”. This project is expected to generate three distinct products that are based on the Earth Charter: a book with inspiring statements and messages of leading religious, spiritual, and moral leaders, a DVD or a website where these messages are being shown on video, and a self-perpetuating methodology for facilitating intergenerational dialogues on our common future.

- 8) A handbook on sustainability, such as *Earth and Faith*, produced by United Nations Environment Programme and the Forum on Religion and Ecology will be published and made available online.
- 9) An *Earth Charter Guide to Sustainable Living* will be produced and made available online. The paper will develop the idea of “being more not having more” and will build on existing papers on sustainable living that have been produced in the Earth Charter Initiative.
- 10) An *Earth Charter Guide to interreligious dialogue and collaboration* will be published and made available online. The Guide will position the Earth Charter in the context of the various initiatives of fostering interreligious dialogue within the United Nations. In particular, the Guide will show the added value the Earth Charter could bring to the planned World Decade for Interreligious Dialogue. The second part will present case studies, best practices and methodologies how the Earth Charter can be used to frame interreligious dialogue and collaboration.

#### ***Education and Workshops:***

- 1) The Task Force will compile a bibliography of relevant articles and materials available for use by religious leaders, lay people, and educators.
- 2) The Task Force will reach out to the network of religious institutions that have endorsed the Earth Charter to test the three-step methodology of ethical reflection that Michael Slaby suggests in his *Earth Charter Guide to Religion and Climate Change*. This will help to refine the methodology and produce some case studies that could be presented online.
- 3) The Task Force will explore the possibility of holding workshops for religious leaders, laypeople and educators in various parts of the world:
  - From April 23 – 25, 2009, the Ecumenical One World Initiative (EOWI) in Germany will organize a conference on the Earth Charter’s relevance for interreligious dialogue and collaboration for sustainable ways of living that will discuss strategies of engaging religious institutions in Germany in education for sustainability using the Earth Charter. This conference will be a good occasion for presenting a German translation of the *Earth Charter Guide on Religion and Climate Change*.
  - The Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values commits to organize a series of Earth Charter-based Faith and Leadership workshops for the next generation of religious leaders in the Netherlands.

- Other workshops will be explored to be held in cooperation with Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association of Taiwan, Religions for Peace, and the European Christian Environmental Network
- 4) The Task Force will compile case studies of how religious institutions are using the Earth Charter and will make them available online.

***Outreach and conferences***

- 1) The Earth Charter website will highlight events and conferences related to this Task Force, such as
- The Second Annual Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in Istanbul, Turkey, April 6 – 7.
  - The Earth Charter and religion conference in Warburg Germete, Germany, April 23 – 25, 2009
  - The European Forum for the Study of Religion and the Environment's (EFSRE) 2nd international conference on "Religion & Ecology in the Public Sphere" in Åbo/Turku, Finland, 14 - 17 May 2009
  - The Parliament of the World's Religions, December 3 – 9, 2009
- 2) The FORUM ON RELIGION AND ECOLOGY will utilize its monthly newsletter that reaches 8.000 people to highlight the activities of the world's religions and the Earth Charter.
- 3) The Task Force will reach out to initiatives at the UN such as
- The UN General Assembly High Level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue and Collaboration for Peace
  - The UN Alliance of Civilizations
  - The UNESCO-led International Year of Rapprochement of Cultures in 2010
  - The planned World Decade for Interreligious Dialogue 2011 – 2020

***The Task Force invites religious, interreligious, and ecumenical institutions at all levels to join them in conducting these tasks and efforts.***