



**Recommendations for Strengthening the Ethical
Dimension of the Negotiating Text under the
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

The following recommended revisions are designed to strengthen the ethical dimension of the negotiating Text prepared in October 2009 by the chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

1. In the Preamble, include the following paragraph:

Recalling the affirmation of our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to our children in the Johannesburg Declaration of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

2. In Chapter I, paragraph #8, add the following concluding sentence:

It also recognizes that the common but differentiated responsibilities of the Parties include the duty to protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.

3. In Chapter II. Enhanced Action on Adaptation and Its Means of Implementation, Section A. Objectives, Scope and Guiding Principles, add to paragraph #22 a new sub-paragraph that states:

Be guided by the Earth Charter.

4. Throughout the document whenever the planet is referenced, the planet's name, "Earth", should be used and capitalized.

The rationale for these recommendations is attached.

Rationale for Recommendation 1

The passage cited from the Johannesburg Declaration (2002) is important because it provides a concise statement of the scope of the Parties' common but differentiated responsibilities. The passage is from Article 7, which reads as follows:

From this continent, the cradle of humanity, we declare, through the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the present Declaration, our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life and to our children.

It is also noteworthy that a similar statement is found in the Preamble of the Earth Charter (2000). The first paragraph of the Earth Charter Preamble states:

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.

Rationale for Recommendation 2

There are four interrelated reasons why the shared vision for long-term cooperative action on climate change should recognize the duty of the Parties to protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems. First, protecting and restoring ecosystem carbon stocks is a necessary mitigation activity. Scientific evidence is growing that stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at a safe level will require both deep cuts in fossil fuel emissions and a dramatic decrease in emissions from deforestation and ecosystem degradation. Second, healthy ecosystems are more resilient and have greater capacity to adapt to climate change impacts, and therefore can better serve ecosystem-based adaptation initiatives. Third, humanity is dependent on the goods and services provided by Earth's ecological systems, and the loss of biological diversity and degradation of Earth's life support systems under the impact of climate change can undermine efforts to achieve sustainability and threaten human security.

Fourth, the greater community of life in all its diversity has intrinsic value and is worthy of respect and care quite apart from its instrumental value to human beings.

In addition, the Rio Declaration (1992) in Principle 7 asserts: “States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth’s ecosystem.” The World Charter for Nature (1982), the Earth Charter (2000) and the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000) all recognize the principle of respect for nature, which requires the protection and restoration of Earth’s ecological integrity. Earth Charter Principle 5 is the imperative to: “Protect and restore the integrity of Earth’s ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.”

Rationale for Recommendation 4

Our Common Future (the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development), Agenda 21 (1992), the Rio Declaration (1992), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) all adopted the practice of capitalizing Earth when referring to the planet. For example, the Rio Declaration Preamble refers to “the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth, our home,” and the UNFCC Preamble asserts “that change in the Earth’s climate and its adverse effects are a common concern of human kind.” The practice of referring to “the Earth” involved a decrease in references to nature in general and reflected the growing recognition of the unity of the biosphere and the interdependence of people and Earth’s ecosystems. It also involves adopting the common practice among scientists of using the planet’s name, Earth. This should become standard practice when drafting international documents.

There are three basic alternatives when referring to the planet: “the earth,” “the Earth,” or “Earth.” Using “the Earth” is a step toward using the planet’s name with a capital E. Since no one would refer to planets like Mars and Jupiter as “the Mars” or “the Jupiter,” it seems not appropriate to continue using the definite article with the name Earth.

In addition, an important reason for using the name Earth is that this practice can encourage respect and care for our planetary home and the greater community of life of which people are a part. The practice of referring to “the earth” can reinforce the problematical attitude of regarding the planet as just a warehouse of resources that exists for human exploitation. Use of the name Earth can evoke the image of our planet floating in space captured in the photographs of the astronauts. This image inspires in many people an appreciation of the uniqueness, beauty, and fragility of our planetary home and a heightened awareness of humanity’s dependence on Earth’s extraordinary biosphere.

Rationale for Recommendation 3

Any framework agreement to guide State conduct after the expiration of the Kyoto Protocol in 2012 must establish an ethical foundation for on-going international cooperation on realizing the Millennium Development Goals and respecting Human Rights. Since the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, civil society and governments have negotiated a fundamental set of ethical principles that set forth States' "common but differentiated responsibilities" for making progress toward realizing sustainable development in all regions. These principles are contained in The Earth Charter (www.earthcharter.org).

The Earth Charter is a declaration of global interdependence and universal responsibility that sets forth fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century. It is the 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. It was finalized and launched in 2000 by the Earth Charter Commission, an independent international entity. The drafting of the Earth Charter involved the most inclusive and participatory process ever associated with the creation of an international declaration. It has been endorsed by UNESCO and IUCN and over 4,800 civil society organizations worldwide.

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.

Principle 6 of the Johannesburg Declaration adopted by the 2002 UN World Summit on Sustainable Development, echoes the preamble to the Earth Charter echoes Paragraph 1 of UNCED's Agenda 21, and ultimately the UN Charter itself: "It is imperative that we, the peoples of the Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations." The Earth Charter elaborates this common responsibility, while laying the foundation by which each State may examine its differentiated responsibilities for achieving the shared vision of the UN General Assembly's Millennium Declaration and safeguarding Earth's climate from irreversible damage.

Rather than reinventing yet again any new formulation of ethical principles to embrace at the Copenhagen conference in December of 2009, States could provide the needed long-term ethical foundation by incorporating The Earth Charter into the Post-Kyoto agreement that the Bali Action Plan contemplates. Respect for nature and respect

for human rights are mutually interdependent. To make progress toward sustainable development, it is not enough to address simply the adverse effects of climate change. Technological innovations and financial mechanisms that lead to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are essential but not sufficient. A change in attitudes and values is necessary. Fundamental to the transformation of current patterns of production and consumption, leading to sustainability, is an ethic of respect and care for the community of life as a whole.

The Earth Charter is based on the common and shared ethical traditions found in every region of the Earth. All States care for their children and future generations, but another factor contributing to humanity's unsustainable way of life is a failure to take fully into consideration the needs and rights of future generations as well as those in present generations, especially the poor, who suggest the harmful consequences of an increasingly degraded environment. Many of the basic inequities and the economic problems exacerbated by the current global economic recession, as well as the deepening ecological crisis, arise from the lack of commitment to the common good and ethical responsibility. The Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change (Para 2.8, 2007) concluded that "The ethics of adaptation imply strong support from the rich countries to the most vulnerable." Unless the Post-Kyoto agreement is expressly grounded on an ethical foundation, this support will continue to be a weak element of international cooperation.

By incorporating the Earth Charter into the foundation for any Post-Kyoto agreement on climate change, the States Parties to the UNFCCC will ensure that the Millennium Development Goals become a core element in the global campaign to restore and sustain Earth's climate for present and future generations.

For more information, see the Earth Charter International website:
www.earthcharter.org

Prepared by Earth Charter International (ECI) Council members Steven Rockefeller, Brendan Mackey, and Song Li and by ECI Advisor Nick Robinson.