

The Only Way Forward



Her Royal Highness **Princess Basma bint Talal** has worked extensively to promote a wide range of global issues related to sustainable human development. Princess Basma founded and heads the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development, a non-governmental organization that promotes sustainable development interventions within local communities. On the international level, Princess Basma is Honorary Human Development Ambassador for the United Nations Development Programme, Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Development Fund for Women, Global Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Population Fund, and Member of the Jury for the Equator Initiative. Princess Basma holds a doctorate in development studies from Oxford University and is the author of *Re-thinking an NGO: Development, Donors and Civil Society in Jordan*, an analysis of the impact of changing paradigms of development. As a member of the Earth Charter Commission, Princess Basma has generated commitment and endorsement for the Earth Charter in Jordan and the region. In 2002, Jordan's ninety-nine municipalities endorsed a declaration to support the Earth Charter. In 2003, the Jordanian Ministry of Education successfully presented the Earth Charter Resolution for adoption by the UNESCO General Conference.

I consider myself to be extraordinarily privileged to be invited to contribute this Afterword to *The Earth Charter in Action: Toward a Sustainable World*. It is always inspiring to read the work of others, and to gain an insight into different ways of seeing and understanding the world around us. I hope that I will be able to do justice to the rich diversity of views presented in this unique volume.

The book demonstrates that, in the few years since the idea of an Earth Charter was first put forward, much has been achieved. The Earth Charter has stimulated intellectuals to rethink fundamental concepts and theories; it has led politicians to revise their own policies; it has led economists to review the very assumptions on which they base their prescriptions for devel-

opment; and it has inspired grassroots activists to challenge the “wisdom” of experts. We are witnessing the realisation that a paradigm shift in the way we theorise development is the only way forward.

We are often reminded that we live in a globalised world. But, economic growth is often dependent on the culture of consumerism and built-in obsolescence. It is hardly surprising, then, that so many of the authors acknowledge that the political, economic, business, and social systems that globalisation seeks to replicate are, in essence, obsolete. In the words of Albert Einstein, often cited in this volume, “You cannot solve problems with the way of thinking that led to their creation.”

In finding new solutions to the urgent challenge of global survival, one size does not fit all. It is essential that we recognise the specificity of local contexts and respect local solutions. In the fight against disease, we now know that local knowledge is often far more effective than western science. Such insight leads us to discover remedies in the flora and fauna of the Amazonian rainforests, the arid deserts, and the frozen wastes. The people of these regions also have insights into social and economic organisation that will help us achieve the necessary paradigm shifts in global systems. If we are to understand their local views and learn from them, it is necessary that their voices be heard, and that we listen to them. We must celebrate biodiversity of thought. As many contributors noted, in the words of the Earth Charter, “This requires a change of mind and heart” (The Way Forward, paragraph two).

Our contexts are diverse, but our vision and values are shared. My own cultural heritage lies in the Arab Bedu tribes of the desert, yet I found a resonance with the essay concerning the challenges facing the Inuit communities of Greenland. The article reminded us that “We have to deal with our situation bottom-up, asking ourselves, ‘What part do I play here, however small and insignificant. What can I do to push things in the right direction, however humbly?’”

This directs the reader to the title: *The Earth Charter in Action*. We are urged to translate lofty statements into local concrete

actions. This will not be difficult. Across the world, there are grassroots organisations that help poor and marginalised people secure a more sustainable livelihood. Their “people-centred” work provides a solid foundation from which to broaden efforts and become “Earth-centred.” The two issues are intertwined, for poor and marginalised people have most to gain from the sustainable use of finite resources.

Women, for example, play a central role in ensuring the survival of the human race. For generations, women have been at the forefront in campaigns to protect the world’s resources. One advantage of the technological revolution is that the actions of such women are now broadcast and validated world-wide. Finally, their extraordinary role is being recognised through global awards, such as the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Charter also provides a unifying focal point around which young people can express their commitment to protect Earth. Never has this been more essential – more than fifty percent of the global population is under the age of twenty-five. The network of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative is designed to serve as a platform where young people celebrate diversity of religion, class, and ethnicity as a positive value, rather than a potential fault line. The more young people work together, the more the ripples of change are created around the world. Our three billion young people should be treated, not as the potential consumers of global products, but as the providers of global solutions. They will have to lead the way to change the priorities that promote material wealth over personal well-being and justice. They will be the active global citizens who use creativity as a tool for action.

This volume illustrates the ways that this youthful creativity can be harnessed. The Ark of Hope, for example, where young people are encouraged to deposit messages and materials that symbolise their vision for the future is an idea that can be adapted easily to different cultural and religious contexts. The Brink Expedition Team raises awareness of the threats presented by global warming, but they do so in the spirit of their beliefs – by travelling without using fossil fuels. Theirs is an adventure which inspires young people to express, in positive, life-enhancing terms, their alternative visions for a better way of organising the world.

In all these endeavours, the role of education is central. Across the world, the movement to promote a more holistic approach to learning is taking hold. The necessary new knowledge, skills, and behaviours cannot be achieved through formal education alone, but must be instilled through access to life-long reflection and learning. This requires that we constantly open our minds to new ideas, that we challenge existing paradigms, and that we engage in genuine dialogue that embraces the diversity of world views. Such interactions bring about more profound and lasting transformation in the human heart and mind. The future is not pre-ordained but is determined by human choices and

actions. We can, to some degree, choose our future – and this book provides insights into the choices that we should make.

This may be the Afterword, but it is certainly not the last word. This is a debate that will continue and will be reflected in action. I look forward to reading a future volume where we celebrate our achievements and, hopefully, a United Nations declaration recognising the Rights of Earth. ●