

TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE WORLD: THE EARTH CHARTER IN ACTION

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“Democracy, nonviolence and peace”.

As never before in history, common destiny
beckons us to seek a new beginning.
-The Earth Charter, from The Way Forward

This “new beginning”, this new phase in the history of humanity, “requires a change of mind and heart, a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity with the participation of all . . . Every individual, family, organization and community has a vital role to play . . . In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations.” These are some of the paths to the future that will allow us to rectify some of the current directions that are filled with somber horizons. It is time for action. We can no longer delay making decisions, especially since, in the eighties, ideologies and ideals were substituted—in a historical abdication of political responsibilities—by “market” laws. And in order to rectify, in order to correct current tendencies, it is vital to have the protagonist appear on the scene, the object of all the efforts made for humanity’s progress and the betterment of the quality of life for all inhabitants of the Earth, without exclusion. For centuries the power held by a few has imposed their design on the majority who, resigned, fearful and confused, has—with brief periods of resistance—acquiesced. Today, we have reasonable hope that, finally, the 21st century will be the century of the people, of the emancipation of the citizens, of the voice of the people, of the change from imperceptible and anonymous subjects to interlocutors and actors, of new governance.

Thus starts the Charter’s preamble: “We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future . . . 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.” Similarly to the preamble of the United Nations Charter (San Francisco, 1945), the focus is unmistakably directed at future generations, those who are a step behind us, those who will be doing it in a few years. On them depends the future, a future that they will have to design freely and responsibly. For ourselves, with our vision and courage, we must ensure that no one disturbs or predetermines the shape or appearance of tomorrow. This is our supreme commitment: from the past we have to extract lessons and apply them. And I never tire of repeating this--the past cannot be changed. It is the way it was. We can only describe it. And we have to do it truthfully. The future we can and we should change. It is our essential task. Our challenge. We cannot distract ourselves and look elsewhere. The eyes of our descendants are already watching us.

“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.” The global situation shows a growing environmental pathology at the same time that the gap between the rich and poor countries grows rather than wanes. “Injustice, poverty, ignorance and violent conflicts multiply and expand, producing great suffering”. All of this, as it is described in “The Global Situation” in the Charter, urgently requires, as I was arguing before, the appearance of civil society and the organizations in which it is integrated so that, from now on, civil society becomes an indispensable interlocutor, and an active participant in the construction of a “democratic and humane” world. In order to put into practice these aspirations, we need to strengthen the sense of solidarity, of fraternity, as it is proclaimed in Article 1 of the Human Rights Declaration. All free, all equal, all endowed with reason, all fraternally united. All different. To the point of uniquenessty, each human being unique, creator. This distinctive capacity of the human species allows us to divert the fatal direction of our trajectory. To have deciphered the language of life—the spatial complementarity of molecules that governs from genetic transference to its translation into structural and dynamic components in all beings—allows us consequently to inexorably predict its behavior. With one exception, the one that endows each human life with boundless excessive creative drive, the exception that allows, even at the edge of light and shadow, of certainty and uncertainty, the freedom to elaborate its own answers, to decide for itself, to “directing with meaning its own life”, a definition of education difficult to improve upon, in the words of D. Francisco Giner de los Ríos. To have

time to reflect, to think, to be oneself, to not just be a passive viewer, a receptacle that lets others decide in his/her name, that lets others—sometimes through different mediating instances—determine the course of his/her behavior.

We, as creators, free, without attachments, with wide wings without weight for high flight, can “provide ~~offer~~ ethical principles to the emerging global community.” Of the four Principles which initiate the Earth Charter, the third one specifically refers to “Build[ing] democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.” The supporting Subprinciple under this states that we need to “insure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.” I think this is a particularly relevant aspect. Some are busy tending to their needs, which many times allows them to barely survive; others are distracted by entertainment that prevents them from having time to think; others are obfuscated by fears, superstitions and individualistic impulses that do not only show their ignorance, but often lead them to adopt intransigent, extremist and fanatic positions; it is only a few who can steal away from daily routine and inertia in order to think what they say and say what they think. We run the risk of being led by the immense gusts of mass media, of being molded by this omnipresent mediating power, being engulfed by the great whirlwind of edited events, some magnified, others downplayed—... in such a way—All this so that we only know what is wanted of us In such a way that we no longer know what we are expected to know, with bias that fills our gardens, many times to the most private corners, with foreign and undesired plants and trees.

The construction of democracy requires us to reclaim the right to transparent information and to express, without hindrance, our views and, with the help of modern technology (Internet, SMS), progressively incorporate multiple voices so that they can become a real popular clamor, one that victoriously confronts hegemony and plutocracy in such a way that silence is broken. To break a silence that has allowed so many injustices, so that an ethical- legal judicial framework can pacifically and strongly be implemented at local and international levels, so that the word of the citizens—for this constitutes real democracy—illuminates the paths of governance towards a more brighter less somber future; so that the “swords become plows” and we move from a culture of imposition and force to a culture of dialogue and peace.

Time to think, to listen, to be one's self. There is no strong and sustainable democracy without citizens who care for others and are capable of arguing in favor of their proposals. There is no democracy in silence, nor in submission or in fear.

Violence has no justification. Never. But we need to try to explain why it occurs, why it is generated; why it emerges, fierce, to the point of, at times, involving the sacrifice of one's own life. As the Earth Charter establishes in its 3rd Part, we need to look for the roots of hostility, frustration, radicalization, and aversion in living conditions that are hard to make compatible with human dignity, in the once and again unfulfilled promises, in the abandonment, in the neglect, in the forgetfulness. To attain social and economic justice it is indispensable to "eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative . . . Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required." And these resources will not be attained if civil society continues to accept that "things are as they are and cannot be anything else," and that "there is no remedy." The age of silence is over. The age of genuine democracy starts where it should: with the voice of the people, with the never violent but always firm expression of their rights, of their projects, wishes and dreams.

Integral, endogenous, sustainable, human development for an adequate distribution of resources of all kinds—including, naturally, knowledge—for the good of all. The reduction of the present imbalances is a *sine qua non* condition; in the prosperous neighborhoods of the global village, only 20% of the world's population enjoys 80% of the goods, of the fruits of innovation, of discoveries, of technological applications. Its spiritual richness, however, is going astray. It needs to open windows and doors in order to meet and understand those who live, many times in crowded conditions, in poor and impoverished ~~areas neighborhoods~~. So that "to live together," as the commission presided by Jacques Delors, recommended in its *Education for the 21st Century* becomes a reality and a cornerstone of the building of democracy in a new world. For this it is necessary that, with a true willingness of conciliation, normalization and pacification, and without delay, measures be taken to alleviate the situation of billions of people. Measures to end the shameful of ~~tax fiscal~~ havens, where money coming from the most horrific trafficking (drugs, arms, people!) is "laundered." Measures that will immediately reduce facts like the following: United States and European Union agricultural subsidies reach 375 billion dollars a year. That is to say, a little more than one billion dollars daily. Weapons spending, which grew in the last few years as it

corresponds to a war economy, has reached 2.6 billion dollars a day. It would be enough to start a progressive reduction of these investments and divert them to supporting endogenous global development, the financing of the new social and economic contract that is indispensable for a sustainable Earth and habitability; for a new environmental contract which would stop degradation, climate change, ocean pollution, that would permit, in all cases, the ability to act with scientific rigor through transdisciplinary commissions; to salvage (or safeguard) the diversity and identity of all cultures and languages avoiding progressive uniformity, the erosion of the identities peculiarities of civilizations that could recognize the many bridges that unite them instead of the aspects that separate them; so that solidarity would be inspired in ethical principles universally accepted.

It is urgent that these transformations begin and that the disparities that the current economic system has widened, creating tensions and a generalized feeling of inability to straighten the paths that fill us with ignominy and hopelessness, be reduced. It cannot be that each day 40,000 people should die of hunger. It cannot be that the military-industrial complex should be producing weaponry for conventional confrontation engagement of armies in of different countries, when what it is needed now, in the face of terrorism, is to strengthen personal security, and to encourage the collaboration of all citizens--of which the great majority are on the side of life and against those who machinate atrocities from the shadows—and technological and human resources in order to, on a cooperative world scale, end violence, at the same time that misery, exclusion, poverty and malnutrition are reduced and eradicated.

The Earth Charter claims that gender equality be assured, another condition for the establishment, at the local, regional and global level, of peace and democracy. If the general principle is the complete equality of all human beings, how can we explain the discrimination that affects some ethnic groups, some indigenous communities, and women? How can we continue to accept a society that is essentially masculine in which the progress of the last decades is that men make 96% of decisions and represent 88% of the voice of the Earth?

Democracy and nonviolence require the security certainty of peace and not the peace of security certainty; not nor the peace of imposition, of fear, of silence. As I stated before, the key to any democratic system is interaction integration, listening and participation. Education for all throughout one's life so that the growing presence of citizens in governance can be assured. So that institutions—in particular universities—become, through

interdisciplinarity, advisers to democratic institutions (parliaments, municipal councils, mass media) and watchtowers of anticipation and prevention. Prevention is the great victory. Only a democratic system in which it is the people who shape the content and tone of governance allows the full exercise of human rights without exception.

Democracy, nonviolence and peace. The Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, ~~adopted~~ ~~approved~~ by the United Nations General Assembly on the 13th of September 1999, establishes that “civil society has to be fully engaged in ~~the fuller~~ development of a culture of peace . . . A key role in the promotion of a culture of peace belongs to parents, teachers, politicians, journalists, religious bodies and groups, intellectuals, those engaged in scientific, philosophical and creative and artistic activities, health and humanitarian workers, social workers, managers at various levels as well as to nongovernmental organizations.” In order to carry out Principle 16 of the Earth Charter, “Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace,” it is especially useful to apply the measures indicated by the action program of the aforementioned declaration: education for all and throughout their whole lives, without any obstacles to access; promote sustainable economic and social development; promote respect of all human rights; ensure equality between women and men; foster democratic participation; advance understanding, tolerance and solidarity; support participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge; and promote international peace and security.

The current contradiction between democracies at the local level (no matter how fragile and vulnerable many of them still are) and oligocracy and hegemony at the international level cannot continue to exist. As it is stated in the Earth Charter, cooperation among all peoples, disarmament, and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, implies that the United Nations should have moral authority over financial, human and technical resources that are essential for the fulfillment of its mission. “We, the people, have decided to ~~save spare~~ the ~~succedeing future~~ generations ~~from~~ the horror of war.” A United Nations system—with specialized international institutions on aspects related to labor, food, education, culture, science, finances, ~~trade~~, etc.—broadly utilized, at the service of the whole world, with the adaptations advised by reality and ~~a prospective vision. the future.~~

The Earth Charter declares 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.”

Today, we celebrate 60 years of the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco, and UNESCO in London, and the 5th anniversary of the launching of the Earth Charter in Amsterdam in the year 2000. This constitutes a framework, an indispensable and desirable background as it provides the Earth Charter with validity, authenticity, and a demand for very concrete commitments. Therefore, we need to promote its diffusion, so that all institutions of learning, all government agencies, all mass media, etc. know and put in practice the major reference points, especially in the current circumstances of confusion and ~~dismay fatigue~~.

All different, all equal, united, with hope ~~due to coming from~~ the unique capacity to create, we commit to disseminate and observe the Earth Charter, to contribute to the Objectives of the Millennium. “That no one who can talk remains silent./ that all ~~join unite~~ in that cry.”