



Diversity and Connecting Civilizations

Briefing paper Thematic Session EC+10 Event

There is an increased understanding on the need to recognize and celebrate the diversity of our planet, at the same time the need to forge collaboration across borders. “We must harmonize diversity with unity”. The Earth Charter Preamble states that “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.”

A number of efforts worldwide, such as the UN Alliance of Civilizations, are focused on “promoting policies and initiatives aimed at improving relations between diverse cultural groups”. The Charter of Compassion states that “the principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves.”

Since the launch of the Earth Charter in the year 2000, several new efforts and declarations have appeared. The most important examples include:

- (a) The Charter of Compassion (2009), which is focused on and highlights the great importance of compassion as a guiding religious, ethical, and social value. The value of compassion is explicitly affirmed in Earth Charter Principle 3. The call for compassion as a fundamental, guiding ethical value is entirely consistent with the Earth Charter.
- (b) The draft Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (2010), which is being circulated by President Evo Morales of Bolivia. This document is in accord with the Earth Charter’s call for respect and care for the community of life. However, it goes beyond the Earth Charter in calling for recognition of the rights of all beings.
- (c) The draft Universal Declaration on the Common Good of Earth and Humanity (2010), which has been drafted by Leonardo Boff and Miguel D’Escoto. Unlike the other two documents listed above, this declaration presents a fairly broad set of ethical principles. It is strongly influenced by the Earth Charter and uses Earth Charter language in a number of places.

The United Nations has adopted a number of soft law documents that are related to the Earth Charter and some show the influence of the Earth Charter. For example, the UN Millennium Declaration affirms the importance of the principle of respect for nature as a fundamental guiding principle in international relations, and the Johannesburg Declaration issued by the WSSD in 2002 appears to have borrowed language from the Earth Charter when it asserts that “we must declare our responsibility to one another, the greater community of life, and our children.” This reference in the Johannesburg Declaration is particularly significant because it is the first time that the concept of “the greater community of life” has been introduced into an international law document, and inclusion of recognition that humanity has responsibilities to the greater community of life and future generations as well as present generations involves a general affirmation of the inclusive ethical framework provided by the Earth Charter. In addition, in 2007 the UN adopted the Declaration on the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples. The Earth Charter gives special recognition to the rights of indigenous peoples, and the UN Declaration is a major step forward in clarifying and setting forth these rights.

The purpose of the thematic session is to dialogue and reflect on the importance of recognizing diversity at the same time as find commonalities among humans, to look at the current efforts related to diversity and the need to connect civilizations and to clarify the role the Earth Charter can play in these efforts.

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Short introductory remarks:

- Karen Armstrong, Charter for Compassion
- Pauline Tangiora, Earth Charter Commissioner
- Rick Clugston, Earth Charter US
- Lisa Jokivirta, Finland (Youth)
- Michael Slaby, Germany, Earth Charter Task Force on Religion, Spirituality and Ethics

Guiding Questions for the discussion:

1. How can the Earth Charter in cooperation with the Charter for Compassion and other initiatives such as the UN Alliance of Civilizations, help further promote the agenda of respect for cultural diversity and connecting civilizations;
2. The Earth Charter is a bases for dialogue between different cultures, religious traditions and sectors, how could we ensure to keep this dialogue ongoing?

Background documents and links:

- High-Level Dialogue of the General Assembly On Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace Informal Interactive Hearing with Civil Society
"Best Practices & Strategies for Interreligious and Intercultural Cooperation Going Forward" by Steven Rockefeller
http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/attachments/10/UN_Rockefeller.pdf
- *The Charter for Compassion* (see annex), <http://charterforcompassion.org/>
- *It Starts with One*. Vision Document on the Earth Charter and Citizenship, Worldconnectors 2010
<http://www.worldconnectors.nl/index.php?id=116>
- *Connecting Civilisations*, statement by the Worldconnectors 2008
<http://www.worldconnectors.nl/index.php?id=99>

Annex 1



The Charter for Compassion

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

We therefore call upon all men and women ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.