



## ***Global Governance, the UN and Climate Change*** **Briefing paper thematic Session EC+10 Event**

One of the main goals of the Earth Charter Initiative is to achieve recognition of the Earth Charter by the United Nations General Assembly and to demonstrate the relevance of the Earth Charter's values and principles to global governance.

Climate change -- caused by humanity's emission of greenhouse gases -- has emerged as a global issue of the highest urgency. Currently this is a major theme in the international agenda. It is crucial to address climate change from an integrated ethical perspective, as framed by the Earth Charter.

On the other hand, it is clear that governments alone cannot address the world challenges humanity faces and that non state actors: business, non-governmental organizations, youth groups and others play an important role in the design and implementation of policies and strategies. This presents important new variables for improving global sustainability governance.

### **The Earth Charter and UN Recognition**

Securing recognition of the Earth Charter by the UN General Assembly remains a goal of ECI, and the next best opportunity appears to be RIO+20, which occurs in 2012. Since the General Assembly has never formally endorsed a document that it did not write, over the past decade the Earth Charter Initiative has sought recognition of the Earth Charter as an inclusive ethical framework for sustainable development created by the emerging global civil society rather than formal endorsement. Based on experience at meetings such as the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, ECI has concluded that there is little chance the General Assembly will adopt a resolution that is focused exclusively on the Earth Charter, but it may be possible to incorporate recognition of the Earth Charter in a declaration or other resolution dealing with a broader set of issues. Developing government support is critical, and a well developed strategy should be constructed. ECI is in the early stages of this process. If ECI is to be successful in mobilizing significant government support for recognition of the Earth Charter at RIO+12, it will require the guidance and active support of Commissioners, Advisors, Affiliates and many others as well as Council members.

It is also important for ECI and the UN Task Force to continue seeking ways for the Earth Charter to support the UN Millennium Development Goals and to collaborate with UN agencies like UNEP and initiatives like the Global Compact.

### **The Earth Charter and Climate Change**

The Earth Charter does not explicitly refer to climate change or global warming. This was considered during the drafting process, but it was decided that it was sufficient to describe "The Global Situation" in very broad and general terms. The principles of the Earth Charter do provide the ethical framework needed to address climate change, including principles for building a green economy.

With release of a new draft Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth by the government of Bolivia, there is growing interest in the concept of the rights of non-human species and ecosystems.

This issue was considered carefully during the Earth Charter drafting process, and a judgment was made that there was not a wide consensus on adopting language regarding the rights of nature in international and national law. The idea of the rights of nature as legal concept remains controversial in many quarters, but the new debate will highlight the importance of the principle of respect for nature and all life, which is clearly articulated in the Earth Charter. The language in the Earth Charter emphasizes humanity's responsibility to and for the greater community of life rather than the rights of the greater community of life.

Recently Professor Nick Robinson has argued that implicit in the Earth Charter is the ecological principle of resilience, which needs to be clarified and made explicit. He believes that the elaboration of the principle of resilience will help acceptance and implementation of the other Earth Charter principles. However, Professor Robinson is not calling for an addition to the Earth Charter, which does make a reference to the critical value of resilience in the Preamble. The Earth Charter has a whole section on "Ecological Integrity" and some ecologists consider the principle of ecological integrity more fundamental than the principle of resilience. ECI should endeavor to clarify how the principle of ecological integrity and the principle of ecological resilience are related.

Relating the Earth Charter to climate change and to the new international treaty that is under negotiation with the framework of the UNFCCC is one important goal of the UN task force and this goal is supported actively by the ECI Secretariat. How should ECI endeavor to influence the 16<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties that will take place in Cancun, Mexico, this coming December? Should the goal be an explicit reference in the international climate change agreement to the Earth Charter as a valuable guiding ethical framework? The argument in support of this approach is that in the final analysis what is needed to respond to global warming is a rapid transition to sustainable development and the Earth Charter provides the ethical framework required. If this approach is adopted, what nations should be contacted in the effort to build support for an explicit reference to the Earth Charter? Who might coordinate such an endeavor?

An alternative or complementary strategy is to continue to demonstrate how the Earth Charter can be used to help address various aspects of the climate change problem. Efforts to date have focused on highlighting the ethical dimensions of the problem, including the need for negotiations to be conducted with a sense of universal responsibility. Another potential application is to use the Earth Charter's principles as a guide for developing and monitoring more holistic mitigation and adaptation policies.

The purpose of this session is to talk about the current challenges and opportunities of global sustainability governance, the role of the UN and non state actors in addressing issues such as climate change and the role the Earth Charter can play.

**Moderator:** Jan Pronk (Earth Charter Special Advisor)

**Reporter** (for the written report): Alicia Jimenez, ECI

**Brief introductory remarks:**

- Nico Schrijver, United Nations Intellectual History Project (UNIHP)
- Sr. Richard Jolly, UNIHP
- Hans Opschoor, ECOSOC Committee Development Policy
- Parvez Hassan, Earth Charter Advisor, Pakistan
- Esther Agbarakwe, Earth Charter Youth, Nigeria
- Yolanda Kakabadse, WWF, Ecuador
- Björn Bisshoff, co-author 'The Earth Charter, a Framework for global governance', Germany

**Questions to guide the discussions:**

1. How can the Earth Charter help address emerging challenges the UN is facing?
2. What is the state of the art regarding the integration of Earth Charter principles in global governance institutional structures?
3. With regards to the Rio+20 process, can the Earth Charter movement help revive and secure political will and commitment to sustainable development? How?
4. What should the Earth Charter Initiative seek to achieve in climate change negotiations and how?

**Documents/Links:**

- Reflections on the Copenhagen Climate Negotiations by Nicholas A. Robinson,  
<http://www.earthcharter.nl/index.php?id=62>
- Briefing Note: Origins of the United Nations Intellectual History Project, Annex II,  
<http://www.earthcharter.nl/index.php?id=62>
- Earth Charter International webpage on Global Governance and the UN  
<http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/United-Nations-and-Global-Governance.html>
- Earth Charter International webpage on Climate Change  
<http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/categories/Climate%20Change>