



WORLDCONNECTORS THE ROUND TABLE FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

IT STARTS WITH ONE

Vision document on Sustainable World Citizenship and the Earth Charter

- I Introduction**
- II Citizens of a shared world**
- III With heart and head and hands**
- IV The power of connection**
- V Spreading the virus of sustainability**
- VI A call to action**

The drafting of a vision document on the Worldconnectors theme Sustainable World Citizenship is part of our working programme for 2010. The theme itself has been important for our way of working as a dynamic network. A thematic working group (WG SWC) has been active since January 2009.

The focus of the WG SWC has been more on activities to catalyse change towards a sustainable future, instead of on drafting a statement. A Worldconnectors SWC community is being built up, partly by making use of social media. This focus will continue, but at the same time, and as a contribution to the celebration of 10 years Earth Charter, it was decided that now is the moment to capture the ideas underlying the activities. This vision document is inspired by the Earth Charter and will be updated as a result of new experiences and insights gained from our continued action and our participation in the Earth Charter+10 Event on 29 June 2010.

Input for this document was provided by the members of the Worldconnectors Working Group (WG) on Sustainable World Citizenship, as well as by the young idealists and social entrepreneurs who participated in two events organised by the WG in 2009 and 2010. WG members: Sandra van Beest, Louk de la Rive Box, Anna Chojnacka, Rindert de Groot (co-chair) and Herman Mulder (co-chair). Members of the Steering Group, Herman Wijffels, Sylvia Borren, Jos van Gennip and Willemijn Aerdts have also contributed to the drafting.

Advisors: Tom van de Beek (Either Or) and Willemijn Kemp (Our Common Future 2.0).

Supporters: Koen Kusters (DPRN), Iem Roos (SID NL), Gabi Spitz, Pamela Moore and Alide Roerink (NCDO).

Statement drafter: Ellen Lammers (WiW), 27 May 2010

Introduction

'It starts with one...'

This year, 2010, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Earth Charter, which was launched as a true people's charter for the 21st century in the Peace Palace in The Hague in 2000. The Worldconnectors wholeheartedly endorse the Charter's fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society.

'It starts with one...' is the motto of this year's worldwide celebrations. We, too, strongly believe in the potential of individuals to change our world for the better. We particularly believe in the power of connection of one-to-one. A creative force of change is generated when committed individuals inspire each other, forge networks that reach out across the globe, and bring into play their many different identities and roles to achieve their vision of well-being for the human family and its home, our Earth.

We call upon the older generation to open their proverbial doors and join hands with today's younger generation. Together they can lead the way and show that a sustainable future is possible, only if we seize the challenge of becoming citizens who truly care for the world at large.

Citizens of a shared world

The Earth Charter seeks to inspire in all people a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the Earth and its future generations. Our world is one: My actions impact on your life. Your choices influence my opportunities. Our ways of living affect the Earth. If we aspire to be – as we Worldconnectors do – sustainable world citizens, this notion of interdependence should be at the heart of our daily lives and actions. The financial crisis has shown that we are all vulnerable to the irresponsibility and greed of others – and it confirmed that some of us are more vulnerable than others. The wide gap in economic wellbeing that exists between North and South, between poor inner city and sprawling suburb, between Wall Street and Main Street, has only become more pronounced. And a world defined by such differences can never be sustainable. Therefore, now that we are told that – in the West, that is – the worst is over, let us not sit back. The economic crisis may have taken some of us by surprise, but it is intimately linked to other crises which, day in day out, define so many people's lives. The food crisis, the crisis of energy and other scarce resources, the climate crisis, the crises of conflict and violated human rights... If indeed we aspire to be world citizens, then all these crises concern each one of us – regardless of where we happen to be positioned geographically and economically.

Let us therefore erase 'complacency' from our dictionaries. Let us stop the fire fighting and swap it for a long-term practical commitment to what it means to be a global citizen: a deep-felt belief in the equality of all people, and in the responsibility for the Earth that we share. First and foremost, this means that we need to devise new ways of managing and sharing our global public goods, or 'global commons'. The most urgent example is the environment. Because, as the Earth Charter commends, '... the well-being of humanity depend[s] on preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment and its finite resources is the common concern of all peoples'.

As true world citizens, we look around us and we look ahead. Now that, due to the recession, cuts will have to be made in so many government and corporate budgets, there is a risk that 'tomorrow' will lose out in favour of 'today'. We can choose for this not to happen. It is all up to us! Let us therefore advocate a new attitude that doesn't stop short at our doorstep, but which embraces the vision that sharing a world means sharing a future.

With heart and head and hands

To become world citizens, we advocate 'close living': consciously reflecting on your own life, mastering your principles, letting significant experiences sink in, and sharing all this with those close to you.

Dreaming of a better world is easily done; making it happen much less so. It needs people who are willing not only to do less harm, but to dedicate time and effort to working creatively towards new solutions. It involves all that we are: a new way of thinking, a new way of acting, and a new way of engaging our hearts to be respectful and compassionate towards all that lives. The Earth Charter says: '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 about being more, not having more'.

We need a change of mindset. Our mental framework should give primacy to common interest, not self-interest. And with regard to development, we should let go of the traditional notion that development is what has to happen 'there', in Africa, in Asia or in the South. Development – in terms of being more – needs to happen everywhere. We may as well make sure it starts 'here'. It is moreover time to let go of the notion that development equals charity, because really, it equals solidarity and a realization of our common interest.

The power of connection

To us, a world citizen is a person who actively takes part in the exciting and promising transition to a different world. The way to achieve this is by making connections - in different directions, on different levels. Because the power of change is multiplied when change is strived for together. A winning team is an inclusive team that competes not against but for all others. Traditional gaps are to be bridged and closed: between the young and the old, between North and South, between women and men, between people of different religions, and between sectors of society – government, civil society, business and multilaterals. Moreover, the true world citizen seeks to connect her or his many roles - as employee, activist, entrepreneur, parent, politically engaged citizen, volunteer, board member, neighbour... – in order to multiply the impact of these efforts.

We strive to connect on different levels and embrace a sustainable way of living locally, nationally, regionally and globally. We stress that interdependence exists not only between people or countries, but also between political, economic, social and ecological systems at the regional and global level. Therefore, governments should be alert to the fact that their policies in one area can either impede or reinforce their efforts in another. Policy coherence should become an object of transparency and accountability, rather than a fashionable catch phrase. Businesses too, should learn to gear their activities towards social sustainability for the people who are their workforce and take responsibility for ecological sustainability throughout their value chains.

Spreading the virus of sustainability

It is our task to think up smart ways of spreading the virus of sustainability. There are many ways to do so; the most effective one may be to spread an authentic message about our own life changing experiences. This may inspire friends and colleagues to transform their life styles into those of world citizens, who regard at the Earth with respect, and at its people with compassion.

There are so many issues that need the sustainability virus to go around, for instance the promotion of using renewable energy sources and of achieving energy access for all – with positive impacts on poverty reduction and people's freedom. We also think of the question of how to make the system of financial products more sustainable, and how to go about greening the global economy. Green accounting, which incorporates environmental assets and their source and sink functions into national and corporate accounts, should become mainstream as one important way forward. This essentially implies a redefinition of the concept of 'value', and of 'success'. People no longer base their decisions solely on economic grounds; emotion and conviction play a big part in their calculations. In this light, would it help if we let go of GDP as the main measuring rod, and developed indicators that not only measure economic output, but also, quality of life and social progress in more inclusive ways? World citizens share a deep interest in other people and cultures. But we need to ask ourselves: how do we enlarge our world, widen our horizons, explore new places and people without passing the buck to future generations?

The good news is: spreading the virus of sustainability may be easier than we think. For two reasons. On the one hand, more and more people will come to see that living sustainably serves their own interests. It is about doing good – but not in the last place for oneself. At the same time, the core ethical notions of sustainability, which remind us of our interdependence, are supported by many religions and philosophies of life. The Great Law of the Iroquois Indians said that in every deliberation, one must consider the impact on 'the seventh generation'. They asked: "What about the seventh generation? Where are you taking them? What will they have?" In the Quran (Ar Rahman, 55) we read that Allah, the Most Merciful '...appointed the Earth for the creatures. In which are fruits, and covered dates. And grain covered with husk, and fragrant flowers.' And that Allah '.. has set the balance. In order that you may not corrupt the balance. And establish the measures justly, nor decrease the due weight.' The prophet Isaiah is known to have said, and note the sequence of his words, 'Peace, peace, to those far and near'. The origin of the Biblical saying 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' is believed to be 'leave the pasturelands behind the way you would like to find them'. In this admonition, the social and ecological are intertwined.

If we believe in a sustainable world, let us share our conviction and help to amplify this whisper of truth. Evil and destruction are infectious, but so is goodness.

A call to action

This year's celebrations of the Earth Charter+10 provide a unique opportunity to expand the impact of the Earth Charter initiative globally. All around the world, people will celebrate the achievements, identify obstacles, chart the way forward, and position the Charter as a resource for addressing the critical challenges facing humanity. Together, in the coming fifteen years, we can achieve the much needed transition to durable energy, make sure that new forms of global governance set the rules of the game, and create a more democratic, safe and respectful world.

The notion of sustainable world citizenship is first and foremost a call to action. Each individual, young and old, in her or his capacity, can join this exciting effort of accelerating our path to a better world.

Young professionals may give primacy to their identity of 'world citizen' at their place of work. They can make sure that sustainability becomes a philosophy that inspires action across the company or organisation, instead of delegating this to an isolated CSR team. Many young people are already fostering change communities at work, often using social networking and innovative forms of communication. We need the innovative force of young people, but their creativity and energy will be put to much better use if today's established leaders also have the courage to take responsibility and come forward with unconventional proposals. The Dutch have a strong tradition of international trade. Let those who take decisions in corporate board rooms realize that they are in a position to make a difference, to belong to the avant-garde, and to be proud of it. Similarly, we call upon our political leaders to commit to visionary social and ecological policies at home, while at the same time contributing to a more inclusive and fair governance of global commons. This is in all our interests, even if it may imply a new balance in global power relations. And finally, we put our trust in global civil society, the millions of committed people all around the world. Indeed, as the Earth Charter predicted ten years ago, 'The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world'.

We are one Earth community with a common destiny. And we, the people, have a wonderful prerogative: we can choose between what we believe to be good or bad, between peril or promise, between exclusion or inclusion, between a dead end street or the vision of a sustainable future. We, the Worldconnectors, commit ourselves, and call upon each of you, to make the better choice and lead by example.

Let us live the change.