
SPECIAL REPORT

The Earth Charter:

Earth Mother
Meets Big Brother

Steven Schwalm

Catholic Family & Human Rights Institute
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 495
New York, NY 10017

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Beneath the rhetoric of survival, behind the Sierra Club calendars, beyond the movie-star appeals, lies a full-fledged ideology — an ideology every bit as powerful as Marxism and every bit as dangerous to individual freedom and human happiness. Like Marxism, it appeals to seemingly noble instincts: the longing for beauty, for harmony, for peace. It is the green road to serfdom.

—Virginia I. Postrel,
The Green Road to Serfdom

Earth Charter Overview

The Earth Charter provides the organizational text for a coalition of international bureaucrats and environmental activists to do nothing less than change the way humanity does business. The first call for an international treaty on the environment came from the 1983 World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the “Brundtland Commission.” The two major accomplishments of the Commission were to identify the environment as a popular issue that lends itself to crisis resolution measures, and to link environmental issues with social concerns and personal and national security.

Throughout the 1990’s a series of U.N. summits advanced the agenda of international environmental groups, calling for restrictions on land use, energy consumption and emissions, and a structure of fees, fines and other penalties for nations or businesses guilty of insufficiently “sustainable” activities. The deep green

environmental movement pushed forward an agenda to impose binding economic regulations and potentially crippling industrial restrictions on Western nations, supposedly to benefit Third World nations.

One of the main objectives of the 1992 U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro (popularly known as the Rio Earth Summit) was to develop a charter enshrining the principles of the global environmental movement as established goals for the “world community.” Agreement on the charter failed when some key governments, including the United States, balked at the very real prospect of shutting down economically while being saddled with compulsory subsidies for other nations. The battle over defining the world’s needs in environmentalist terms and expanding U.N. power to reshape the international landscape, however, did not end there.

Environmental groups and various U.N. and international leaders almost immediately began work to develop the charter anyway, and created an independent Earth Charter Commission to oversee the drafting of a new charter. In 1994, the U.N. Secretary General of the Rio Earth Summit, Maurice Strong, joined with former President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, to launch a new Earth Charter Initiative. Strong had long been a key figure in the U.N.’s environmental movement, notably as chair of the first World Conference on Environment and Development in 1972, and as a member of the Brundtland Commission.

After several years of what the Charter Initiative characterizes as “the most open and participatory consultation process ever conducted,” involving “thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations from all regions of the world, different cultures, and diverse sectors of society,” the Commission completed its

draft. The Commission's last meeting was held at UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Headquarters in Paris in March 2000, where it approved a final version of the Earth Charter document, and appointed an Earth Charter Steering Committee to take responsibility for oversight of the Earth Charter Initiative.

The official launching of the Charter took place in an all-day ceremony on June 29, 2000, when it was presented to Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands in the Peace Palace at The Hague. For a universal declaration by and for all the world's people, attendance at the launch was confined to a very small group of very elite "international leaders." Among the approximately 300 people at the whole-day event were Strong and Gorbachev, Dr. Kamla Chowdhry, Prof. Steven Rockefeller, Prof. Wangari Maathai, Mr. Federico Mayor, Dr. Parvez Hassan, Amb. Mohamed Sahnoun, Erna Witoelar, and Sir Shridath Ramphal. Witoelar, for example, was an Indonesian Government Minister who also served as United Nations Special Ambassador for the Millennium Development Goals for the Asia Pacific Region, while Ramphal was a member of the Brandt, Palme, and Brundtland Commissions, a past President of the World Conservation Union and co-chaired the U.N.-funded Commission of Global Governance.

Though the Earth Charter is not yet an official U.N. document, its origins and the thoroughgoing cross-pollination of personnel with top positions in both the U.N. and in the Earth Charter Commission insure that the Charter remains a key document for U.N. global policymaking. As Witoelar explains in an essay entitled *The Earth Charter and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals*:

Even though the Earth Charter has not been fully endorsed by the United Nations in its totality, it has directly or indirectly influenced UN processes and products in quite significant ways. The (U.N.) Millennium Declaration, including the MDGs, and the Earth Charter are really complementary to each other.

Steven Rockefeller, a chair of the Earth Charter drafting committee, has outlined how

The Earth Charter builds on the Stockholm Declaration, the World Charter for Nature, the Rio Declaration, and many other international law instruments as well as dozens of NGO declarations and the seven major UN summit meetings held during the 1990s.

Though it has yet to become the legally binding universal convention envisioned by the Brundtland Commission, the Charter does set forth what it considers to be universal principles. The preamble states that it is to be viewed “as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions are to be guided and assessed.” The Earth Charter Initiative, the organization advancing the Charter, insists that, like so many non-binding documents ratified by the U.N. before it, it is but a first step toward more coercive measures enacted to advance its agenda:

In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations, fulfill their obligations under existing international agreements, and support the implementation of Earth Charter principles with an international legally binding instrument on environment and development.

Since its official inception in 2000, the Earth Charter has increasingly become a locus where the international environmental movement's determination to impose its ideology meets with the U.N.'s aspiration to set itself up as the world's governing body with the power to set and enforce global policies.

The Earth Charter Text

More than other U.N. documents, the Earth Charter is larded with language supporting causes so noble and expressing intent so admirable as to make a Miss Universe contestant blush. Virtually no desirable outcome on humanity's universal wish list lies outside the scope of the Charter's goals: world peace, universal respect for human rights, universal access to education, an end to war and all types of violence, and end to pollution, the elimination of "corruption in all public and private institutions," gender equality, bounty and beauty, and universal understanding, compassion and love are but a few of its modest goals.

Its feel-good, new-agey, positive-vibe jargon might be able to create the warmest of fuzzy feelings in the unwary, and at first, it does seem to have something for everyone. Channeling Pope John Paul II, Principle I of the Charter is called Respect and Care for the Community of Life, and calls for us to "[a]ffirm faith in the inherent dignity of all human beings." The voice of George W. Bush echoes in its Principle III directive to "[e]nsure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms." Its embrace of the principle of nonviolence would make Gandhi proud, while even Spiderman couldn't agree more that "with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility." It even appears to put in a good word for the principles enshrined in the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, advocating

“the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and dissent.”

This is not to say that the people involved in the Earth Charter Initiative and related global organizations are content with mere platitudes. Proponents refer to the Charter as a “plan of action,” and the bare text supplies more than a hint of what lies in store for nations and businesses should something like the Earth Charter ever be put into effect in some binding form.

The Preamble starts out with a little mysticism about our place in the cosmos. It opens with the statement that “[h]umanity is part of a vast evolving universe” and closes with the declaration that the “protection of [the] Earth’s vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.” It then moves us into crisis mode. You see, our “sacred trust” is being violated:

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous-but not inevitable.

The answer to these problems is to adopt the Earth Charter.

For a document that aspires to be a new global ethic for all mankind, several of the points found in the Charter could be considered by many to be questionable at best.

Principle 1a demands that we recognize “*that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.*” Saint Francis of Assisi couldn’t have said it better. . . until you realize that the thrust of this principle is not to give glory to God the Creator. Just the opposite: Human valuations that put human well-being at a premium are part of the problem, not a solution.

Part a of Principle 2 builds on this. Skewed as the values of the unwashed masses are, their power to damage the environment must be limited. To that end, we need to “*accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people.*” This is a clear stab at the concept of property rights, making those rights contingent on the as-yet-undefined and elastic concept of “environmental harm.” Ultimately, the principle puts the right to own property, and even to “use natural resources,” at the mercy of whoever winds up defining “environmental harm.”

“In order to fulfill these four broad commitments,” the Charter continues, “it is necessary to” adopt the remaining laundry list of measures, including the six points under Principle 7: “*Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth’s regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.*” There may well be people with a strong aversion to having their “patterns of production, consumption and reproduction” regulated by an unelected global body that uses controversial data for the purpose of controlling the unknowable future. But, the Earth Charter Commission remains undaunted. It also insists that, on a global scale, economies “internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods and services in the selling price, and

enable consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards.” What factors would be considered for each product or service is a question for another summit, but for the layman it might seem an invitation to artificially jack up the price of any good or service deemed environmentally or socially unfit.

For a document so apparently fixated on the sacredness of all life, the Charter does make exceptions, to wit: 7e. “*Ensure universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction,*” and 7f, “*Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.*” As most casual observers of politics are well aware, these are the leftist codes for abortion and euthanasia.

Also included in the Charter is a section inoculating the environmental bureaucrats against one of their most annoying afflictions: facts. Principle 6 states: “*Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.*” In other words, when in doubt, the greens win out. This is made abundantly specific in the subsections:

- a. *Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.*
- b. *Place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm, and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm.*

This requires that anyone potentially running afoul of the environmental bureaucrats has to prove the negative, and if they cannot prove that their activities don't damage the environment, they could be liable. What

business could possibly be sure it could prove itself pure before this inquisition — particularly in light of the omniscience required by the next subsection? That subsection reads:

- c. *Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.*

The Charter continues with two more sections. One is on “social and economic justice,” and it inserts keystones of the leftist social platform into the Charter, such as the inclusion of sexual “minorities” as a protected class. The other section, which is on “democracy, nonviolence, and peace,” calls for government procedures to enforce environmental directives:

13d *Institute effective and efficient access to administrative and independent judicial procedures, including remedies and redress for environmental harm and the threat of such harm. . .*

The Metaphysics of Global Environmentalism

The Earth Charter is, in its proponents’ view, more than just a practical guide for ensuring environmental sustainability. It has metaphysical dimensions. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Mikhail Gorbachev stated:

Do not do unto the environment of others what you do not want done to your own environment. . . My hope is that this charter will be a kind of Ten Commandments, a ‘Sermon on the Mount’, that provides a guide for human behavior toward the environment in the next century. . .

On the Charlie Rose Show in 1996 Gorbachev stated: “Cosmos is my God; Nature is my God.” In an inter-

view with the Earth Council, Maurice Strong, the other Co-Chairman of the original Earth Charter Commission, concurs: “The real goal of the Earth Charter is that it will in fact become like the Ten Commandments.” Just last year, at the November 8, 2005 Earth Charter +5 plenary session, Steven Rockefeller examined the spiritual basis of the Charter. “We are bound together by a shared ethical faith that is rooted in the sense of being interdependent members of one human family and the greater community of life on Earth,” he said. Rockefeller went on to declare that:

We are united in the conviction that the principles of respect and care for the community of life, ecological integrity, human rights, gender equality, cultural diversity, economic justice, participatory democracy, tolerance and peace are the keys to progressive social change in our local communities and globally. We have come here to have our faith and hope renewed. . .

Not only is the Earth Charter a sacred text for the international environmental movement, it represents what is currently in vogue in so-called “human ethical development.” As Rockefeller explains in an interview with the Globus Institute, the Earth Charter is an ethical step forward from earlier (particularly “Western”) faith traditions: “The heart of the Earth Charter is an ethical vision of the community to which we belong that is more inclusive than the traditional visions that have been dominant in Western culture and most other cultures as well.” Where other faith traditions focused on mankind’s responsibilities, particularly to one another, the Earth Charter represents a step forward in ethical evolution:

The history of human ethics has involved the slow progressive evolution of a sense of moral respon-

sibility from the family and tribe to ever-wider spheres of human association. Now this evolution of ethical consciousness must expand further to include animals, plants, ecosystems, and the Earth as a whole.

One of the “progressive” spiritual discoveries expressed in the Charter is the idea that humanity is a part of creation and has a duty to something beyond ourselves:

In truth, we belong to the larger community of being that is the cosmos—something vast, grand, mysterious, and wonderful. The deeper meaning and joy of life involve the realization that we human beings are not here in this world alone, and we are not here for ourselves alone. Our ethics must make this clear, and we need forms of spiritual practice that empower us to live in this truth.

The literature of Earth Charter Initiative-related groups is heavily concentrated on this spiritual aspect of the Charter, with titles like *Agriculture Ethic from the Perspective of the Christian Faith*, where the author, a Catholic Priest, traces the “biblical perspectives and Roman Catholic teaching, on care of the land, ecological soundness, economic viability, [and] social justice,” or *Rebuilding Our Food System: The Ethical and Spiritual Challenge*, where the authors “identify an ethical and spiritual crisis at the core of the present and growing crisis in our food systems.”

The Earth Charter Subtext

The language of the Charter outlines its agenda in a general way, so that while many of the dangers it poses to constitutional rights, national sovereignty, and economic freedom are clear, many others are detectable

only by inference. Viewing it along with other U.N. documents addressing the same themes, or reviewing the speeches and activities of members of the Earth Charter Initiative or affiliated groups, however, gives a much a fuller picture. The finer points of the regulatory regime, economic burdens, institutional self-aggrandizement, and punitive remediation that the Charter really represents are not in the document, but all around it. Some of the universal appeal of the rhetoric of the Charter is lost when one comes to understand the actual ideas behind the lofty-sounding prose.

It helps to know, for example, that Maurice Strong was a member of the Commission on Global Governance and a lead author of its report, “Our Global Neighborhood,” which outlined mechanisms to expand U.N. authority and limit national sovereignty. It makes sense, then, that he would assert, as he did in the essay *Stockholm to Rio, A Journey Down a Generation*, that “although states are sovereign, they are not free individually to do whatever they want.” And to understand that Strong has worked closely with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on projects like the Global Science Panel on Population and Environment is to understand that all the beautiful language in the Charter about the need to respect and care for life “in all its diversity,” means nothing for those at the earliest stage of life in a human female’s womb. In fact, Ronald Bailey has observed that Strong is a self-described “socialist in ideology, a capitalist in methodology,” and that “his friends, his allies among Canadian Liberals, his networks in the U.N. and the Third World, [and] even his long-term business partners. . . all lean left.”

Sir Shridath Ramphal authored the official book for the Rio Earth Summit, *Our Country, the Planet*. As a central figure behind the Earth Charter, his words are

instructive. Speaking during the feature address at the launch of the Charter in Port of Spain on October 28, 2000, Ramphal revealed the redistribution socialism, population control environmentalism and class warfare mentality elevated to a global scale that the Earth Charter truly entails.

First and foremost, Ramphal makes it clear that he does not like the wealth produced in the West:

It is estimated that if the whole world aspired to the living standards now prevailing in the West, the world of the 21st century would require the resources of many more planet Earths to satisfy that aspiration. But, of course, we will continue to have only one Earth.

Though he appears to oppose the West's wealth on principle, he is even more exercised about the wealth difference between rich and poor nations:

One hundred years ago, as the 19th Century turned into the 20th the ratio of average income of the richest country in the world to that of the poorest was 9 to 1. Last New Year's eve, as the 20th Century turned into the 21st, that ratio had risen to 60 to 1. Today, the average family in the United States is 60 times richer than the average family in Ethiopia—or in America's own Hemisphere, 40 times richer than the average family in Haiti. Inequality has been rising too within many countries, including rich ones, since the early 1980s.

Elevating the rhetoric of class warfare to global levels, Ramphal observes:

The richest countries, with just one fifth of all the world's people, have:

- * 86 percent of world GDP
- * 82 percent of world export markets
- * 68 percent of foreign direct investment
- * 74 percent of world telephone lines

The remaining four-fifths have to make do with what is left over.

If both the absolute wealth of industrialized nations and the wealth difference between them and poor nations are deplorable situations, then what is the only solution? Wealth redistribution. Assuming that major changes in international economic relations are required for sustainable development, Ramphal outlines who should bear the burden. Sustainable development requires “a shared effort by all the world’s people, a partnership for survival in which each country has a role that is related to, [and] sometimes integrated into, the roles of others.”

“The partnership, of course,” he goes on to say, “is not between equals.” After all,

Developed and developing countries are unequal, in responsibility for getting it wrong and in capacity for setting it right. Aristotle, in his ‘Ethics’, instructed us a long time ago that equity between unequals requires not ‘reciprocity’ but ‘proportionality’. His dictum holds in this ultimate domain of environmental restoration. Proportionality must be the ethical touchstone of the role of developed and developing countries in their partnership for survival through sustainable development.

In addition to saddling the wealthier nations with the costs of enacting his vision of a green future, Ramphal also advocates for population control. Life and

biodiversity are all good, but there can, according to Ramphal, be too much of a good thing:

In the early years of the 1990s, in an unprecedented joint statement, the Royal Society in Britain and the National Academy of Sciences in the United States issued a warning in these terms:

If current predictions of population growth prove accurate and patterns of human activity on the planet remain unchanged, science and technology may not be able to prevent either irreversible degradation of the environment or continued poverty for much of the world. . .

Why were the scientists concerned about population growth? Why did they. . . think of it [not] as a flowering of the species, but [rather] in the negative sense. . . [as] an overgrown garden? If we are, as we believe, the best thing that has happened to the Planet, why shouldn't more of us be ever welcome? There is good reason why they did not. The real reason, the ultimate reason, for their concern is sustainability—the sustainability of life on the Planet.

In scientific terms, it is described as Earth's 'carrying capacity'; less formally, it is our impact on the biosphere measured by what we use and what we waste. When we ask whether Planet Earth can sustain double its present human population, the answer has to do with consumption. If we continue to draw from nature at the rate we do today—if, overall, we consume at today's level—such a doubling may not be sustainable: the population explosion could threaten survival. Remember the words of the scientists: If current. . . pat-

terns of human activity on the planet remain unchanged: they were talking about ‘consumption.’

Ramphal may not have been catching the papers with his morning cup of coffee, so perhaps he is not aware that, like other U.N.-identified crises, the facts have passed him by. In Russia, Italy, Japan and many other moribund wealthy nations there is a “birth dearth” to such an extent that governments are coming up with schemes to subsidize child-bearing, and native-born populations there run the risk of becoming minorities in their own countries due to the influx of immigrants.

Conclusion

Like any utopian dream, the Earth Charter expresses many noble aspirations. Like most U.N. schemes, the Charter is also full of grandiose ambitions. But the lesson of the 20th Century is that when grandiose ambition meets utopian dream in the real world, the result has always been totalitarian nightmare. To the extent that the dictates of the Earth Charter are followed, a global bureaucracy will be fattened at great financial expense, as well as at the expense of property rights, national sovereignty, and possibly even freedom itself.



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