

# THE EARTH CHARTER

## A common framework for renewing the sacred balance

“We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. 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. 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. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life and to future generations.”

*Preamble of The Earth Charter*

The Earth Charter is the product of nearly a decade of worldwide, cross-cultural conversations aimed at finding a common set of values and principles for creating a truly sustainable human society. For peoples of different faiths and cultures, the Charter can serve as a wonderful starting point to reflect together on the ethical vision needed to renew the sacred balance of our planet.

Throughout the text of the Charter, the call to respect nature is united with the call for justice. To end ecological devastation, we must also work for a better distribution of wealth, human rights and authentic social participation. In particular, the small minority of humanity that consumes the majority of the Earth’s gifts must change their way of life so that all creatures—and all people—may flourish.

The Charter puts forth a powerful challenge to all of humanity to choose a new way of living in the world:

“The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. 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...”

This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility...

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”

### History of the Earth Charter

In 1987, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development proposed the creation of a new charter or universal declaration on ecological protection and sustainable development that would “prescribe new norms for state and interstate behaviour needed to maintain livelihoods and life on our shared planet.” The 1992 Rio Earth Summit attempted to do this, but fell short of the aspirations that many people had.

In 1994, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev together with the Rio Earth Summit’s Secretary General Maurice Strong started a new “people’s initiative.” An Earth Charter Commission was formed in 1997 to oversee the project and a Secretariat for the Commission was established at the Earth Council in Costa Rica. In March 1997, the Commission produced the first version of a *Benchmark Draft* and finalized the text in March 2000 after gathering input and ideas from around the world.

In Canada, a number of Churches and religious organizations have endorsed the Earth Charter including the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, the Canadian Unitarian Council, The United Church of Canada, and several religious congregations. Interfaith organizations as well as individual faith communities are also invited to endorse the Charter.

The Earth Charter is an excellent tool for interfaith dialogue. Persons of different faiths can share how their religious traditions reinforce, complement and deepen the ethical values needed to create a truly just and sustainable Earth community.

To find out more about the Charter, visit [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org). The site also contains a large number of resources. Or contact Earth Charter USA, 2100 “L” Street NW, Washington, DC, 20037, USA. Tel: 202-778-6133.∞

### Key principles of the Earth Charter:

#### 1. We must respect and care for the community of life by:

- Recognizing that all living beings are of value and that all are interdependent.
- Affirming that with increased knowledge and power comes increased responsibility for the common good.
- Ensuring the participation of all in society and the respect for human rights.
- Taking care to protect the beauty and bounty of the Earth for future generations.

#### 2. We must protect and restore the Earth’s ecological systems by:

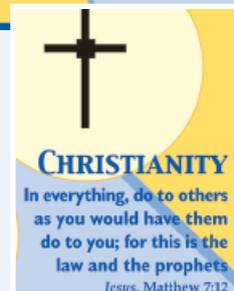
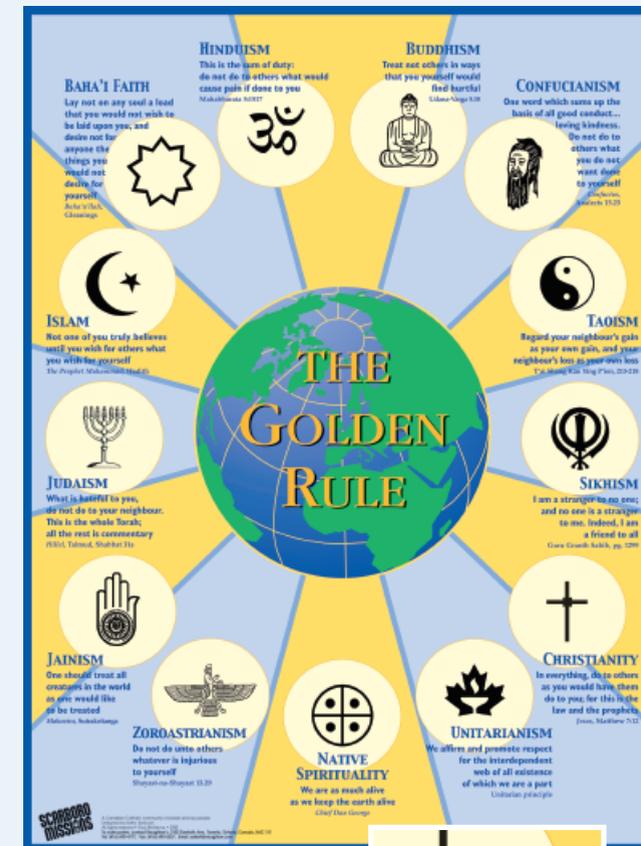
- Safeguarding endangered species and caring for the Earth’s water, soil, air, forests and oceans.
- Exercising precaution, discerning the potential impact of our actions to ensure that they will not be harmful.
- Adopting lifestyles that emphasize quality of life while minimizing consumption.
- Recognizing and preserving the traditional ecological knowledge and spiritual wisdom of all cultures.

#### 3. We must promote social and economic justice by:

- Eradicating poverty, guaranteeing access to the essentials of life and ensuring a sustainable livelihood for all people.
- Distributing wealth equitably, cancelling onerous debts and ensuring fair trade.
- Affirming gender equality and promoting the participation of women in all aspects of society.
- Eliminating discrimination in all its forms, recognizing aboriginal rights and honouring the role of youth.

#### 4. We must build a global society based on democracy, nonviolence and peace by:

- Strengthening democratic institutions, supporting civil society and protecting human rights.
- Promoting education and life-long learning aimed at teaching a sustainable way of life.
- Treating all living beings with respect and consideration.
- Nurturing a culture that values and celebrates diversity, nonviolence and peace.



### The Golden Rule poster

Produced by Scarborough Missions, this striking poster (actual size 22”x29”) presents the Golden Rule in 13 religions.

Order from Broughtons Religious Books & Gifts. Tel: 416-690-4777; Fax: 416-690-5357; Email: [sales@bbroughton.com](mailto:sales@bbroughton.com)

**Poster Study Guide—“A do-it-yourself Golden Rule workshop”**—enables any individual or group to create and sponsor a workshop for youth and adult audiences. One of the many goals of the workshop is to support people who struggle with ethical issues, including the ecological crisis endangering the Earth and all life on the planet. The guide is available for \$5.00 from the Scarborough Missions Interfaith Desk, 2685 Kingston Road, Scarborough, ON, M1M 1M4. Tel: 1-800-260-4815. Or download it free of charge from our website at [www.scarboromissions.ca](http://www.scarboromissions.ca)