

**INFUSING GLOBAL  
WISDOM  
INTO  
INTERNATIONAL LAW**

**A Research Paper for the World Future Council**

Judge C. G. Weeramantry

This study has been prepared for the World Future Council in the hope that it will give a stimulus towards the task of translating the common environmental teachings of all religions and customary systems into international law. Studies have been made before of these common teachings but this needs to be taken a step further into the realm of binding international law and ways and means must be explored for achieving this. This task is one of great urgency, having regard to the rate at which environmental resources are being irretrievably damaged.

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## **RATIONALE UNDERLYING THIS PROJECT**

This project seeks to incorporate into modern international law a vast body of worldwide wisdom which international law has neglected thus far, at great cost to itself and the human future.

Humanity has had several millennia of experience in relation to its interaction with the environment. This accumulated store of experience and wisdom has been incorporated in the traditions of all cultures and civilizations and in the past three or four thousand years has been incorporated in religious teachings as well.

In the past few centuries, however, the environment has been handled in a manner that is causing it lasting and irreparable damage, resulting also in the rights of future generations being imperiled and destroyed. Associated with this is the prevalence of a set of values and priorities standing in marked contrast to the traditional value system that had prevailed for millennia.

This concentration on the present at the expense of the future needs urgently to be corrected at this critical phase of human history when future generations are being imperiled and the environment is being devastated as never before. A broadening of international law is one of the important ways in which this can be achieved.

An important route to this result is the infusion into operative international law of this enormous body of accumulated wisdom. This vast repository of knowledge, principles and concepts resulting from tens of thousands of years of humanity's interaction with the environment can no longer be overlooked if humanity's long-term future is to be safeguarded and is too precious an asset to be ignored, as has happened thus far.

International law needs to be alerted to this major lacuna in its perspectives, its attitudes and its orientation. The purpose of this study is to examine ways in which this traditional wisdom can be incorporated into international law.

The sources of international law as authoritatively set out in Article 38 (1) of the Statute of the International Court of Justice show customary international law and the "general principles of international law recognized by civilized nations" as sources of international law co-ordinate with treaty law. If a concept or principle can be shown to be universally recognized across the nations, it becomes a part of international law under the two heads mentioned and does not need conventions to bring it into the domain of binding international law. This can be achieved if intensive research is done on extracting the common core of such concepts and principles recognized by all traditional systems. If there is universal agreement on this matter among all cultures and

civilizations, this becomes assuredly part of current international law under the two heads indicated above.

The teachings of the world's religions as well as these customary systems of law are prime sources of this global wisdom and a search for the identification and clarification of their common core of teachings in relation to the environment is imperative. The book just published titled *'Tread Lightly on the Earth: Religion, The Environment and The Human Future'*, which examines five major religions (Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) shows a large core of such common principles relating to the environment and the human future. More such work needs to be done on similar lines in regard to the other religions as well as customary systems of law. If this research reveals a common set of principles in regard to the environment and the protection of future generations, these principles could qualify to be treated as international law in terms of Article 38 as already referred to. This would be an enormous source of enrichment of international law which has traditionally neglected the perspectives of religious teachings and traditional systems of law.

Many reasons can be adduced for the urgency of this work. One of them is the urgency of the environmental problem with many species of life being extinguished every day, virgin forest being felled, seas rivers and lakes being polluted and earth resources being exploited in such a manner as to deprive future generations of their birthrights. Another is the "clash of civilizations". This is due entirely to the boxed-in approach just referred to, with people of each religion knowing nothing of the wisdom of the other. Approaching international law in the manner indicated is the surest guarantee that a world conflict will not result from a "clash of civilizations". Far from there being a "clash", it shows that there is a confluence of the teachings of all civilizations on the values, principles and concepts which are the very bedrock of international law.

We know also that the next major war will be one involving nuclear weapons, in which event the destruction of the environment and all civilization will be a virtual certainty. For all these reasons a detailed study is imperative of the ways in which global wisdom can help in saving humanity and the environment from destruction. Correcting this major shortcoming of international law is an important step towards this end.

## INADEQUACY OF MODERN CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES

Much of modern political, cultural and economic activity proceeds on the basis of certain priorities which are quite opposed to the priorities stressed by previous cultures and civilizations.

These differences can be summarized under the following heads:

### A) **Stress on Rights Rather than Duties**

Modern culture, politics and law continuously stress rights, whether they be economic, political or social rights. These are the results of a series of historical events in the West, where these rights were forcibly required from rulers who did not acknowledge them, in consequence of which force was resorted to in order to give them a standing of their own. The idea was that these rights came to individuals by reason of their humanity and not by their reason of being conferred on them by the rulers. The means to this end was often a revolution such as the French Revolution, or the American Revolution or earlier in history the events that led to Magna Carta. As a result of the difficulties with which these rights were won the emphasis was on the rights rather than the duties which accompanied them.

In traditional societies the emphasis was the converse, that is on duties rather than on rights. Their philosophy was that if everyone performed their duties, then their rights would fall into place. Japanese, Chinese and Indian cultures emphasized duties even to the extent that the phraseology of duties was far better developed than the phraseology relating to rights.

Modern institutions and jurisprudence emphasise rights to such an extent as to overshadow the duties aspect, and the Universal Declaration itself stresses that it is a universal declaration of human rights. It is this emphasis on rights rather than duties that has led to the environmental devastation we see all around us.

The present study of traditions and religious teachings could help to shift attention once more to duties.

**B) Short Term Gain Regardless Of Long Term Cost**

Most activity in modern times is centred on the quest for short-term gain whatever the long-term cost.

Many factors combine to produce this result.

One is that most political office holders who take the major decisions are concerned with showing quick results, for their focus is on the next election. What matters is to show benefits which are tangible. The damage caused in the distant future is too remote to be significant.

A second factor, of equal importance, is that many of the environmentally destructive forces in operation today are the results of commercial activities, mainly by powerful multinational corporations. These corporations wield far more economic power than many of the poorer nation states and they drive hard bargains with those nation states for the exploitation of their natural resources. Their prime concern is the short-term profits they can show to their shareholders. This motivation clouds out all the ethical issues which should restrain them.

A third factor is the power of modern science and technology. More powerful than any other force known in the millennia of human history, the scientific technological complex is anxious to increase the reach and power of science and once new techniques are evolved their expertise is made available to the commercial world.

All these forces in combination have virtually unrestrained power to exploit the global environment, particularly in the poorer countries. International law cannot restrain them as it is structured at present, though all the global traditions are agreed that such exploitation is wrong and that short-term profit at the cost of depriving future generations of their basic birthrights is wrong. The need is, therefore, urgent for incorporating that traditional global wisdom into modern international law.

**C) Concentration on the Present Generation to the Exclusion of All Others**

All current legal systems, and the system of international law likewise, are based on the rights of those who are presently alive. People of future generations have no standing whatever in court of law, for the legal systems of the world afford them no standing even when a matter affecting their rights comes before the courts.

We can thus trample on the rights of future generations even in a criminal fashion, robbing them of their basic birthrights, and still emerge unscathed so far as the law is concerned. Current legal systems are totally ill equipped to give this protection.

Some feeble attempts have indeed been made to give them some sort of standing, as for example, by giving some sort of rights to rivers and lakes and mountains and trees, but this is more exceptional and all too weak.

It needs to be a mandatory requirement of all legal systems, and particularly of the international legal system, that such interests should have a valid standing and a right to representation. The voices of unborn generations need to be heard.

Traditional global wisdom ensured this. That wisdom needs to be incorporated into international law.

#### **D) Dominance of the Materialistic Over the Moral**

The modern world is largely governed by economic considerations, which have proved to be even mightier than naked military force. In earlier ages, philosophers spoke idealistically of the pen being mightier than the sword. Today the dollar is proving to be mightier than the sword and even regions which could not be conquered by the sword have been conquered by the dollar, and are under its continuing rule.

Whereas in former times the moral sentiments of the community would prevail through the advice of elders, today all those considerations yield before the power of economic might. Moral systems and even legal systems are unable to resist their compulsive force.

Another factor that makes for the dominance of the materialistic element in major decisions today is the dominance of the military industrial complex which was referred to by General Eisenhower in a famous address to the American people. The military establishment is in association with the technological establishment and the latter is in association with major commercial interests. Together they make a most powerful combination which is a dominant factor in most countries. Their decisions are determined by conditions of expediency and national advantage and the moral dimension is largely submerged.

Among the major victims of this pattern of action is the environment.

**E) Stress on the Individual Rather than the Group**

Modern legal systems, as observed earlier, are geared largely to the protection of rights rather than duties. A corollary to this is that the individual looms large in this scheme of legal protection. The protections that were traditionally accorded to the rights of the group as such tend to be submerged. Communal grazing rights, for example, or rights to the enjoyment of large open spaces and forests which all the members of the community traditionally enjoyed, are lost to rights of private ownership. Individuals or corporations own enormous extents of territory which were formerly open to the public. Just as group rights are thereby lost, so also are the rights of future generations, for individuals claiming ownership of those vast extents are free to exploit them as they will. Mining without regard to the future, felling of forests, decimation of wild life – all these proceed apace, causing irreparable damage to the future.

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This brief outline of some principal features of modern legal systems will show how the environment and the long-term interests of humanity are thereby damaged. Traditional systems prevalent for thousands of years had inbuilt protections against this sort of damage and the world's religious systems prescribed rules of conduct which prevented such damage.

A study of these systems is therefore imperative, for if they reveal universal attitudes which are a corrective to such attitudes, this would be of great importance to the task of environmental protection on a global scale.

## ENVIRONMENTAL WISDOM CONTAINED IN RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL TEACHINGS

A study of the religious systems of the world reveals a compliance of teachings on respect for the environment and the duty of protection and care that should be extended towards it.

An earlier study *Tread Lightly on the Earth: Religion, The Environment and the Human Future* examined this compliance of teachings in the context of five principal religions – Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

This paper deals with these five faiths in basic outline and the reader wanting more information is invited to look at the discussion in *Tread Lightly on the Earth*.

The present chapter examines a number of other religions and the same conclusions emerge of similar teachings in this area.

The fact that all these religions carry the same fundamental message adds enormously to the weight of the central thrust of this project – that a strong case exists for the proposition that these basic teachings are already part of international law.

### HINDUISM

Hinduism,<sup>1</sup> one of the oldest faiths, takes a cosmic view of time and the human family. It thinks in terms of millennia of human existence both in the past and in the future and its volume of juristic literature is immense. Its texts known as the *Dharmasastras* are treatises on religious and legal duties based on the concept of *Dharma*. Conduct according to *Dharma* requires a concern not only for all other human beings, but for all species of life and all creation. This is a powerful corrective against anthropocentric attitudes which are characteristic of modern civilisation and activity.

This universalism is due to the presence of the divinity in all things which is beautifully expressed in the words of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

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<sup>1</sup> This topic is more fully dealt with in *Tread Lightly on the Earth : Religion, The Environment and The Human Future*, pp 31-67, to which the reader is referred for a fuller discussion

On me the universe is strung  
Like clustered pearls upon a thread

Since the divinity is present in all things, all things are entitled to respect. Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between God and every element in His creation and these elements may even interact directly with the divinity.

From all of this a number of principles emerge which are very relevant to our theme. They include the following:

- The interconnectedness of all things
- The integrity of humanity past, present and future
- The unity of the human family
- The need for humans to be in harmony with all forms of life
- The *Sarvabhuthahitha*, the notion of the well being of all beings
- The doctrine of *Karma*, the inexorable effects of the present action on the future
- The avoidance of waste
- The concept of sustainable development
- A deep concern for future generations
- A comparison of our relationship with Earth to our relationship with our mother, who nourishes and sustains us

Hinduism pursues these concepts not merely at a theoretical level but also with intense practicality. It lays down duties incumbent on rulers for the protection of the environment and the care of future generations.

Treatises like Kautilya's *Arthashastra* written over two thousand years ago, expound in detail the ways in which the government should protect the environment, specifying various fields of activities such as agriculture, irrigation, protection of animals, protection of river resources, care of parks and the proper management of mines. All of these activities are the King's responsibility and he is required to appoint special officers or superintendents to be in charge of each of them. Indeed Kautilya lists thirty superintendents who should manage various areas of government activities in relation to land. Significant among them are the planting of fruit trees, the protection of animals and maintenance of irrigation systems. The *Arthashastra* is perhaps the most detailed document coming to us from the ancient world dealing with state responsibilities regarding the environment.

Some followers of Hinduism have carried forward its environmental teachings even to the extent of sacrificing their lives to protect the environment. An event of global significance in the history of environmental protection was the sacrifice by the Bishnois people of hundreds of lives to defend the trees of the forest against the wood cutters of the Maharaja of Jodhpur in 1730. The timber was wanted for the construction of the Maharaja's new palace but the Bishnois people placed themselves in front of the trees

and sacrificed their lives to protect the trees. This is known as Kejrali massacre where three hundred and sixty three of them died. This had dramatic results, government attitudes were altered, and a full apology was issued.

Mahatma Gandhi in recent times brought a number of these Hindu principles regarding the environment into prominence, stressing that each member of a community has a duty to live in communion with nature. Hinduism recommends a life of simplicity and austerity in contrast to the wasteful lifestyles in the modern age which are depriving the planet of its resources and thus impoverishing future generations as well. In Gandhi's words the earth has ample resources to satisfy everyone's need, but not everyone's greed.

The sacred writings of Hinduism contain numerous passages stressing respect for Earth, likening nature to a human mother who has a continuous and profound interest in her children. Indeed there is a prayer with which many Hindus commence their day, asking mother earth for her forgiveness for treading on her, so deep is the respect Hindus show for nature.

Among the aspects stressed in this literature are:

- Her indescribable beauty
- Her sheltering of all living species including humans
- Her mutuality of interests with humans, for if she prospers, we prosper, and if she is afflicted or damaged, we are afflicted and damaged
- If we do not take care of her, our Mother, we diminish our ability to look after ourselves
- Although her people belong to different races, follow different faiths and speak numerous languages, she cares for all humans alike

The *Prithvi Sukta* (Hymn to the Earth) enjoins all human beings to protect, preserve and care for the environment. Its concluding verse reads "O, our Mother Earth...may we continue to enjoy your blessing of hidden riches, glory and realisation of our material and spiritual wellbeing". This is an eloquent reminder of our total dependence upon, and our material and spiritual linkage with her. Substitute "environment" for "Mother Earth" and we have here a manifesto of tribute to, and dependence upon, the environment which is eloquent and all-embracing.

Trusteeship of earth resources and concern for future generations are also notions which are deeply embedded in the teachings of Hinduism.

This is interlocked with the previous topic. Trusteeship of resources is based on the philosophy that the wealth of nature is provided by God for humanity in general and not for this generation or that. Since the long term vision of Hinduism reaches through to thousands of generations and all eternity, it is totally incompatible with this notion that any one generation has the right to diminish or extinguish the resources that nature provides. Indeed this would amount to sacrilege and also to theft from future generations

of their rightful inheritance. This idea of the preservation of nature can be illustrated by many episodes in Hindu history.

In short, Hinduism exhibits a deep sense of responsibility for the protection of the environment and a profound concern for future generations and it goes so far as to endow the environment and its component elements with rights which need to be respected by all humans.

Hindu philosophy is impregnated with notions of respect for nature and for natural phenomena such as forests, rivers and mountains. The environment is alive and teems with life, trees and rocks become shrines and the river is respected as a source and support of physical and spiritual life. Nature, like gods of old, can be both threatening and protecting.

All of this follows from the central concept that the divinity is present in all things, as set out earlier. Rivers, mountains, trees, animals and the natural elements all reflect the presence of the divine and are hence not to be lightly treated as if they are owned by and exist to serve humanity. They must be respected and we are in partnership with them and not in a state of overlordship.

The earliest teachers of Hinduism dwelt in the large forests which covered much of the Indian subcontinent. Consequently, they attached great importance to trees. Students were taught under trees, meditation took place under trees, the tree was a source of spiritual inspiration and was also a symbol of protection. Indian culture absorbed this special tradition of respect for trees and other forms of life associated with it, namely plants and animals.

From all of this there ensued the idea of a relationship between humans and the community of trees, plants and animals, all of which were vested with rights of their own. Human dependence on these forms of life also generated a duty to protect them. Forests indeed became places of peace and harmony with God.

We close this brief review of Hindu environmental teaching with an important practical example of the translation of these teachings into law.

India provides an interesting example of the merger of these ancient principles with modern legal provisions. In ancient India, the kings took an oath to protect the earth and its subjects and develop the earth so that its fruits are abundant enough to satisfy the needs and desires of those who depend on the king for protection and order. Modern India sees environmental stewardship not solely as the *dharmic* responsibility of governments and ministers. Within a democracy this becomes a more broadly shared responsibility.

In the forty-second amendment to the Constitution of India passed in 1976, environmental stewardship, along with nine other specified responsibilities, became a duty of every Indian citizen. Part IVA, Article 51A, clause 'g' states:

*It shall be the duty of every citizen of India...to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life, and have compassion for living creatures.*

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## **JUDAISM**

### **Introduction**

Judaism<sup>2</sup> has a vast literature embodying millennia of spiritual thought bearing on environmental duties. This is evidenced by such studies as the two volume treatise titled, “Torah of the Earth: Exploring 4000 Years on Ecology in Jewish thought”<sup>3</sup>. This work draws on thirty two expert studies on different aspects of this topic.

Apart from the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible, there is also an extensive range of sacred Jewish texts penetrating into every facet of life. All of these have been subjected to intensive interpretations over the centuries, and contain numerous references to environmental care and concern.

### **Humanity as God’s Steward**

There has been a debate as to whether humanity is the lord of the environment vested with rights of absolute ownership, or whether humanity is rather in a position of stewardship over God’s creation. This debate has continued over the centuries and was

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<sup>2</sup> This topic is more fully dealt with in *Tread Lightly on the Earth, op.cit.*, pp... 70-110

<sup>3</sup> Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2000

brought to a head by the essay of Lynn White Jr., titled, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis” (1967), which was critical of the role of Judaeo-Christianity in framing Western civilization’s relationships with nature on a theory of humans’ dominance over nature. Between the anthropocentric or human-centred view and the ecocentric or nature-centred view, there is a middle position which is now widely accepted. Commands such as “serve and keep the Garden of Eden”, in Genesis: 215, and narratives such as that relating to Noah’s Ark, involving a duty of care over the animals entrusted to Noah, are pointers to the stewardship notion.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Jewish Congregations of the Commonwealth summarizes this in terms that “Stewardship in Judaism means that we are guardians of the world for the sake of future generations... An ancient Rabbinic tradition teaches that, at the dawn of human history, God said to humankind, ‘See the beauty of the universe which I have created – and all that I created, I made for you. Be careful, therefore, that you do not harm what I have made, for if you do, there will be no one left to restore what you have destroyed”. Consequently, a reading of the Bible in light of modern environmental problems reveals the importance of its stress on trusteeship rather than overlordship.

### **The Nexus between Nature, God and Humanity**

Nature, God and humanity are integrally interlinked. This points to a continuing relationship between God and nature, God and humanity and consequently between nature and humanity. Much effort has gone into working out practical ways of translating this interconnectedness into action. For example, Ellen Bernstein’s collection of essays, titled, “Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where the nature and the sacred meet”, suggests a wide range of Jewish responses to this question.

### **Nature is Not a Mere Object**

Scriptural passages indicate that animals, vegetation and even natural objects have an ability to praise God. They are not mere objects to be exploited by humanity.

“Praise the Lord, praise Him, sun and moon  
Praise Him, all you shining stars  
Let them praise the name of the Lord  
For He commanded and they were created  
He established them forever and ever.

Praise the Lord from the earth  
You great sea creatures and all ocean depths  
You mountains and all hills  
Fruit trees and all cedars

Wild animals and all cattle  
Creeping things and flying birds  
Kings of the earth and all people  
Princes and all rulers of the earth” (Psalm 148)

This shows a direct relationship, which prevents humans from treating them as mere objects, with no standing of their own.

### **The Protection of Land**

Jewish scripture gives special protection to the land in various ways – periods of rest every Shabbat (once a week), every seventh year and every fiftieth year. This reflects an understanding that land should be respected and taken care of. The objective is a continuation of the usefulness of land rather than its exploitation. It is a period of peace and rest given to the land showing the care and respect due to it. There are several ceremonies associated with these periods of rest, all of which bring home the importance of land and the environment. Many Psalms give expression to the beauty of creation such as Psalm 104: 10-24 describing the beauty of the trees, the birds, the animals, the hills and valleys all of which are God’s creations and therefore impose obligations and care on humans. There are thus numerous passages in the Jewish scriptures helping to see the land and its riches in their true inspirational beauty and not as a mere resource for exploitation.

### **The Rule against Waste**

Rabbinic law was specific in its restrictions on pollution and waste. There were specific rules protecting towns from unwanted smells and toxicity. There were rules against water pollution such as that a person should distance his out-house from his neighbours drinking well. The concept of waste management is implicit in Jewish scripture thus showing great concern for the environment.

### **“Do Not Destroy” (Bal Tashit)**

There are several passages in the scriptures encouraging Jews to look upon nature as a divine gift and hence to limit consumption and waste of this divinely gifted resource.

The rule forbidding destruction is of great importance in the environmental context and has been relied on even to forbid destruction of enemy agricultural property in war time. Deuteronomy 19:19-20 (when you are at war for a city you have to besiege it... you must not destroy its trees, wielding the axe against them”. The Bal Tashit rule extends to such actions as breaking vessels, destroying buildings or clogging wells, all of these have damaging effects upon the environment. Maimonides in his *Guide for the Perplexed* gives a broader philosophical background for these rules; “Do not believe that

all things exist for the sake of humanity... everything exists for its own sake and not for anything else or anyone else”<sup>4</sup>.

### **The Emergence of Eco-Judaism**

There has been a significant reawakening of Jewish thought in recent times regarding the relationship of humans with the environment. This has provoked the emergence of a substantial body of literature as well as a series of suggestions for practical actions to strengthen this relationship. There has also been an increased sensitivity to the environmental implications of the events in the Jewish calendar.

Major modern studies have gone into the heart of the Jewish relationship with nature. Studies such as those of Manfred Gerstenfeld, on *Judaism and the Environment*, 2001<sup>5</sup> have examined the interaction between Judaism and nature. Ranging through Jewish literature including the Bible, Midrash Literature and Responsa, he dealt with such aspects as the use of natural resources, animals and pollution.

Gerstenfeld is opposed to the view advocated by writers such as Lynn White (Jr.)<sup>6</sup> that the Bible legitimizes the despoiling on nature.

### **Rights of Animals and Vegetation**

Many lessons are to be drawn from the episode of Noah’s Ark. Amongst them are the reminder of man’s duty towards the animal kingdom, “for throughout those twelve months, Noah and his sons did not sleep because they had to feed the animals the beasts and the birds” (Tanhuma 589). There was also a stress on the continuity of species, for animals were taken into the ark in pairs. Thirdly there is the notion of custody and trusteeship emerging from the entire narration. Kindness is a part of righteous conduct and animals in distress are to be helped.

Care for animals is a thread that runs through the Bible, “On the Shabbath day everybody of the household shall rest, including animals (Ex 20:10)”. Kindness to animals is stressed in many Biblical passages as where Balaam is chastised for smiting his ass and Moses is rewarded for looking for a stray lamb<sup>7</sup>.

All of this shows that Biblical concerns are not centred on man alone.

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<sup>4</sup> *Tread Lightly on the Earth: op.cit.* p 102

<sup>5</sup> Gerstenfeld, Manfred, *Judaism and the Environment*, Policy Study No. 23, Institute of the World Jewish Congress, in connection with the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs 2001

<sup>6</sup> *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis, op.cit*

<sup>7</sup> *Tread Lightly on the Earth: op.cit* p 102

## Judaism's concern for future generations

Rabbi Sacks has also observed, “The focal point of Jewish life is the transmission of a heritage across the generations. Judaism’s focus is its children. Abraham’s first words to God are, “What can You give me, if I am without children?” Rachel says, “Give me children, for without them it is as if I am dead.” To be a Jew is to be a link in the chain of generations. It is to be a child and then a parent, to receive a heritage and to hand it on. Moses, “received the Torah at Sinai and handed it on...” and so must we. Judaism is a religion of continuity<sup>8</sup>.

## Conclusion

In conclusion Jewish sacred literature contains a plenitude of references to nature, the respect to be shown to it the duty of trusteeship and the protection of future generations. All this has come into prominence in recent years and a number of Jewish organizations have taken up the cause of environmental protection.

There is no lack of references in Jewish scripture which can be used and have been used for this purpose and a number of perspectives on the global environmental problem can be gathered from the literature of Judaism.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.chiefrabbi.org/thoughts/pinchas5767.html>

## BUDDHISM

The Buddhist scriptures<sup>9</sup> are vast in volume, following principally from the fact that the Buddha, having attained enlightenment at the age of thirty-five, devoted much of the remaining 45 years of his life to teaching and preaching. After a few centuries of oral transmission, his teachings were recorded in the first century prior to the Christian era by a commission of monks in Sri Lanka. This monumental process of recording consolidated the Buddhist scriptures in the Pali language, and has been a source of reference ever since.

The Buddhist Canon consists of a series of sets of texts, including the Pali Canon (*Tripitaka*) as found in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, and the Sanskrit Canon, found only in fragments and in Chinese and Tibetan translations. There are also other texts of the different schools, but they all establish the authenticity of a common source.

The Pali Canon, called the *Tripitaka* or the three baskets, arranges its subject-matter in three collections called the *Vinaya Pitaka* (the basket of discipline), the *Sutta Pitaka* (the basket of discourses), and the *Abidhamma Pitaka* (the basket of higher doctrine).

The basket of discourses is immense and contains sermons and didactic stories embodying a vast range of principles covering every aspect of human conduct and every relationship between humans and the external world. Humanity's relationship with the natural environment and all living things receives detailed attention. This vast literature consists of five collections, known as *Nikayas* – the *Digha Nikaya* (34 long discourses), the *Majjhima Nikaya* (152 middle length discourses), the *Samyutta Nikaya* (2,889 short discourses), the *Anguttara Nikaya* (2,308 short sayings, often in the form of maxims or aphorisms), and the *Khuddaka Nikaya* (over a thousand sayings in the form of stanzas or aphorisms, covering the whole range of Buddhist philosophy). Perhaps the most popular collection of these short sayings, which has been translated into practically every major language, is the *Dhammapada*, a collection of 423 stanzas.

### **Buddhism's respect for nature**

The Buddhist respect for all living things - including plants and trees - is an integral part of its attitude to the environment.

In regard to sentient creatures, the Buddha's history of previous incarnations indicates the possibility of one being born in different realms including the animal realms. One of Buddhism's most fundamental aspects is that it extends to the care and protection of all life on earth, not just of people.

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<sup>9</sup> This topic is more fully dealt with in *Tread Lightly on the Earth : op.cit.*, pp. 111-155

## **An All Embracing Code of Conduct**

Buddhism teaches the noble eight-fold path as a way of life. This consists of right vision, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindedness and right concentration.

This is a detailed way of directing attention to the different aspects of human conduct, and each one of them has relevance to the environment, for any one of them wrongly practised can gravely damage the environment. This searching scrutiny of human conduct is a very valuable aid to examining the impact of wrongful conduct on the environment. For example, right livelihood could be violated through an occupation which damages the environment. Right vision may be violated by concentration on short term profits at the cost of long term damage. Right mindfulness could be violated by attitudes of unconcern for the environment.

Likewise there are five precepts, including abstaining from taking life, and abstaining from taking what belongs to others. Damaging the environment and damaging the rights of others who are entitled to its benefits would come within this.

## **Opposition to Anthropocentrism**

Buddhism is completely averse to the notion that nature and all created things exist for the benefit of mankind. Mankind is part of the entire cosmic order but not in a position of dominance. Humans are just as much subject to the natural order of the universe as any other form of sentient existence. Buddhism is ecocentric rather than anthropocentric since it views humans as an integral part of nature.

## **The Unity of Humanity**

The Buddha was perhaps the first to point out that whereas every living species on the planet, whether it be a plant or a worm or an insect or a bird or a mammal, has many sub-species within it, humans are all cast in one species. “Thus there are no characteristics indicating differences of species among human beings in the way in which there are characteristics indicative of differences in species among animals and plants.”<sup>10</sup>

This reflection is of immense importance to the unity of the human family and has major implications for our topic. This one species occupies one common home and it follows inevitably that it must do all it can to protect its environment which is the entitlement of all and must be preserved for the benefit of all. It must not be exploited by

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<sup>10</sup> *Vasettha Sutta, Sutta Nipata*, verse 607 translated by Ven. H. Saddhatissa, Curzon Press, Surrey, 1985

a few for their advantage to the detriment of the right of others who are equally entitled to share and enjoy it.

### **The Interconnectedness of All Forms of Life**

Buddhism sees also a network of relationships between all forms of life. Hence whatever happens to one form of life has its effects and repercussions on all others. The chain of causes and consequences is enormous and complex and follows inexorably, for every action has its reaction – a fundamental teaching of Buddhism.

### **The Place of Humans in the Environment**

Buddhism's holistic view of the universe puts humans in the overall context not only of the entire material universe, but the entire universe of living entities. We are part of the entire fabric of life with interconnecting threads running in every direction. In accordance with the karmic law of action and reaction, these interconnecting threads can take us anywhere in the fabric of life.

### **Future Generations**

Buddhism takes a cosmic view of time and space and in that context takes a very long-term view of the human future. We are concerned not merely with the results of our actions in our lifetime, but for generations to come, and we need to be conscious that every action produces its reaction, however long that reaction may take to make its appearance. Consequently, the welfare of future generations is very much our concern, for it is inevitable that whatever we do will affect them. Our actions in regard to the environment are one of the principal means by which we can affect future generations, whether for better or for worse.

### **State Duties Towards the Environment**

Buddhism specified certain basic virtues of rulers in the *Dasa Raja Dharmaya*, which set out ten aspects of royal duties. These included:

1. Generosity
2. Morality
3. Nonviolence
4. Friendliness

According to *Cakkavattisihanada Sutta* the ideal king is expected to protect not only people but quadrupeds and birds and life of all descriptions.

The Emperor, Asoka's 5th Pillar Edict (3rd Century B.C.) stating that he in fact placed various species of wild animals under protection is one of the earliest recorded instances of a specific governmental policy of conservation. Asoka's prohibition of killing these species was no doubt a reflection of his dedication to Buddhist ideals which included compassion towards all creatures.

Interpreted in the light of Buddhist teaching generally, all these have important environmental connections. One is that the state should provide care and protection not only to humans, but even to birds and beasts and the environment which sustains all life.

There is also a principle that protection of the weak is a royal duty. This would extend to all forms of life which are unable to protect themselves. The environment is unable to speak for itself and to fight for its own protection. It is therefore a royal duty to ensure such protection.

### **Conservation of Natural Resources**

The conservation of natural resources was a royal duty and to this end the ancient Buddhist kings, as in Sri Lanka, issued edicts that not a drop of water was to be permitted to flow into the sea without first serving the needs of the humans, i.e. agriculture. Conservation of natural resources, especially the water supply, was therefore important and it was well known even in ancient times that the felling of forests adversely affected rainfall.

In Sri Lanka, for example, there were ancient royal edicts prohibiting the felling of virgin forests.

All of this links well with the modern theories of sustainable development, their essence being that while development is important it should not be pursued to the damage of the human future.

### **Principles of Trusteeship**

Buddhist philosophers and scholars have expanded on these concepts in a manner which makes them intensely relevant to the subject under discussion. Historical examples of such teaching abound. One of the best known illustrations is the sermon preached by the monk Mahinda, son of the Emperor Asoka, to the King of Sri Lanka when the monk accosted the King who was enjoying a hunt in the royal forest. The monk's sermon included a reminder to the King that although he was the King of the country, he was not the owner but the trustee of the land on which he was hunting. This example also demonstrated that sustainable development is not a new concept but was envisaged over two thousand years ago.

## **Buddhist Attitude to Animal Life**

Buddhist literature abounds in references to animals as sentient beings, sharing the anxieties and often displaying the virtues which we tend to associate with humans only. The Jataka stories of previous incarnations of the Buddha bring this out with great force, for he was often born in animal form and as such displayed the highest qualities of courage, concern, kindness and self-sacrifice which are associated with the highest levels of human conduct. The moral of this is that animals themselves are on the same upward path towards moral and spiritual development which we associate with humans only.

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## CHRISTIANITY

Over the centuries several views have been taken regarding Christianity's perspective on human relationship with nature.<sup>11</sup> Among these are;

- All of nature was God's creation and therefore entitled to respect
- All of nature was impregnated with the Divine presence and therefore entitled to respect
- The view that God looks after all His creation as God looks after the lilies of the field
- The view that God had an all embracing purpose in creating every component element of nature and therefore that damage to any part of this creation damages the entirety
- The view that all nature has lessons for humanity and that there are even sermons in stones
- The view that all creatures have a direct relationship with God and can even commune with God – a view of which the most celebrated exponent was St. Francis of Assisi

Of major importance to the modern environmental problems is the great emphasis placed by Christianity upon the simple life and frugal living. The environmental problems we face today are largely the result of the violation of this basic teaching of Christianity

### Christ and Nature

Christ grew up in a rural and agricultural setting. He spent His early years in Nazareth Galilee which was largely agricultural

According to Christian teaching Christ is also linked to all creation for in the words of John "He was beginning with God. All things came into being through Him and without Him not one thing came into being" (John 1:2-3).

Furthermore there is a continuing linkage with nature in many of the similes used in Christ's teachings such as the references to the seed falling on stony ground, the tenants in the vineyard and the lesson of the fig tree. There is also the moving passage

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<sup>11</sup> This topic is more fully dealt with in *Tread Lightly on the Earth, op. cit.*, pp.156-205

where Jesus refers to His own life describing how “Foxes have holes and birds have nest, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lie down and rest”

### **The Dominion Theory**

A theory which long held sway was the theory that humans were given dominion over nature with man being seen as God’s viceroy on Earth. Some interpreters of this theory have viewed it as giving humans dominion over the earth to the extent of subduing nature and making it serve his will. Though this was by no means the official attitude adopted by the church, it persisted in many quarters owing to the lack of stress in church teaching on the protection of the environment.

### **The Stewardship Theory**

Countering the Dominion Theory was the Stewardship Theory which was that what was given to man was not overlordship but stewardship, with a heavy responsibility to look after the earth which was entrusted to humanity’s care. Noah has the position of trusteeship over the animals that were entrusted to him and Adam was given the Garden of Eden not only to enjoy but also to look after it. The Stewardship Theory has now gained much support and is the official position of most Christian churches.

### **The Respect Due to Nature as God’s Handiwork**

The entire universe and all nature with it is God’s handiwork. It is beautiful beyond human imagination and complex beyond human understanding. It was all created in accordance with Divine purpose and must therefore be respected.

### **All Nature is Impregnated with the Divine Presence**

Another reason for respect is that all of nature is impregnated with the divine presence. In the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins “The world is charged with the grandeur of God”.

If one loves God one must love His creation and must therefore love nature.

### **God Has a Continuing Interest in His Creation**

God did not create the universe just for a short time only. Nor did He withdraw from it after creation and let it function like a machine. He created it and keeps up a continuous interest in it as evidenced in the beautiful passage;

“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them...Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.” (Matthew 6: 28-30)

If God has a continuing interest in His creation His followers must likewise show such an interest.

### **Concern for Future Generations**

Christianity concerns itself deeply with the welfare of children and in this concept is deeply concerned with the welfare of the future generations. Stumbling blocks placed in the way of the children have been condemned by Jesus in the strongest terms.

“If any of you put a stumbling block before any of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18: 6)

Pillaging the inheritance of children, which is what environmental destruction does to them, would therefore attract the severest disapproval of Christian teaching.

Christianity is not concerned merely with this generation or that but with the long term future. Consequently we need to have in mind in our dealings with the environment the impacts of our actions on future generations.

### **Nature Has Lessons for Humanity**

Every natural object is full of philosophical implications if we would only pause to think about it. This is another reason why nature should be respected for it is a symbol of life, symbol of God's bounty and a thing of beauty. Thinkers down the centuries have written of this even in a non-spiritual context. William Blake (1757-1827) summarized this beautifully in the verse;

To see a world in a grain of sand  
And heaven in a wild flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of Your Hand  
And Eternity in an hour

And so did Shakespeare in the verse

Tongues in trees  
Books in the running brooks  
Sermons in Stones  
And good in everything

In the spiritual context of contemplating God's creation this assumes redoubled meaning.

### **All Creatures have a Covenant with God**

There are biblical passages indicating that even the natural world has direct contact with God. Passages such as “The Mountains and the hills will burst into song before you” and “All creation rightly gives You praise” indicate this.

Indeed there are church figures such as St. Francis of Assisi who believed that there was direct communication between birds and animals and God.

### **Interconnectedness of all Creation**

For the various reasons set out earlier all creation is looked upon as a work of God which must necessarily therefore be bound together as one created entity rather than as a series of separate objects. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, gave the analogy of the human body, which is a community of different parts each of which is totally dependent on all the others. No part however important is able to function on its own. The cosmic Christ concept is also used to support this view for all component elements of creation are held together in Christ.

Such integrated approaches have much relevance to the environmental problem because damage to one part of the environment affects the whole.

### **Christian Principles of Living**

A Christian principle of living summarized in the precept “Act Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly” has deep environmental significance. There must be justice to all, not plunder of the rights of others. There must be mercy to all God's creatures, for kindness to animals is also a part of Christian teaching. Walking humbly means a lifestyle devoid of greed, ostentation and acquisitiveness. A person living according to these Christian principles would not tread heavily on the environment as would be the case if these principles are violated.

### **Modern Church Activity**

The churches have in recent times issued numerous statements in regard to the necessity for the protection of the environment in terms of the Christian teachings. For example the World Council of Churches meeting in Geneva on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2008 issued a many-faceted statement urgently calling on churches to strengthen their moral stand on

various environmental issues. There is considerable activity in this field and there is much Christian teaching that can be invoked for environmental protection.

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## ISLAM

Islam<sup>12</sup> like the other religions considered is rich in instructions on the protection and the preservation of the environment. Islam is also deeply concerned with the generations yet to come, for its vision extends to the future of the human race as long as mankind exists on the planet. That community will in perpetuity be based on adherence to the ideals laid down in its sacred literature.

### Qu’ranic Teachings on the Environment

Muslims learn from the Qu’ran that God created the universe and every single atom and molecule it contains and that the laws of creation include the elements of order, balance and proportion:

‘He created everything and determined it most expertly’ (25:2)<sup>13</sup>

There are beautiful passages describing the cosmic as well as the earthly dimensions of the act of creation. There are also several graphic descriptions of God’s creation of the entire universe from nothingness, the beauty and perfection of this work, its symbolic value as a reminder of God’s power, the blessings it brings upon humanity, and humanity’s duty of custodianship of this creation.

Another significant feature of Qu’ranic teaching is that it is not only humans who have formed communities among themselves, for other creatures too form communities. They are not objects for exploitation by humans.

There is nothing that moves on the earth,  
No bird that flies on its wings,  
But has a community of its own like yours. (6:38)

### The *Hadiths* as a Source of Guidance on the Environment

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<sup>12</sup> This topic is more fully dealt with in *Tread Lightly on the Earth, op.cit.*, pp 207-248

<sup>13</sup> Fazlun M Khalid, *Islam and Environment, Social and Economic Dimensions of Global Environment Change, Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change*, 2002, p 332

Apart from the extensive Qu’ranic teaching of environmental principles, the *Hadiths*, which are traditions of the sayings and the doings of the Prophet, also contain much instruction on these matters

In this body of learning, there is an array of environmentally related principles. Collections of these such as the well recognised collection of Al-Bukhari in 88 books have been systematically arranged under separate heads. Among these are books on agriculture, hunting, water and irrigation. It is remarkable that there were such early anticipations of some of the principal environmental problem areas of today, together with routes to their solution, which are beginning to attract attention belatedly in our time. For example the “Book of Agriculture” speaks of sustainability in the cultivation of land and the “Book of distribution of water” emphasises the duty to share water equally and rules out the appropriation or monopolisation of water by the privileged few.

### **Islamic Principles Regarding Environmental Protection**

From Islamic teaching a wide variety of environmentally related principles can be gathered. Among these are:

- Humanity is a position of guardianship in regard to the environment
- The environment needs to be preserved in all its purity for future generations to enjoy it
- The environment as God’s Creation must be respected
- The environment must be respected as God’s gift to humanity
- God had a plan in creating Nature the way He did
- All creation is in a state of submission to God
- All nature consists of signs from God
- Humans need to have a caring relationship with the Earth
- There is a relationship between all created things and God
- Other forms of life have rights
- The environment was created with a sense of balance and that balance must not be interfered with

### **The Duty of Guardianship**

The Qu’ran specifically spells out humanity’s duty of custodianship in terms that;

‘It is He who made you trustees of the Earth,’ (6:165)

In this work of trusteeship, a cardinal principle is that, “the faithful followers of the Beneficent are those who tread upon the earth lightly. (25:63)

## **Sustainable Development**

An important concept that runs through Qu’ranic teaching regarding the creation of the universe is the notion of balance. Everything has been set in perfect balance. This concept is most important for the environment, because any disturbance of this balance has its repercussions throughout the structure.

This acquires special significance as it is integrally linked to the concept of sustainable development. This involves a balance between what humans take for themselves out of the environment and what must be retained in the environment for the future. To upset this balance, which has been so carefully set, becomes then a serious violation of religious duty.

Since the Islamic concept is that the whole universe has been created with an underlying principle of balance which keeps it all together, it is not for humans to disturb that balance and if they do, disaster will result.

He raised it up and set the balance  
Transgress not the balance (55:1 -2)

## **Responsibility Towards Future Generations**

The community of humans, according to Islam, consists not only of those who are alive here and now, but those who are to come, generation after generation.

The concern for future generations is implicit also in the notions of trusteeship, guardianship and vice-regency. Each of these shifts perspectives away from merely present advantage to a conservation of the long term interest of the community.

Another Islamic concept that reinforces the duty toward future generations is the concept of good faith which underpins Islamic law. We must act in good faith towards all who will be affected by our actions and if we plunder or pollute the environment we are not acting in good faith toward generations yet to come.

## **Duty to Tread Lightly on the Earth**

Islam treats treading lightly on the environment as one of the attributes of faithfulness, for “the faithful servants of the Beneficent are those who tread upon the earth gently” (Qu’ran 25:63). This is the Qu’ran’s very expressive way of teaching that good conduct towards the environment is itself a religious duty. One must not burden the environment with the weight of providing one with luxuries which go beyond what one needs to live a healthy and happy life. Wealth, ostentation, greed, acquisitiveness, conflict, aggression – all these place a burden on the environment. If everyone were to do the same the adverse impact on the environment would be considerable. Indeed that is precisely what the rich and the powerful are doing at this very moment. If all citizens of

the planet were to live according to the lifestyle of the citizens of the rich world, the entire supply system of the planet would collapse several times over.

### **God had a Plan in Creating Nature the Way He Did**

It follows from all other concepts outlined in this discussion that Nature was not haphazardly put together but was part of an overriding and all-encompassing plan.

Every element of it was put in there for a purpose, all in perfect proportion and balance and the planning was very exact. God

Created everything  
Then he ordained it  
Very exactly (25:2)

The human intellect would be unable to comprehend even a fraction of this plan, and in deference to God, every part of it must be respected.

Furthermore, since the planning was so exact, a disruption however slight could upset the balance on which the entire plan depended. The greatest circumspection must therefore be used in dealing with the environment.

This contributes to the notion that every element in nature is interlinked in a manner which may often be beyond human understanding. Interference with one element or aspect may therefore produce multiple results in many areas, many of which might be unforeseeable. Respect for the overall plan therefore means respect for all its constituent elements.

### **Conclusion**

The Islamic notion of peace means not merely peace with one's family, one's relations, one's neighbourhood, one's people and all the world, but peace also with the environment in which one spends one's earthly existence. One must not do violence to it, damage it or exploit it for selfish advantage.

Since there are around 60 countries with Muslims as the majority component of their population, the observance of these environmental and long-term perspectives by this important segment of the global population is an important route towards achieving a world-wide response to the environmental crisis now facing humanity.

The Islamic wealth of principles in regard to the environment could thus be of great value in modern environmental studies and particularly in the work of incorporating them into international law.

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## CONFUCIANISM

### Introduction

Confucianism offers many valuable teachings and insights on the environment and the common human future. Confucius or K'ung-fu-tzu (551- 478 B.C) has had many disciples and followers over the centuries. The teachings of Confucius on ethics, social relationships, humility in governance, significance of learning and the importance of right conduct have much relevance to the environment and the rights of future generations.

Confucian teaching has wielded enormous influence for centuries in moulding the customs and the thought patterns of successive generations in China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and currently has many followers in various parts of the globe.

The central teaching of Confucian ethics is said to be *jen* (*pronounced as ren*). This has been translated in numerous ways as meaning "love," "goodness," "humanity," and "human-heartedness." *Jen* (*ren*) is considered to be the supreme virtue representing human qualities at their best. *Jen* involves faithfulness to oneself and others. Conduct towards others is best expressed in the Confucian golden rule, "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself." Other important Confucian virtues include righteousness, propriety, integrity, and filial piety. One who possesses all these virtues becomes a *chün-tzu* (perfect gentleman).

### The Dao (*way of life*)

Confucius himself deeply believed in Heaven (God) and taught the Dao or Way leading human beings to enlightenment, Dao comprised enlightened conduct in every aspect of life, both internally within oneself and externally in regard to all entities outside oneself – ones family, fellow citizens, all other humans, all forms of life and all created things. Its environmental implications are therefore of great importance.

### Universal Brotherhood and Sisterhood

Confucius believed that all the people of the world are brothers and sisters under the one God. This meant that there would be universal harmony without barriers between different groups. He also deplored the barriers caused by religion, observing that since the term religion tended to be abused, it would be better to speak of the science of God.

A Sung Dynasty Confucian scholar Chang Tsai [early 11th cent. AD] wrote:

“Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such a small being as I finds an intimate place in their midst. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all

things are my companions." (Chang Tsai, "Western Inscription", in "The Continuity of Being" by Wei-ming Tu; also *Source Book In Chinese Philosophy* by W.T. Chan, p. 497)

### **Respect for All Forms of Life**

If we truly understand the fundamental nature of our interrelatedness, then that should lead to profound respect not only for our fellow human beings, but also for all forms of life and all creatures great and small. This respect finds its roots ultimately in fundamental respect for life.<sup>14</sup>

### **Intergenerational Perspectives**

As Mary Evelyn Tucker<sup>15</sup> states, the values within the Confucian tradition constitute. ‘a dynamic cosmological context or worldview for promoting harmony amidst change; the embeddedness of each person in concentric circles of relationships and ethical responsibilities, the importance of the family including past, present, and future generations’. Confucian teaching is always set in this time perspective and is a totally opposite world view to that which is so widely prevalent in the modern world, of a concentration on the present. It is in the cosmological context that Confucian teaching is set.

### **The Significance of Education**

Confucius attached great value to education, for without proper instruction by the elders the richness of the past will be lost and the interests of the future will be jeopardized. In the words of Mary Evelyn Tucker, Confucius emphasized, “the significance of education in cultivating the individual, enriching the society, and contributing to the political order; the role of government in establishing a political bureaucracy for ruling large numbers of people, and the value of history as an element of civilizational continuity and moral rectification”. This has relevance also to the environment, for environmental education is lacking today, in contrast to ancient times when the elders would have imparted to the children the importance of caring for the earth, which gave them life.

### **The Promotion of Harmony amidst Change**

Continual change is a necessary element of life, but Confucius emphasized that there should be harmony amidst change. This is particularly important because very often

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<sup>14</sup> <http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/Environ/pollution.htm>, *Pollution and the Environment: Some Radically New Ancient Views* by Ronald Epstein

Dharma Realm Buddhist University Public Lecture Series, Talmage, California

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<sup>15</sup> <http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/confucianism/index.html>

change promotes conflict. While change may be necessary it needs to be achieved in perfect harmony. This is part of the cosmological world view of Confucianism. The enormous changes that have taken place in human life in the past few centuries have only resulted in conflict.

### **Anthropocosmic World View**

Confucianism takes a world view which does not have an anthropocentric perspective but rather an anthropocosmic perspective, placing man against the background of the cosmos rather than the narrow background of humanity alone. This view provides us with a comprehensive ethic which takes in the relationship human beings and nature.

“By “anthropocosmic” we refer to the great triad of heaven (a guiding force), earth (nature), and humans. This idea is central to Confucian thought from its earliest expressions in the classical texts to its later developments in Neo-Confucianism which arose in the eleventh century. This seamless interaction of these three forces contrasts markedly with the more human centered orientation of western traditions.<sup>16</sup>

### **“Organic Holism”**

There is an essential holism in the Confucian approach to all matters concerning human activity. Humans are not isolated individuals acting alone but are part of an interconnected universe. Every action interacts with every other, every object interacts with every other. This interaction must be understood to range from the micro-scale to the macro-scale. Nothing is too small or too large to be outside the operation of this rule.

The I CHING (Book of Changes) gives expression to this concept and is not based on the concept of a creator or a God. There is more concern with the ongoing universe than with its origin and this ongoing universe has all these myriad strands of interaction based on a holistic view of the universe as a functioning interrelated unity. Such a cosmic and holistic view is of great environmental significance for it places upon humans the duty and responsibility of being thoughtful in relation to the results of their actions.

### **“Dynamic Vitalism”**

This refers to the material force of the universe. There is this element of a universal and material force which pervades the entire cosmos and gives a unifying element to all existing things. This concept links humans and the natural world. There is within it the force of production and reproduction, (Sheng-Sheng) and there is also a

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<sup>16</sup> <http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/confucianism/index.html>

process of ceaseless movement which also results in continuing change. All of this needs to be in harmony, thus indicating dynamic vitalism as an additional factor which provides an interconnection between humans and nature.

### **The Group Interest**

In the Confucian framework of thought humans are seen not as isolated individuals but as a group sharing common interests. Modern culture and civilization tend to emphasize the individual rather than the group and place special emphasis on rights and freedoms rather than obligations towards the group. The Confucian tradition, by way of contrast, emphasizes the group and its interests as well as cooperation within the group. Pursuit of individual interest and egocentric wants and desires which are the cause of many environmental problems today could be considerably restrained by Confucian perspectives. These would also turn the spotlight on duties rather than rights and on the long term perspective rather than the short term gain.

Human livelihood and culture was seen as continuous with nature, as the following passage by a leading Han Confucian, Tung Ch'ung-shu (c. 179–c.104 BCE), indicates: “Heaven, earth, and humans are the basis of all creatures. Heaven gives them birth, earth nourishes them, and humans bring them to completion. Heaven provides them at birth with a sense of filial and brotherly love, earth nourishes them with clothing and food, and humans complete them with rites and music. The three act together as hands and feet join to complete the body and none can be dispensed with.

### **Continuity**

Since there was a strong ethic of gratitude and indebtedness to past generations Confucian teaching naturally thought in terms also of the duties we owe to those who are to come after us. This imposes a duty of care of the environment and a restraint of the tendencies to exploit it for one's short term benefits. As with many other systems going back to remote antiquity there is in Confucianism a strong sense of the unity of past, present and future. Intergenerational obligations therefore take on a special importance and this is integrally related to environmental protection.

### **Bio Diversity**

The holistic view of the universal order to which we belong, means also that each component element of that unity in diversity needs to be respected and preserved. Other life forms therefore must be given due respect and this provides much support to the concept of bio diversity. This is also set against the background of human dependence for survival on other life forms which are therefore entitled to protection and respect.

## **Centralized Action to Protect the Environment**

Forms of government as envisaged by Confucianism are generally government from the centre. Administration and all other activities are seen in a centralized perspective and consequently the policies which Confucianism encourages need to be carried out by the government itself. This imposes obligations on governments and rulers to protect the environment rather than to leave protection to the actions of individuals. Individuals can of course be rallied to the cause but there needs to be also some drive from the centre towards this end. There is here a pointer to state obligations in this regard.

## **Conclusion**

It will be seen from all these perspectives of Confucianism that they have much to contribute to a fuller understanding of modern environmental problems. The cosmological setting of Confucian thought takes us away from the narrow time frames and individually oriented perspectives that are the cause of most of our environmental problems today.

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## SIKHISM

*Guru Nanak (1469-1539)*, the founder of the Sikh religion emphasized throughout his teaching the importance of proper human conduct. The *Guru Granth Sahib* is its sacred book.

In his meditations he saw the whole world ablaze and analyzed this as an indication that humans were at war with each other at every level because of greed, pursuit of power, violence, lack of compassion, lack of thought for the future and many other factors which are extremely relevant to our study. The causes of conflicts were analyzed as the baser human motivations such as, hate, fear, greed and revenge.

The Sikh approach is the path of love for God and fellow human beings and *Guru Granth Sahib*, states that, 'those who wish to follow the path of love should be prepared to make great sacrifices.'

Furthermore the Sikh teaching is that all conflict starts at an individual level and the means of ending conflict is to heal oneself in the first place. Even the approach to war and peace must therefore commence with each individual and this element of Sikh teaching is of great importance of our present study because one of our central themes is that peace education is required at every level, from the kindergarten to the corridors of power. Care of the environment must also start therefore with a consciousness and resolve at the individual level of one's duty to do all one can to protect it.

Sikh teaching also emphasizes that individuals are at war not only with others but also at war within themselves for competing passions and interests. Glamour for recognition even within the individual personality. There will consequently be a desire to accumulate wealth and possessions for oneself, competing with the higher instincts of service to others, and self restraint. The former instincts are environmentally destructive and the latter are protective and the latter instincts must be encouraged to prevail.

Another element of Sikh teaching which is important to our study is that high ideals alone will not suffice. These ideals need to be translated into practice. This observation is of great relevance to the political and international scene which is full of high professions but lacks the resolve to translate these into practical terms.

Guru Nanak was very explicit in regard to social activism. Every person needs to work for peace and this obligation is all the greater when one is in a position of power and authority. We need to give up our selfish concentration on our own personal profits and self interests and we need to respect our neighbours' rights.

One essential teaching of Sikhism is that peace is possible when no one inflicts pain on another. The fifth Sikh Guru Arjan described such a regime, *Halemi Raj*. It is

only if this rule is followed that there will be peace. The concept of causing harm is not restricted to causing harm to humans. Harm to the environment, harm to future generations and harm to other forms of life would also come within this prescription.

Conduct need to be based on righteousness, graciousness and good deeds. These are common universal values.

*Guru Amardas*, fervently prayed that the burning world be saved and *Guru Nanak* set out three objectives which rulers should follow

- *Degh, Tegh and Fateh* –
- *Degh* – Symbolizes food, meaning thereby that everyone should under a just regime have all the subsistence that he or she needs, *Degh* also involves the concept of sharing, for society should be free of greed or personal gain.
- *Tegh*, meaning the sword of justice symbolizes the rule of law, justice, human rights and duties, and related concepts. It is the ruler's obligation to ensure and maintain a just society. Justice in this context includes also justice to children and to those who are to come after us, and this is rich in environmental significance.
- *Fateh*, means the ultimate survival of a just society.

Here again there is thought about the future. We need just rule not only for the present but for the indefinite future, and we cannot achieve this if we rob the future generations of their basic right.

A ruler dedicated to these three concepts would give peace and dignity to all his subjects.

Especially pertinent to our current study is *Matha Dharat Mahath*, meaning that all have an equal right to the resources of the great Mother Earth.

Guru Nanak condemned the building of empires, the plunder of conquered peoples, the damage caused by war and invading armies and it is of interest that when he condemned Babur the Mughal ruler who invaded India he was imprisoned, though he was released later.

Religious fanaticism was condemned and Guru Nanaks teaching was that God is everywhere and is present in every one and no religion is superior to another. All religious paths take lead to God and most importantly there are common universal values (*Dharma*) which are binding upon all people whatever their race or nation or faith.

We close this brief outline of a religion which strongly affirms the fundamental values under discussion by noting that Sikhism has the concept of a Parliament of Religions, which is a model for inter faith harmony and Sikh Holy scripture the *Guru Granth Sahib* specifically stresses the teaching of inter faith harmony.

Sikhism is a religion impregnated with the concept of righteousness and gives strong confirmation of all the values emerging from our study.

Another important feature of Sikhism, which is of intense relevance to our study is that Sikhism also embodies the concept of a global village where all humans are brothers and sisters to each other. Greed, the lust for power and egocentrism are the causes which tend to set the world aflame and Sikhism aims at putting out that fire before it reaches globally destructive proportions. All of this is intimately linked to environmental protection, conservation of earth resources, respect for all forms of life and concern for the rights of future generations.

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## ZOROASTRIANISM

Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest religions, places much emphasis on environmental protection.

There is a traditional story which illustrates this forcibly. Ages ago Mother Earth was in trouble as the people were hurting her. She sent an appeal to God – Ahura Mazda - for assistance in the form of warriors who would stop the people from doing damage to her. The underlying idea was that the harm that was being done to her could only be stopped by force. Ahura Mazda's answer was significant. He said to Mother Earth that rather than sending warriors to stop the people from harassing her he would send her a Holy Man to give the people inspirational ideas as to how they should behave better. The Prophet sent was Zoroaster.

This offers a valuable idea to the modern world. It is by persuasion and a realisation of the damage being done rather than by the use of force and sanctions that environmental damage can be prevented.

Among the ideas which can be strengthened through Zoroastrianism are the following;

### **Trusteeship**

Human beings are seen as the highest of created beings. This imposes a duty on humanity to show care for the universe. They are the natural overseers of the Seven Creations (Sky, Water, Earth, Plant, Animal, Human and Fire). The duty of care of the physical world is imposed not merely for spiritual salvation of human beings but also because they have a natural responsibility as overseers of the Seven Creations.

### **Interrelationship and Harmony**

All the Seven Creations are interrelated and interdependent. Humans cannot exist but for the support they get from the others. This interrelationship needs to function smoothly and harmoniously and not in such a manner that one of the Creations harms or endangers the other. Earth and Humans cannot therefore afford to be in conflict.

### **Respect**

Because all creation is sacred it should be treated with respect. It is humanity's duty to return to Ahura Mazda the world in a form as perfect as the original state in which

humanity received it from Ahura Mazda. This will be humanity's obligation at the end of time and we must do nothing which will impair our performance of that obligation. This wonderful creation of Ahura Mazda bequeathed to us in all its glory and beauty, must be treated with the greatest regard and respect.

### **Purity**

Because of the respect due to the Earth there must always be the utmost purity in our actions concerning its resources. Thus Zoroastrians would never enter a river to wash in it because that would amount to pollution. The purity of nature needs to be preserved. And whole volumes have been written by Zoroastrianism scholars on the duties associated with purity.<sup>17</sup> The concept of purity applied rigorously to the disposal of wastes, corpses, clothing and personal property of all sorts. There were also many rituals associated with purity which was dealt with in the minutest detail. When the world was first conceived by Ahura Mazda it was pure and unpolluted and humans must aim continually at keeping it so.

### **Concern for the Future**

Since the world was created perfect and wonderful, Zoroastrianism sees a duty to keep it without damage or decay but ever flourishing. It will have to be restored eventually to Ahura Mazda and this imposes a solemn duty of care for the future to the best of everyone's ability.

### **Righteous Conduct**

Each of the Seven Creations was invested by Ahura Mazda with some of the divine attributes. Humans were given the essence of wisdom and they need to use it to promote truth, order and righteousness. It is only through such conduct that humans will be able to exercise proper sovereignty and care over what has been entrusted to them.

### **A Just World Order**

The sovereignty accorded to humanity needs to be used to create a just world order which will make the world happy and peaceful for all time. This would only be possible if a due sense of responsibility is shown towards the creation of the Wise Lord Ahura Mazda. Pollution and defilement of any sort are damaging to these beautiful creations.

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<sup>17</sup> *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism:*

To this end all humanity must act together through good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

### **The Struggle Against Evil**

Zoroastrianism sees a conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil. A malevolent hostile spirit is always at work seeking to destroy the beautiful creation of Ahura Mazda. The duty of humans is to play an active role in this struggle and to combat the forces of evil which are thus seeking to destroy this beautiful creation.

\* \* \*

### **Conclusion**

It will be seen from this very brief summary that Zoroastrianism is a faith deeply imbued with love and care for the beautiful creation of the Wise Lord Ahura Mazda. Environmental care is one of foremost obligations it imposes upon its followers.

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## JAINISM

Jainism is one of the oldest religions and goes back to at least the 8<sup>th</sup> century before the Christian era.

It had its own sacred texts similar to the Vedas of Hinduism, such as the *Acaranga Sutra* of around 300 B.C. The ultimate goal as taught by Jainism is to ascend to the *Siddha Loka* – a world in which one is removed from all earthly entanglements and where liberated souls dwell for all time in a state of consciousness and bliss.

### The Jain Way of Life

The essence of the Jain way of life is obedience to the five vows prescribed for daily life – non violence, (*Ahimsa*), truthfulness (*Satya*), avoidance of theft (*Asteya*), sexual restraint (*Brahma Charya*) and non-possession (*Aparigraha*.) All of these have a profound bearing on the environment:

#### Non- Violence (*Ahimsa*)

One has to minimize harm to all life forms. Jain monks follow this to the extent of sweeping their paths when they walk in order to avoid harming insects. This principle of non-violence extends also to particles containing life (*Jiva*) whether in earth, water, air, micro organisms or plants. This view prevents damage being caused to animal life of any sort and also extends to the protection of vegetation. This basic precept is thus of profound importance to environmental protection.

#### Truthfulness (*Satya*)

Truthfulness does not have a narrow meaning of being truthful in one's dealings with others. It extends even more importantly to being true to oneself and not ignoring the implications of what one sees around, or of what one does. For example, when one knows the suffering or damage caused by waste, one would not be truthful to oneself if one ignored it. This extended view of truthfulness means also that one cannot hide one's consciousness away from the known consequences of one's acts, and cannot therefore be indifferent to such activities as the felling of forests or the pollution of water or the atmosphere. To know that is occurring and to ignore it thereafter is to be untruthful. This places a very heavy environmental responsibility on every individual.

### Avoidance of Theft (*Asteya*)

To exploit earth resources or to appropriate earth resources to oneself is to steal them from those who are also entitled to use them. In fact, extensive devastation of the environment would also be a theft from future generations. The vow 'not to steal' is violated if one acts in this fashion, and there is a clear implication here of protecting the rights of future generations from inter-generational theft.

### Non-Possession (*Aparigraha*)

One does not cling to possessions and material goods or indulge in acquiring them beyond one's immediate needs. This is one of the main causes of environmental damage and pollution in our time, and it follows from the desire of individuals and other entities such as corporate bodies to appropriate and possess material goods to the maximum extent possible.

## **Practical Environmental Activities**

Jain tradition encourages its followers to engage in activities promoting the environment. Many such projects have been traditionally undertaken in the vicinity of Jain temples and the entire community participates in them. Prominent among these are tree planting projects and the establishment of forest preserves. Such activity is an indication to all Jains to do the same to the extent they can whenever their situation permits it.

## **Vegetarianism**

Jains have a history of advocacy against meat eating and animal sacrifice. The philosophy on which this is based extends also to showing kindness and giving protection to animals, where this is possible. This attitude has also over the centuries been an important force for environmental protection.

## **The World View of Jainism**

Jainism has a cosmological perspective of our place in the universe. This results in what might be described as being in tune with the infinite. The entire universe is a living creation, and we are part of it, and this creation goes on for an infinity of time. Short term perspectives and individual perspectives are entirely out of tune with this bio-cosmological world view.

## **Karma and Rebirth**

All living beings have a soul and this soul leaves the body on death, to be reborn in another form.

## **Conclusion**

Jainism thus provides basic philosophical perspectives which are of great value to the protection of the environment and the rights of future generations. Jainism sees our obligations through a bio-cosmological world-wide vision, where all life forms are interrelated. The five-fold basic duties of Jainism merge together in protecting the environment, the integrity of living species and the rights of future generations, in a manner which strongly reinforces the central principles which environmental protection is based.

For these reasons Jainism has been perceived as a religion of ecology and has been described in the following terms:

Jainism is fundamentally a religion of ecology and has turned ecology into a religion. It has enabled Jains to create an environment-friendly value system and code of conduct. Because of the insistence on rationality in the Jain tradition, Jains are always ready and willing to look positively and with enthusiasm upon environmental causes. In India and abroad, they are in the forefront of bringing greater awareness and putting into practice their cardinal principles on ecology. Their programs have been modest and mostly self-funded through volunteers.

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## DAOISM

Daoism, dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC, has deeply influenced Chinese culture for over 2000 years. The philosopher Laozi's work *Dao De Jing* is its classic text. Over the centuries there have been many schools of Daoist thought.

Daoism's central philosophy is the Dao, which means "The Way". Dao is the way of heaven, earth and humanity. Dao is the origin of everything and is the ultimate aim of all who follow it. A key component of dao is *de* which indicates virtue, morality and integrity.

Dao took the form of the Grandmother Goddess who came to earth to enlighten humanity, and instructed humanity in "The Way".

One of the principal lessons she taught was the way of non selfishness (*wu-wei*). Humans were taught to be plain and modest and not to struggle with others for personal advancement. They were taught the way of non interference. The same applied to their relationship with the natural order.

In Daoism there is a juxtaposition of two opposite forces known as *yin* and *yang*. These two forces are in constant opposition to each other and are present within every entity. When they do reach harmony, the energy of life comes into being. All forms of life and all cultures and civilizations contain within themselves this opposition between *yin* and *yang*.

Daoist organizations were formally set up in the East Han period (206BC – 220AD) and Daoism along with Confucianism and Buddhism has been one of the main formative influences on Chinese culture over the centuries. There are over 100 Daoist associations, 25,000 Daoist priests and nuns and over 1000 Daoist temples all over China.

Lessons we learn from Daoism in regard to Ecology include the following:

### **Harmony with nature**

There will be opposition through *Ying and Yang* between our care of nature and our destruction of it. The destructive element needs to be kept under control and harmony must be achieved between humans and nature. If such harmony is not achieved there will be destruction of nature and, with it, destruction of humans. Therefore to reach harmony is vital if we are to avoid disaster to the human family.

### **Daoist Ideas about Nature**

It is vital that a balance be preserved between people's needs and the protection of nature. The necessary harmonious relationship between humanity and nature is disturbed by such forces as the power of modern industry and technology. Nature is there for our support. It is there for our harmonious relationship with it and not for unprincipled exploitation for our short term gain.

### **Egocentrism of Humans**

There is a tendency for human beings to be so concerned with their own advancement and short term gain that they have an exaggerated idea of their own importance. They lose the sense of balance between themselves and the environment. The conflict of the *yin* and *yang* within ourselves must be resolved and the urge for self advancement must be curbed. We need to do this both on an individual and a collective basis. Furthermore, humans have the greatest capacity to do environmental damage, for Daoism looks upon humanity as the most intelligent and creative entity in the universe. Humanity's power to damage the environment is therefore greater than that of any other creature in the universe and hence the responsibility lying upon it is enormous.

Daoism calls upon us to awaken to this realization.

### **Giving Value to Life**

Daoism lays great stress on the continuation of life, for life is the highest created entity there is. Consequently the continuance of life is of inestimable importance and just as the extension of the life of an individual is of value so also is the continuity of life of the collective group of humanity. In fact there can be no greater value than this and if we do something to damage that value we are acting in a supremely wrongful manner.

All that Dao teaches results in a prolongation of life, whether it be meditation or exercise or the discarding of false value, or the doing of good deeds.

Viewed in this way the preservation of the future of the human family is a supreme value and anything that damages this has to be most carefully avoided.

### **Following the Earth**

The *Dao De Jing*, the basic classic of Daoism, contains the following words. ‘humanity follows the earth, the earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Dao and the Dao follows what is natural’. The lesson emerging from this is that humanity needs to treat the Earth with great respect. Just as the Earth has to respect heaven, so also humanity has to respect the Earth.

Since there is thus a human duty to respect the Earth, there is duty to do what we can to help nature to grow and flourish. This applies both to living things whether they be animals or plants or to nature itself whether it be mineral resources, water or any other amenities which nature offers to human beings.

### **Daoism aims always at harmony**

Since achieving harmony is one of the root teachings of Dao, harmony between humans and the Earth is of the utmost importance. This needs a great effort towards understanding our true relationship with nature.

Since harmony between humanity and nature is of the utmost importance we need to have more than a merely superficial understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature. We need to build up a deep understanding and one of the classics of Daoism, *Bao Pu Zi*, (4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D) points out that we can have two kinds of attitudes towards nature – exploiting it for our own advantage or following nature’s way. If our understanding of our relationship with nature is superficial we tend to follow the first. But if our understanding of the relationship is deep we tend to follow the second.

The excessive use of nature which is brought about by thoughtless use and exploitation can even bring about the extinction of humanity.

### **The Limitation of Nature’s Sustaining Power**

Natures sustaining power has limits and this is the result of the balance and harmony of nature, which is always capable of being upset. This results in devastation both to nature and to humanity. When we use earth resources we must refrain from over exploitation, because we will upset this balance.

### **Duties of Government**

Daoism encourages both government and people to do what they can to preserve this balance and to take good care of nature. The duties that Daoism imposes range through all sections of society from the poorest to the highest seats of affluence and power.

In the result Daoism embodies principles of great importance to the relationship between humanity and the environment. Daoism has a world view of ecology and an infinite view of the human future.

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## **BAHA'I FAITH**

The Baha'i Faith was founded in Persia in 1863 by Baha'u'llah and now has followers in 200 countries. Its central teachings are the unity of God, the spiritual oneness of humanity and the underlying unity of the world's major religions.

The Baha'i scriptures are very specific in their teachings on the environment. Nature is seen as a reflection of God's majesty and as an expression of his purpose in supporting humanity and civilization for thousands of centuries to come.

### **Long Term Perspectives**

This long term view of the future of humanity is a major setting to the teachings of the Baha'i faith, and gives the necessary time perspective which operates as a major corrective to the short term perspectives of modern civilization. Indeed Baha'u'llah's promise was that civilization should exist on the planet for a minimum of five thousand centuries and it is against that span of time that we must view the availability of earth resources.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability in the use of the environment is thus a key to the Baha'i attitude towards it.

Baha'u'llah was quite categorical in his teachings regarding trusteeship, or stewardship of the earth. All use of nature must be in moderation and in a spirit of detachment, not of ownership. There is also a confident assertion in the Baha'i faith that it is possible to meet the needs of present *and* future generations if we conserve and use with responsibility the enormous assets God has made available to us.

### **Duty of Respect**

Nature and all that goes with it – celestial objects, the animal kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, the seas and rivers, the land and mountains – all of these are part of God's plan, and therefore reflect His sovereignty and grandeur. They need therefore to be treated with respect and care.

At the same time, a distinction must be drawn between respecting nature and worshipping nature. Nature is to be seen as an emanation of God's grace. It is the work of God the creator, and to be respected as such, but not to be worshipped.

Nature reflects God's qualities and attributes, and is not an embodiment of God, or part of God.

A reason why nature should be greatly respected and cherished is that all nature is not merely a creation of God, but also reflects the qualities and attributes of God.

### **Nature as An Emanation of God's Will**

The will of God is to be respected and nature as God's sublime creation reflects God's majesty, and should be a constant reminder to us of the attributes of God.

“Whatever I behold I readily discover that it maketh Thee known unto me, and it remindeth me of Thy signs, and of Thy tokens, and of Thy testimonies. By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine Omnipotence.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Baha'i Faith Statement**

The Baha'i attitude to the environment is summarized in the following statement issued by the Baha'i Office of the Environment on behalf of the Baha'i international community.

“In this age of transition toward a world society, protection of the environment and conservation of the earth's resources represent an enormously complex challenge. The rapid progress in science and technology that has united the world physically has also greatly accelerated destruction of the biological diversity and rich natural heritage with which the planet has been endowed. Material civilization, driven by the dogmas of consumerism and aggressive individualism and disoriented by the weakening of moral standards and spiritual values, has been carried to excess.”

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Palmer with Victoria Finlay, *Faith in Conservation: New Approaches to Religions and the Environment*, , pp.72

## **The Unity of Mankind**

Baha'u'llah taught that the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens. For the Baha'i faith, the oneness of humanity is the fundamental spiritual and social truth. In accordance with this teaching, all human activity must be restructured to serve the needs of that one community rather than the particular needs of subsections of that community.

In consequence, industrial activity, economic activity, agricultural activity and political activity need to be reoriented towards that one goal.

Likewise, all social institutions and legal systems need to be restructured towards serving the ideal of one world and one community rather than the separate interests that come from a division of the human family into compartments.

## **The Need for Environmental Education**

An important aspect of this is that educational systems need to be restructured so as to emphasize to all children the oneness of humanity, our trusteeship of nature, and our obligation towards the generations to come. This must not merely at the theoretical and moral level, but needs to be translated into practical terms, and Baha'i oriented education also gives children a training in tree planting projects and environmental conservation.

## **A Worldwide Set of Values**

This view of the human family as one society necessitates also the evolution of universal values and principles rather than values and principles that are tailored to meet the needs of a particular tribe or cast or group or nation. Baha'u'llah's objective was to find and proclaim a world-embracing system of values in his quest for planetary justice, peace, prosperity and unity. Indeed, Baha'i teaching describes the oneness of humanity as the fundamental spiritual truth of our age.

## **Interconnectedness**

The interconnectedness and interdependence of all things is part of Baha'i teaching. It is on the basis of interconnectedness that the universe works, and it is on this basis that all the responsibilities of humanity are worked out. Any action we take must be taken with a consciousness of this principle of interconnectedness. The principles of interconnectedness and interdependence apply not only to all humans among themselves, but also between humans and animals, humans and vegetation and humans and all created things. We must not therefore act on the basis that our acts remain isolated in space or time.

## **Animals**

The Baha'i faith requires kindness to every living creature. Children need to be taught from their earliest days the duty that lies on them to be tender and loving towards all animals. All these creatures are in the process of growing and developing towards perfection, for no creature was created perfect and complete.

## **The Vegetable Kingdom**

The vegetable kingdom, like the animal kingdom, also needs care and attention. Just as the organs and limbs of the human body each contribute to the efficiency of the whole, so also all these parts of creation contribute to the totality of the universe. The vegetable kingdom has its special part to play in this totality. The beauty of the flowers, leaves and trees, the wholesomeness of the fruits, the diversity of colours, forms and shapes – all of these are there with a purpose, and cannot be segregated from humanity. The interrelationship is a vital and ongoing process, and if we act irresponsibly towards these elements we cause harm to ourselves. There is an interdependence and reciprocity of all parts of nature, a truth to which modern civilization is becoming growingly insensitive.

\* \* \*

All the above perspectives as taught in Baha'ism are of importance in the environmental field and strengthen the general principles the world is in search of, for safeguarding the global environment and protecting it from destruction.

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## ENVIRONMENTAL WISDOM CONTAINED IN TRADITIONAL AND CUSTOMARY SYSTEMS

Maurice Strong, General Secretary of the UN conference on environmental Development held in Rio in 1992 has observed in his forward to the Gaia Atlas of First Peoples by Julian Burger:

*“As we awaken our consciousness that humankind and the rest of nature are inseparably linked, we will need to look to the world’s more than 250 million indigenous peoples. They are the guardians of the extensive and fragile ecosystems that are vital to the wellbeing of the planet. Indigenous peoples have evolved over many centuries a judicious balance between their needs and those of nature. The notion of sustainability, now recognized as the framework for our future development, is an integral part of most indigenous cultures.”*

He went on to observe: “The indigenous peoples of the world retain a collective, evolutionary experience and insights which have slipped our grasp. Yet these hold critical lessons for our future.”

All of this traditional wisdom is scarcely known or used by modern law, and international law itself neglects these perspectives to its own cost.

There is a vast number of traditional systems and it is not possible to deal with even a fraction of them, as they would run to hundreds. For the purpose of study four of the best known systems have been selected by way of illustration.

### NATIVE AMERICAN TRADITION

Native American tradition is extremely rich in its appreciation of our duties towards the environment and our position of trusteeship in relation to it. The following are some of the principles that emerge:

#### **Land Cannot Be the Subject of Ownership**

Its underlying philosophy is that every part of the earth has a sanctity of its own and cannot possibly be the subject of human ownership.

Eloquent expression was given to all of this in a letter by Chief Seattle to the President in Washington when the President indicated an intention to purchase land. That letter gives a vivid description of the interconnection between the elements of nature and the human community. The letter gives expression to this in the following terms:

“The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of the earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people.”

### **The Interrelationship between Humanity and Nature**

All of nature is integrally bound into the life of the people and the people themselves. The concept of treating elements of nature as entities distinct from humans is totally foreign to the Native American tradition. In fact, the interrelationship is so deep that Chief Seattle’s letter states: “The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors...Each glossy reflection in the clear waters of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The waters’ murmur is the voice of my father’s father.” Such a close appreciation of the interrelationship between humanity and nature makes it impossible to break this bond without total damage to the human family.

### **Duties towards Children**

Native American tradition is very strong on our duties towards our children. This concept is so strong that the duty extends for several generations. Indeed, there is a very strong tradition that no serious decision concerning the tribe could be taken without considering the interests of seven generations to come. Any decision taken without regard to this minimal period of operation would be a lopsided decision. This would amount to a strong criticism of the way in which decisions are taken in modern society having regard only to short-term advantage as evidenced in results shown in the next few years.

### **The Dependence of Humans on Nature**

A central teaching is that the earth must be considered to be our mother. The mother sustains us and looks after our needs and we must reciprocally sustain our mother and look after her needs. Indeed, as stated in the letter already quoted, “The earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth.”

One of the descriptions of this relationship is “we love this earth as a newborn loves its mother’s heartbeat.”

### **The Interconnectedness of All Things: The Web Concept**

Native tradition speaks of the “web of life” as many other traditions do. Man is merely a strand in that web, and if any hurt or damage is done to the web, that damage is done to oneself. This interconnectedness extends not only to living things, but also to the rivers, the seas, the air, the land, the mountains and valleys. They are all part of a common web.

### **Respect for Nature**

All nature is the creation of God. God designed it, and it is precious to him. To treat it with disrespect is to show disrespect to God. The letter referred to earlier states: “The earth is precious to him [God], and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator.”

### **A Vision of the Future**

Native tradition visualizes also what would result if the principles referred to are not followed. There would be a felling of the forests, and a slaughter of the animals whom we depend on. “What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? Where will the thicket be? Gone! Where will the eagle be? Gone!”

Native tradition visualized a very dismal scenario in the event that its teachings were disregarded. The wisdom of the elders would always warn the tribe against results such as this which would inevitably follow a disregard to the basic duty of valuing and protecting nature.

### **Spirituality in All Living Things**

Native American spirituality saw the presence of spirituality not only in humans but in animals and plants as well. It followed from this that animals, birds, forests and plant life had as much right to existence as human beings, and should not be damaged or destroyed. Spirituality was so much part of traditional Native American belief that people who lack spirituality would be totally divorced from their traditional way of life, for when spirituality is destroyed, materialism takes its place, and materialism destroys both humans and the world they live in.

In fact, Indians sometimes refer to animals as “people” and nature to them was a community of such “people”, with whom they had a contractual relationship. This was the essence of the Native American attitude towards nature (*Ojibway Magazine*.)

### **The Collective Use of Land**

Land, far from being the subject of individual ownership, was always looked upon as existing for the service of all. In the words of Buffalo Tiger (Burger, *The Gaia Atlas of First Peoples*):

*“We Indian people are not supposed to say, ‘This land is mine.’ We only use it. It is the white man who buys land and puts a fence around it. Indians are not supposed to do that, because the land belongs to all Indians; it belongs to God, as you call it. The land is part of our body, and we are part of the land.”*

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## **ANNEX**

### **Wealth of Indigenous American Tradition**

There is an amazing richness of different Native American tradition in relation to the origin of life and the ways in which teachings and instructions have been imparted to human beings as to their relationship to the earth.

The wealth of material that could be so collected will be illustrated by a citation of the traditions of just one group which received international prominence when members of that group, the Hopi people, conveyed a message to the United Nations General Assembly on 12/10/1992. Speaking from the podium of the General Assembly their representative Mr. Thomas Banyacia said

“My name is Banyacia of the Wolf, Fox and Coyote land and I am a member of the Hopi’s sovereign nation. Hopi in our language means peaceful, kind, gentle truthful people. The traditional Hopi follows the spiritual path that was given to us by Massau’u the Great Spirit. We made a sacred covenant to follow his life plan at all times, which includes the responsibility of taking care of this land and life for his divine purpose ... Our goals are not political control, monetary wealth or military power but rather to pray and promote the welfare of all living beings and to preserve the world in a natural way.” The stress on preservation of the land comes out very clearly from this message.

The speaker also recounted how in 1948 Hopi leaders 80, 90 and even 100 years, old explained that the creator made the first world in perfect balance. “People misused their spiritual powers and the world was destroyed by sinking of land and major earth quakes. Only a handful survived. The people of this second world repeated their mistakes and were destroyed by freezing which you call the great ice age. The few survivors entered the third world but gradually turned away from natural laws and pursued only material things and the world was destroyed by the great flood. Those who escaped are now in this fourth world but our world is in terrible shape again even though the Great Spirit told us to take care of the earth and what is in it. This is now the time for us to weigh the choices for our future. The Hopi and all original native people hold the land in balance for all living beings. Nature, the First People and the spirit of our ancestors are giving you loud warnings. It should be the mission of this assembly to use your power and rules to examine and cure the damage people have done to this earth and to each other.”

This statement has been reproduced as it is a telling reminder of the concern of native people for the welfare of the land and of the dangers attendant on neglect of this duty.

### **AFRICAN CUSTOMARY LAW**

African traditional law is now revealing itself as a very comprehensive body of customs and practices, incorporating a number of fundamental principles vital to the human future. Much research is still being done in this field, and views such as Maine’s view that law was an exclusive monopoly of a privileged class are being shown to be the reverse of what really prevailed in society.

Among these principles are the following:

## **The Group Concept**

African society paid much importance to the needs and entitlements to the group as such, rather than the individual. The group might be an extended joint family, a small village unit or a tribe, but it was the group as a whole rather than any individual within the group who were vested with rights. It was the group's obligation to ensure that all the individuals within it were looked after.

In consequence of this concept, grazing rights, hunting rights, fishing rights and alike were regulated on the basis of group entitlement and this concept has much relevance to modern environmental law, where much of the damage done to the environment results from individuals seeking to assert their rights, whatever the cost to the community.

## **Long-term Perspectives**

The groups which ordered the affairs of a community would generally have within them a village elder or a wise man of the tribe, who would advise the group on the long-term perspectives and the long term interests of the tribe, rather than the acquisition of short-term gains. Hence there was constantly a view of the rights of future generations and the need to protect hunting grounds, fishing areas, etc. in such a manner that they were not damaged over the long term. Strict rules were evolved for their protection.

## **The Three-Fold Face of Humanity**

African custom was rich in the ways in which it safeguarded traditions and at the same time preserved the interests of generations yet to come. Archbishop Tutu in several of his public statements has referred to this as the "three-fold face of humanity", as seen in the African tradition – those who went before us, those who are with us here and now and those who are yet to come. If we neglect any one of these categories in taking an important decision relating to the group, the decision that results will not be comprehensive but will be lopsided. This makes it clear that African custom and tradition were integrally linked with the rights of generations yet unborn – a perspective which modern law dramatically lacks.

## **Participatory Decision Making**

Recent researches contradict Maine's view that in the epoch of customary law, the law was an exclusive monopoly of an oligarchy, for African law was not confined to a privileged class. Among the Arusha of Tanzania for example, every lineage and age-group would have its own spokesman or counselor and arbiter in disputes involving this group [F.S Gulliver - *Social Control in an African Society 1913* – page 47 ecseq]. In

African societies, perhaps even more than in most others, there was the ample provision for grassroots opinion to manifest and assert itself (C.G Weeramantry – *Equality and Freedom 1976* – Page 19).

### **The Inter-Connectedness of All Forms of Life**

Africans believe that all forms of life are interconnected; in consequence of which interference with any one may have an impact on the others. As Dr. Abraham Akrong, professor of religion at McCormick religious seminary has pointed out (sourcebook for earth's community of religions by Joel Versluis) has pointed out that Africans believe that life is a complex web of relationships, and that it is the harmony and stability provided by these relationships that create conditions for wellbeing and wholeness.

This world view accords with the concept that humans and the environment are interrelated like a family, in consequence of which damage to the environment is clearly damage to humanity as well.

### **The Continuity of Life**

African tradition emphasizes that ancestors are much more than dead parents of the living. “They are the embodiment of what it means to live the full life...(Abraham Akrong *ibid*).” The same line of reasoning operates to make those who are yet to come not merely individuals living in a distant future, but an integral part of those who are alive, thus forming part of an inter-knit community, past, present and future, which constitutes one entity and cannot be separated. Here again we find reinforcement for the idea that the welfare of future generations are an immediate concern of the present generation. One cannot live a full life without taking account of that part of one's immediate family.

### **Dependence on the Environment**

In African tradition and religion the human being is a dependent creature. Humans did not create the universe, but found an awe-inspiring universe already created for them. Natural events therefore take on a special significance. The Ulu traditional religion of southern African has a notion that natural events such as changes in the clouds, the flowing of rivers, lightening and thunderstorms are all occasions for consciousness of God, and consciousness of our total dependence on the environment which God has created for us. In the words of Lizo Doda Jafta, lecturer at the federal theological seminary in Southern Africa:

“The Zulu notion of God-consciousness...says that God lives in, through and beyond everything and everyone, but that God is most clearly apprehended through those spirits who are always around, below, above and in them... When

the Zulus see the Deity in every place and all the time, they are acknowledging the ubiquitous nature of God as well as their constant sojourn within the realm of the divine presence.”

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## **AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS**

Aboriginal culture, one of the oldest known to mankind, is deeply imbued with a love and respect for nature. Nature was viewed as a living entity which lived and grew with the people, and upon who sickness and death, the people likewise, sickened and died. See generally C. Eggleston, ‘Fear, Favour and Affection’ (1976).

Aboriginal art constantly embodies this theme, showing human beings as linked to Mother Nature with an umbilical cord. If this cord is severed, the child has no means of existence, and would perish.

Aboriginal custom showed a real concern with sustainability, for there are numerous traditions indicating how the land should not be over exploited. One of them is the tradition of the ‘walkabout’, which means that after a tribe has lived on a particular plot of forest for some years, it must move around to other areas so as to allow the used plot to regenerate. Indeed, there was a deep seated tradition in Aboriginal culture that no land should be used by man to the point where it could not replenish itself.

A little known feature of Aboriginal culture is that its concern for upwards of ten or twenty thousand years has been so great that sophisticated irrigation systems were devised by them, which are probably the earliest irrigation systems known on the planet. “There were remarkable Aboriginal water control schemes at Lake Condah, Toolondo and Mount William in south-western Victoria. These were major engineering feats, each involving several kilometers of stones channels connecting swamp and watercourses”

A deep seated concept in Aboriginal culture is the concept of 'dream time'. This concept includes the thought that all objects are living things, and share the same soul or spirit that the Aboriginals share. There is a soul running through all things, including humans, and we are all part of that common entity. That is the 'dream time' to which the spirit of an Aboriginal person returns from, where it will return again through birth, and may even take the form of an animal, plant or rock, for even rocks have a soul.

There could be no stronger expression of respect for nature than to view it as an entity with a spirit of its own. This perhaps links with the concept we find in the bible that "...the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Isaiah 55:12 (NIV)"

Dream time thus is a psychic state which embraces the entirety of the universe, and which extends into the infinite past and the infinite future. The dream time also explains the creation process as one in which ancestor beings created the land's features as we see them today, and later "turned into rocks or trees or a part of the landscape." [Footnote 12 – [www.aboriginalart.com.au/culture/dreamtime2.html](http://www.aboriginalart.com.au/culture/dreamtime2.html)]

Love for land and nature was in aboriginal tradition a very real theme, woven into their lives in a variety of ways. Among these were:

- i) Ceremonies (Corroborees)
- ii) Rituals
- iii) Totems
- iv) Paintings
- v) Storytelling
- vi) Community gatherings
- vii) Dances
- viii) Songs
- ix) Dreams

In short, "the earth is accepted as a member of our family, blood of our blood, bone of our bone." [footnote 17 : Us Mob, (Aboriginal writer) Mudrooroo 1995, pg 47]

Aboriginal identification with the land was so comprehensive that it took in every element of nature in a holistic way, which is probably outstanding in every possible way. This is given beautiful expression in a spiritual song of the Aborigines, which the Aboriginal author Hyllus Maris (1934-86) expressed with great feeling and beauty in her poem 'The Spiritual Song of the Aborigine'.

*I am a child of the Dreamtime People  
Part of this Land, like the gnarled gumtree  
I am the river, softly singing  
Chanting our songs on my way to the sea  
My spirit is the dust-devils*

*Mirages, that dance on the plain  
I'm the snow, the wind and the falling rain  
I'm part of the rocks and the red desert earth  
Red as the blood that flows through my veins  
I am eagles, crow and the snake that glides  
Through the rain-forest that clings to the mountainside  
I awakened here when the earth was new  
There was emu, wombat and kangaroo  
No other man of a different hue  
I am this land  
And this land is me  
I am Australia.*

Here beautifully expressed is a total identification with land, which shows an all-pervading essential spirit which humans share with every element and particle of nature. Aboriginal art is an important source of expression of this concept of oneness of nature, and total dependence on it. In western Arnhem Land, for example, there are rock art images which have been analysed by scholars for their significance; as for example the study by Dr. Christopher Chippindale of Cambridge University and Meredith Wilson of the Australian National University. Over one hundred and seven of these images have been so analysed.

One of the foremost images which encapsulates much of this tradition is the rainbow serpent, which is associated with fertility, abundance, community organization and peace. These paintings first appeared in Arnhem Land rock art more than six thousand years ago, and perhaps even as early as eight thousand years ago, and the tradition has continued without a break, for even as recently as 1965, this image has been painted on rock. It is sometimes thought to be the world's oldest religious image, and it is the symbol of unity with the environment, peaceful cooperation and continuity of tradition. It has been described in the following terms:

*“The belief in the Rainbow Snake, a personification of fertility, increase (richness in propagation of plants and animals) and rain, is common throughout Australia. It is a creator of human beings, having life-giving powers that send conception spirits to all the waterholes. It is responsible for regenerating rains, and also for storms and floods when it acts as an agent of punishment against those who transgress the law or upset it in any way.”*

(Page 47, “Journey in Time”, Reed 1993)

In conclusion, it could be said of Australian Aboriginal tradition that it represents one of the world's oldest belief systems, dating back ten thousand years or more, which is integrally related to many of the aspects relating to nature which are integral to the human future – the unity of humanity, its oneness with nature, its dependence on nature, its continuity through thousands of years of time, the need to protect the future, and the need to preserve all elements of nature with due respect to them as entities in their own

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## **MAORI TRADITIONAL SYSTEM**

The Maori people of Aotearoa (New Zealand) describe themselves as "*Tangata Whenua*" (People of the Land), and throughout their culture great stress is laid on their relationship with the natural environment. The principles on which this relationship is founded are social, cultural and economic, but through them all runs a deep spiritual connection. Maori culture, resulting from centuries of interaction with New Zealand's environment, is an important part of the contemporary culture of New Zealand.

The Maori, having arrived from the Pacific several centuries ago, faced a different set of climatic and environmental conditions in New Zealand. A new landscape, different flora and fauna and new seasonal variations all required a process of adjustment to their new environment, resulting in a society closely linked to the environment.

Maori culture recognized that whereas human acquisitions would never be of a lasting nature, the environment would continue to subsist. Human possessions were ephemeral, whereas the environment was constant. A Maori proverb gave expression to this in terms that "the treasure of land will persist; human possessions will not last." (Brougham)

The conceptual basis of treating the natural environment as the extended family of humans or vice versa is found in the many traditional narratives of the Maori people. The creation narrative tells us that in the beginning there was only darkness. *Ranginui*, the Sky Father had looked upon *Papatuanuku*, the Earth Mother (the primeval parents) and loving her, descended and embraced her. They produced number of children who

included *Tane*, (God of the Forests), *Rongo* (God of Cultivating Food), *Tangaroa* (God of Seas), *Tawhiri* (God of Wind and Storm) and *Tumatauenga* (God of War)

In Maori culture, the linkage between the human groups and the environment was so great that some natural features such as a mountain, a valley, a rock or a lake could be relied on to give a group its source of collective identity. Against that background, those resources needed to be protected. Those resources were referred to as “the treasures that have been passed down” (*Nga tonga tuku iho*). These therefore had to be preserved for future generations.

The concept of *Nga Tonga*, or treasures, covered other forms of assets as well, and included habitats, species and natural resources.

The management of the community assets received careful attention, and community assets embraced environmental, spiritual, political, social, economic and cultural components (*Hua Aina Development Trust 1993, page 118*)

There was a great deal of customary lore regulating practices concerning the environment, and the manner of its conservation and the extent of permitted use. All of these were part of the wise management of resources.

‘*Tikanga*’ was a word that described traditional knowledge, custom, practice and common sense thoughts. Resulting from *Tikanga*, there would be rituals and practices governing such matters as fishing grounds and harvesting. Arising from this knowledge there would be a set of principles (described as *Ritenga*) which cover laws, rules and obligations in relation to the responsibilities and relationships between people and natural resources. There would be a resource management regime which all members of the tribe would have to observe and which struck a balance between the people’s needs and the protection of the environment.

There would also be carefully preserved categories of sacred, dedicated and protected sites and objects (*Tapu*), and there would be special sacred or protected places such as burial grounds or special landscapes which were intensively protected. Violating this protection would be an act of desecration.

A concept developed by Maori culture was the concept of *Rahui*, which was used to restrict access to or use of natural resources for a variety of reasons. Thus there would be *Rahui* preventing the taking of shellfish or preventing fishing for trout or other species or forbidding swimming in contaminated waterways. *Rahui* was a means used by the community to promote sustainable practices and also to protect particular sites and the *Rahui* would be imposed for a period deemed appropriate.

By way of contrast, there were places and objects which were free of restrictions, where, for example, hunting or fishing were freely permitted. It was the wisdom of the community that determined what places and practices were forbidden and what were permitted.

### ***Kaitiakitanga* or Guardianship**

Maori tradition talks not so much in terms of ‘trusteeship’, which could be used as a rather legalistic concept, but in terms of ‘guardianship’, which is more closely related to the duties of protecting children and others who are unable to protect themselves on their own. This notion is very appropriate to environmental management.

The society significantly designated selected persons as vested with the responsibility to protect and guard particular resources, traditions, practices, objects or places that needed protection. This role of protection, or *Kaitiaki*, was entrusted to selected persons or groups in relation to particular objects or places. But there was also a general *Kaitiaki* function imposed on everybody to protect the environment.

*Kaitiakitanga* thus means guardianship, protection, preservation or sheltering or sheltering of the sky, sea and land. This results in one of the best philosophies of prudent environmental management, introducing elements of inter-generational responsibility and an obligation for protection.

In these various ways, traditional Maori society had devised principles and practices for environmental protection which were extremely effective, and which have an important continuing role to play. These practices may also give modern environmental protection some concepts and procedures which may be of value.

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## **MATTERS OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN ALL RELIGIONS AND CULTURES**

### **General Principles**

- Humanity is in a position of trusteeship of the environment and not in a position of ownership or overlordship
- Humans are accountable for their trusteeship and will suffer adverse consequences if they default in their duties
- Humanity is part of the environment and must exist in harmony with it
- In the theistic belief systems the environment is God's creation and must, as such, be respected
- In systems where the environment is not seen as a creation of God, it is nevertheless an integral and sentient part of the world order, entitled to consideration and respect in its own right
- When the environment prospers, humanity prospers with it
- When the environment is damaged, the human community is damaged with it
- Living creatures are not mere objects to be exploited by humans
- All of humanity constitutes one family with common duties towards the environment
- There should be an internal consciousness of the importance of the environment and right vision in regard to this
- Any action damaging the environment inevitably produces adverse repercussions
- Mother Earth, which nourishes and tends humanity, must be respected like a mother

### **Interconnectedness and Interdependence of All Elements in Nature**

- God had an over-arching plan in creating the universe and every part of it was an essential constituent element of the whole

- The entire environment is part of a structure and no part of it can be disturbed without damage to the entirety
- All the elements of nature are integrally interconnected
- Nature is like a spider's web and action in regard to any part of it has inevitable repercussions on the entirety
- Humans may not be able to perceive the reason for every item of matter or life in the universe, but each item has a purpose which is intrinsic to the overall scheme
- All forms of life are interconnected

### **All Objects in Nature Have a Standing of Their Own**

- All things and life forms that exist have a place in the universal scheme.
- Theistic belief systems teach that all creatures have a direct relationship with the Divine and have communities of their own which need to be respected
- The environment and all its components, both sentient and non-sentient, have rights of their own
- All elements of nature have a message for humanity if only one contemplates them

### **Peaceful and Harmonious Relationship with Nature**

- All actions should be avoided which disturb the harmony of humans with the environment
- Non-violence should be practised towards all creatures and towards nature
- Kindness must be shown to all creatures
- All disputes should be peacefully resolved, for violence between humans does violence to nature
- Peace should be preserved not only among humans but also between humans and the environment

### **Earth Resources Belong To All**

- All of humanity is one family inhabiting one planet and resources must be equitably shared
- Assistance should always be given to fellow humans who are in need
- Resources ought not to be appropriated disproportionately by any one individual or group
- Human greed should be restrained
- Unjust enrichment must be avoided
- Extravagance and hoarding are to be discouraged
- Unfair or extravagant use of earth resources is a theft of the rights of others who are entitled to use them whether in the present or in the future

### **Future Generations**

- The present generation should show a deep concern for the welfare of future generations
- The present generation should not pillage earth resources which future generations are entitled to enjoy
- The present generation should not by its conduct transmit an unhealthy environment to future generations
- Pollution of earth, air and water constitutes damage to future generations and must be avoided
- The present generation is a trustee of the environment for future generations
- No major steps should be taken affecting land or resources without considering the interest of future generations
- Future generations have no voice to speak for themselves and the conscience of the present generation needs therefore to keep their welfare constantly in view
- Earth resources were given to be enjoyed by all generations and not merely by any one generation

### **Rejection of False Values**

- The pursuit of false values such as wealth and power must be discouraged as they damage the environment
- Ostentatious and luxurious life styles must be discouraged as they damage the environment
- The pursuit of economic profit should be subject to ethical and environmental restraints
- Science and technology need to be kept within an ethical framework for they are not values in themselves
- Personal attitudes need to be changed so as to generate respect for the environment
- Since ignorance is a major cause of wrong-doing, environmental education must be promoted
- The concept of environmental protection should be internalised into the consciousness of people

### **Conservation of the Environment**

- Special attention should be paid to conservation of resources such as water
- Forests should be preserved and timber should not be felled except for substantial reasons which give benefit to the community
- Lands which are deprived of timber or vegetation should be replanted
- Land should not be neglected but should be well looked after
- Animal life is entitled to special protection and the extinction of species should be prevented
- Waste should be avoided
- There is an obligation imposed on all users of the environment to maintain its cleanliness

### **Sustainable Development**

- Earth resources were given to humans not for this generation or that but for all generations
- A balance should be struck between the needs of development and the concept of sustainability
- Natural resources should be used for the benefit of humanity, but not in such a manner as to damage or affect their availability for future generations
- Undermining the environment can never be justified for the sake of ‘development’
- “Development” which damages the environment is a contradiction in terms

### **Treading Lightly on the Environment**

- There is a duty to tread lightly on the environment
- Forms of livelihood which cause damage to the environment should be discouraged
- Excessive consumption of earth resources should be avoided
- Simple living is to be encouraged
- Waste of all forms is to be avoided
- Any activity causing pollution of earth, air or water should be discouraged
- Activities should be discouraged which deplete stocks of life or vegetation or planetary resources

### **Shifting the emphasis from the individual to the community**

- The individual can only exist as a member of a community sharing a common environment and has duties both to the community and to the environment
- The stress should be on duties rather than rights
- The stress should be on the community rather than the individual

- If the individual performs his or her duties towards the community, his or her rights will fall into place
- Much environmental damage is caused by individuals seeking to assert their rights to the maximum without regard to the resulting effect on the community
- Stress on individual rights results also in stress on the letter of the law rather than the principles underlying the law. Religious teaching discourages this

### **Practical Steps for Environmental Preservation**

- There is a duty imposed upon every element of society from the central government down to each individual to take active steps for protection and preservation of the environment
- Steps should be taken to translate religious teachings regarding the environment into practical terms
- Active steps should be taken to preserve the cleanliness of the environment
- Agencies should be created within the State with responsibilities for protecting and conserving different aspects of the environment
- The environmentally related teachings of the religions should be emphasised and acted upon rather than relegated to the background through the emphasis on moral precepts
- Environmental education on the lines indicated above should be undertaken by every religion

## WAYS IN WHICH THIS INFORMATION CAN BE COMMUNICATED TO THE PUBLIC AT ALL LEVELS

The problem has to be approached on a short-term as well as a long-term basis.

The short-term basis is important as quick results are required. The long-term basis is also important in order to put this approach on a stable footing so that it will be generally accepted in future years.

- A) The short-term basis should include the following:
- a) top level conferences of religious experts drawing together the basic principles on which all religions are agreed;
  - b) top level joint conferences of religious experts and legal experts at which correspondence between the principles agreed on in the religions and the required legal principles is discussed;
  - c) a formulation of these principles in legal terms;
  - d) a declaration that these principles form part of :
    - the general principles of law recognised by nations
    - customary international law
  - e) A series of lectures and public events for purposes of generating greater awareness of this concept
  - f) A possible international declaration (e.g. the Lusaka Declaration) which can be issued as a result of all the above steps
  - g) A possible international declaration to be passed by a UN agency or even by the General Assembly, but with the realisation always that these principles are already law and do not need the declaration to make them law.
- B) The long-term bases include:
- School education
  - Legal education
  - Popular lectures

- Conferences
- Media Campaigns

Environmental ministries and organisations need to set up standing committees to work actively and continuously on these projects.

Organisations like the World Future Council can perhaps provide guidelines for these activities. e.g. For school activities  
For legal education  
For media campaigns

## **INCORPORATION INTO INTERNATIONAL LAW**

The most authoritative formulation of the sources of international law is Article 38(i) of the Statute of the International Court of Justice. It sets out the sources as follows:

### Article 38

1. The Court, whose function is to decide in accordance with International Law such disputes as are submitted to it, shall apply:
  - a. International conventions, whether general or particular, establishing rules expressly recognized by the contesting states;
  - b. International custom, as evidence of a general practice accepted as law;
  - c. The general principles of law recognized by civilised nations;
  - d. Subject to the provisions of Article 59, judicial decisions and the teachings of the most highly qualified publicists of the various nations, as subsidiary means for the determination of rules of law.

Among non lawyers there is a popular understanding that for a rule to become part of international law it should be incorporated in a treaty. Article 38(i) shows that this is far from the truth and that there are other sources of international law which are equally valid and far more extensive. Numerous matters not even approaching the level of incorporation in treaties are already contained in binding international law if it can be shown that they can be brought under one of those other sources.

It should have been pointed out that the process of treaty making is time consuming and very laborious. It takes years of diplomatic effort and eventually not all

states may agree. On the other hand, sources like “general principles of the law required by civilized nations” and “customary international law” are already there, embodying the very rules we are in search of.

The missing factor is the necessary research which will reveal that those principles are universally agreed on. More of the principles contained, for example, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would be the subject of such universal agreement, and this was demonstrated to an unbelieving world when the committee chaired by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt aimed at a set of universally agreed principles, must to the surprise of the scholars of the day who had predicted that such a result was impossible.

Another popular misconception which stands in the way of the task we are attempting is the belief that a principle of international law must be physically enforceable if it is to be binding.

This is an outmoded belief which found its strongest expression in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in the Austinian school of jurisprudence. John Austin and those who followed him believed that law must be enforceable if it is to be considered a law. According to this view, international law was not law because it was not enforceable.

If this view be correct not a single rule of international law is enforceable for it a powerful state is in violation of it, it is totally impossible for the UN community to mount the necessary force to enforce it on the violating state. States have armies at their disposal and the international community or the UN do not have armed forces on a similar scale.

The real authority of international law is not the ability to exact compliance by armed force but its moral authority – the fact that the whole world accepts it as a binding principle. If this is so there is a duty of compliance which even the most peaceful states must respect. No state likes to be seen by the international community as an international law-breaker, and this in the last resort is the way international law achieves obedience. It is almost ridiculous to expect an enforcing mechanism powerful enough to enforce its will on the great powers.

We need to rid the international mindset of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century approach to international law as non-law and to persuade the global public that they have an important role to play in persuading their governments to comply with basic principles which the world of civilized states universally accepts.

This is where our current approach gains special significant, for the basic moral and ethical codes of the vast bulk of the world community have been formed largely on the basis of the teachings of religion. More than five sixths of the world population of 6.8 billions are followers of one or other of the religions or belief systems mentioned in this study, and if it can be demonstrated that a particular principle commands the

allegiance of all those religions, then it indisputably comes within “the general principles of law recognized by civilized nations” and also with “customary international law”.

This study hopes to demonstrate that the basic principles of environmental protection and concern for future generations are contained specifically within the teaching of each and every one of the religions and belief systems surveyed. That being so, they must indubitably form part of international law and we have a set of principles which are an integral part of the international legal system, which all states, however powerful, must respect.

We do not need to enter into the laborious task of embodying them in a treat, which would take years, if not decades of work and would not necessarily be achieved.

Another reason why this particular approach is of immense importance is that time is running out on the task of preserving the global environment. It is already being irretrievably dangers day by day. Species are rendered extinct every day, rainforests are being felled out at the rate of a football field of forest areas every hour. There is no time for the period of years required for a treaty. We need action now and the laws must be set in motion now. The paradox is that the laws are already there and we do not recognized this fact.

The approach set out in this study is, therefore, of vital importance for the survival of humanity. It is not just an idealistic and impractical approach. It is based on the fact that the principles we seek are already their in the real law and this is what we need to make lawyers and the international community realize.

## **INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS (SELECTED PROVISIONS)**

### **A. UN DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE 2007**

The UN Declaration was adopted by a majority of 143 states in favour, 4 votes against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States) and 11 abstentions (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burundi, Colombia, Georgia, Kenya, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Samoa and Ukraine).

#### *Article 5*

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.

#### *Article 9*

Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right to belong to an indigenous community or nation, in accordance with the traditions and customs of the community or nation concerned. No discrimination of any kind may arise from the exercise of such a right.

*Article 11*

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.

*Article 12*

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.

2. States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.

*Article 13*

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

*Article 15*

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.

2. States shall take effective measures, in consultation and cooperation with the indigenous peoples concerned, to combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and to promote tolerance, understanding and good relations among indigenous peoples and all other segments of society.

*Article 29*

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.

2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent.

3. States shall also take effective measures to ensure, as needed, that programmes for monitoring, maintaining and restoring the health of indigenous peoples, as developed and implemented by the peoples affected by such materials, are duly implemented.

#### *Article 31*

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

2. In conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights.

## **B. THE EARTH CHARTER 2000**

### Preamble

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.

### Earth, Our Home

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon 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 with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

## The Global Situation

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 Challenges Ahead

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. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

## Universal Responsibility

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, government

### I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.
2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.
3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.

4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

## II. ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.

6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.

7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.

8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

## III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.

10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.

11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.

12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

## IV. DEMOCRACY, NONVIOLENCE, AND PEACE

13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.

14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.

16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace

## The Way Forward

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Such renewal is the promise of these Earth Charter principles. To fulfill this promise, we must commit ourselves to adopt and promote the values and objectives of the Charter.

This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision. We must deepen and expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom.

Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals. Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership. The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance.

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.

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.

### **C. DECLARATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES AND HUMAN DUTIES 1998**

ADOPTED BY A HIGH-LEVEL GROUP CHAIRED BY RICHARD J. GOLDSTONE  
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE CITY OF VALENCIA AND UNESCO INITIATED  
AND ORGANISED BY THE VALENCIA THIRD MILLENNIUM FOUNDATION

#### **Article 1**

##### *Definition of Duties and Responsibilities*

For the purposes of this Declaration, unless the context indicates otherwise:

- (a) “duty” means an ethical or moral obligation;

(b) “responsibility” means an obligation that is legally binding under existing international law;

(c) “global community” means States - including their governments, legislatures and judicial institutions -, international, regional and sub-regional intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, public and private sector corporations, including transnational corporations, other entities of civil society, peoples, communities and individuals taken as a collective.

## **Article 2**

### *Bearers of Duties and Responsibilities*

1 Members of the global community have collective, as well as individual duties and responsibilities, to promote universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

2 States have a duty and a responsibility to adopt all legislative, administrative, policy and other steps necessary to ensure respect, and to enforce and proactively promote, within their territory or under their jurisdiction, human rights and fundamental freedoms in all circumstances, including situations of armed conflict.

3 States have a further duty to take appropriate action, within the framework of the principles of international law, to promote the implementation of the human rights and freedoms of all humankind in all circumstances, including situations of armed conflict.

4 Competent inter-governmental organisations have a duty, in accordance with their mandates, to promote awareness of and to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms; to monitor compliance by States and other entities with a responsibility to respect and enforce human rights and fundamental freedoms; to assist States in the implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to use advocacy to help enforce human rights and fundamental freedoms.

5 Relevant non-governmental organisations have a duty to respect and promote, as best they are able, awareness of human rights and fundamental freedoms; to monitor compliance by States and other entities; to assist States and inter-governmental organisations in the monitoring and implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and to use advocacy to help enforce human rights and fundamental freedoms.

6 Public and private corporations, especially transnational corporations, have a duty to respect, promote and implement human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres of their activities.

7 As the holders of human rights and fundamental freedoms, all individuals, peoples and communities in the exercise of their rights and freedoms, have the duty and responsibility to respect those of others, and a duty to strive for the promotion and observance thereof.

### **Article 3**

#### *The Duty and Responsibility to Protect Life and Ensure the Survival of Both Present and Future Generations*

1 Members of the global community have collective, as well as individual duties and responsibilities, to take appropriate action to protect the right to life of every member of the human family, and shall ensure the survival of present and future generations - unencumbered by war and violent conflict, gross and systematic human rights violations, extreme poverty, hunger, disease and environmental destruction.

2 States have the primary duty and responsibility to respect and ensure the right to life of all within their territory and under their jurisdiction. In accordance with this duty and responsibility States shall take all necessary measures to prevent the deprivation of life by the State and its officials, and shall take positive and effective measures to protect and enforce the right to life.

3 Individuals and non-State actors have a duty and a responsibility to respect life, and have a duty to take reasonable steps to help others whose lives are threatened, or who are in extreme distress or need.

### **Article 4**

#### *The Duty and Responsibility to Promote Collective Security and a Culture of Peace*

1 Members of the global community have collective, as well as individual duties and responsibilities, to promote a culture of peace by taking appropriate action to prevent war and foster international peace, collective security and co-operation.

2 States have a duty and a responsibility to refrain from acts of war, aggression, the use of force or the threat of force in their international relations in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, and have a duty and a responsibility to promote global security through collective security arrangements and mechanisms established in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

3 Competent inter-governmental organisations have a duty and responsibility to promote conflict prevention and promote peaceful means of resolving inter-State and intra-State conflicts or disputes in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In particular, the Security Council of the United Nations has a duty and a responsibility to set up a standing peacekeeping force as provided for in Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter. Regional and sub-regional entities endowed with the necessary powers should be encouraged to enhance their peacekeeping capabilities and play an active peacekeeping role in their regions.

4 States have a duty to build and/ or enhance mediation, conflict prevention and post-conflict peace-building mechanisms and should contribute to and strengthen local, sub-regional, regional and international conflict resolution and peacekeeping capacities.

5 States, competent inter-governmental organisations, and relevant non-governmental organisations and other entities of civil society have a duty to promote a culture of peace by encouraging people, especially children and young people to establish friendly relations with other peoples, and to educate them in methods for the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

#### **D. UNESCO DECLARATION ON THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CURRENT GENERATIONS TOWARD FUTURE GENERATIONS 1997**

##### Article 1 - Needs and interests of future generations

The present generations have the responsibility of ensuring that the needs and interests of present and future generations are fully safeguarded.

##### Article 2 - Freedom of choice

It is important to make every effort to ensure, with due regard to human rights and fundamental freedoms, that future as well as present generations enjoy full freedom of choice as to their political, economic and social systems and are able to preserve their cultural and religious diversity.

##### Article 3 - Maintenance and perpetuation of humankind

The present generations should strive to ensure the maintenance and perpetuation of humankind with due respect for the dignity of the human person. Consequently, the nature and form of human life must not be undermined in any way whatsoever.

##### Article 4 - Preservation of life on Earth

The present generations have the responsibility to bequeath to future generations an Earth which will not one day be irreversibly damaged by human activity. Each generation inheriting the Earth temporarily should take care to use natural resources reasonably and ensure that life is not prejudiced by harmful modifications of the ecosystems and that scientific and technological progress in all fields does not harm life on Earth.

##### Article 5 - Protection of the environment

1. In order to ensure that future generations benefit from the richness of the Earth's ecosystems, the present generations should strive for sustainable development and preserve living conditions, particularly the quality and integrity of the environment.

2. The present generations should ensure that future generations are not exposed to pollution which may endanger their health or their existence itself.
3. The present generations should preserve for future generations natural resources necessary for sustaining human life and for its development.
4. The present generations should take into account possible consequences for future generations of major projects before these are carried out.

#### Article 6 - Human genome and biodiversity

The human genome, in full respect of the dignity of the human person and human rights, must be protected and biodiversity safeguarded. Scientific and technological progress should not in any way impair or compromise the preservation of the human and other species.

2. In view of UNESCO's ethical mission, the Organization is requested to disseminate the present Declaration as widely as possible, and to undertake all necessary steps in its fields of competence to raise public awareness concerning the ideals enshrined therein.

#### OTHER DOCUMENTS

*(Set out in **Tread Lightly on the Earth: Religions, the Environment and the Human Future**, by the Author - A Report made to the World Future Council 2009)*

- a) **The Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics of Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople – 2002**
- b) **The Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in 2000**
- c) **United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) issued a book stressing the interconnectedness of religious and environmental concerns 2000**
- d) **Statement by the Union of Concerned Scientists issued a World Scientists' Warning to Humanity 1992**
- e) **A Joint Appeal for Preserving and Cherishing the Earth, issued by a Religious Partnership for the Environment at a Global Forum Meeting in Moscow 1990**
- f) **The Assisi Conference and the Assisi Declarations 1986**

**g) The World Charter for Nature 1982** (G.A. Res. 37/7, 28 October 1982)

This document is of particular importance because for the first time in history it was a Universal document pronouncing every form of life to be unique regardless of its worth to man and stressed also the need for a moral code of action in this area.

**h) The Resolution on the Historical Responsibility of States for the Preservation of Nature for the Present and Future Generations** (G.A. Res. 35/8, 30th October 1980)