

## **Earth Charter To Set Standard on Environmental Awareness**

### **By FLETCHER DALTON**

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In 1957, Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, appealed to the membership, specifically the youth division, to disseminate the idea that nuclear weapons should be abolished. Seizing upon this idea to re-route the direction of history, the youth division overwhelmingly responded.

Now, 40 years later, SGI President Ikeda, in his 1997 peace proposal, declares a need to protect the Earth from environmental desecration through respect for human rights, sustainable living and economic equity.

“A task I would like to propose,” he writes, “is a grass-roots endeavor that lays down a new set of principles, what can be called an Earth Charter, that will provide a clear vision for the third millennium.”

Actually, efforts to create an Earth Charter have been under way around the world for at least a decade. In 1994 a major step was taken when Maurice Strong, chairman of the Earth Council, and Mikhail Gorbachev, president of Green Cross International, decided that the final year of the 20th century, 2000, would be a prime time to submit an Earth Charter to the United Nations. Mr. Strong and Mr. Gorbachev are co-chairs of the Earth Charter Commission.

“All we want to achieve by working on the Earth Charter is to show all peoples of the world, politicians and business circles, that we have only one option,” Mr. Gorbachev said in Rio de Janeiro earlier this year. “That is to live within the demands of nature. We must do everything we can to be worthy of our time, to prove that we are a mature society, able to assess our situation and act wisely and responsibly in the interests of the present and the future.”

Advocates hope that, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United Nations adopted in 1948, the Earth Charter will become an international standard of thought and conduct. The draft itself includes a preamble and 18 principles on environmental conservation and sustainable living (please see box, p. 4).

From now through March 1998, the Earth Charter Commission is actively seeking input on the draft from people and organizations around the world. In his peace proposal, the SGI president asked for the Boston Research Center’s help in developing the charter, and the center has so far responded with an Earth Charter Consultation on June 14. During two plenary sessions and two small group discussions, attendees discussed the draft at length (please see story below).

Plans are also under way to hold consultation meetings sponsored by the SGI-USA, with times and locations still to be determined.

“Just as wide scale destruction of the Earth’s living systems appears irreversible and hopelessness prevails among the most knowledgeable environmentalists, the Earth Charter emerges as a wake-up call to grass-roots movements like the SGI,” says Virginia Straus, executive director of the Boston Research Center. “The consultation process provides a rare opportunity for globally minded citizens to take back responsibility for protecting the Earth by forging principles to govern human–Earth relations, living by these principles, and insisting that corporations and governments live by them, too.”

Al Albergate, SGI-USA Community Relations director, makes it clear that the SGI-USA affirms the idea of an Earth Charter but is not out to defend or promote the language of this particular draft. SGI-USA’s purpose is to help in the consultation process by gathering widespread opinions about it. “This is a great chance to not only take part in the review ourselves but to interact with members of the community,” Mr. Albergate said.

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