

Charter Critique
By FLETCHER DALTON, Bureau Chief
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The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century gets citizens involved in reviewing language of proposed Earth Charter.

“I think this is the most wonderful thing I’ve ever done,” said a woman during the lunch break at the Earth Charter consultation at the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century today.

“To think,” said her companion, “that our reading, pondering and assessing this Earth Charter Benchmark Draft will affect how people regard and treat the Earth during the next century gives me a lot of hope.”

The consultation attracted nearly a hundred people, including university students, persons from business and religious communities, ecologists and others interested in having a say in restoring a reverence for the Earth.

At the first of the two plenary sessions, the facilitators, Carol Zinn and Eileen Gannon of Global Education Associates, told the audience that the meeting would provide a “double learning experience.”

The first experience is participation in the consultation process itself. The second is in leaving the meeting “confident enough to hold consultations on the Earth Charter Benchmark Draft within your own personal networks.”

Many of today’s participants first heard of the charter during the Boston Research Center’s “Religion and Ecology” series held earlier this year. Steven Rockefeller, a professor of religion at Middlebury College, presented an early draft of the charter before leaving for an international ecology conference in Rio de Janeiro. Called Rio+5, the conference was the five-year progress review of the 1992 Earth Summit. Professor Rockefeller is charged with the responsibility of gathering input on the Earth Charter Benchmark Draft from the world’s religious organizations.

Between the two plenary sessions, there were small-group discussions on the language and intent of the draft. At the end of the day, the groups made reports and suggestions, ranging from clarification of terms to a need to “reach the heart of humanity,” to “acknowledge power differentials and differences in vulnerability.”

The charter was described by some as “an invitation to raise people’s consciousness” and by others as “a moral, visionary statement that we can work from.”

Some of the comments reflected individual writing styles. “Too long,” was one person’s assessment. “I want these principles so easy to understand that sixth graders will be able to memorize them.”

“The language is not sufficiently elegant,” a student said. “It should have the tone and depth of the Declaration of Independence.”

“Forget the semantics,” another responded. “I’m concerned that it reflect third-world priorities and be sensitive and clear enough to reach indigenous peoples in every country.”

And so it went. At the end of the consultation, however, there was a sense of hard work dutifully done and a deeper realization of the importance of creating a code of conduct for future generations who will inhabit the Earth.

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