

**EARTH CHARTER ACTIVITY HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
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SGI members, in tandem with the local Bahai community and members of the United Nations Association (UNA-USA), sponsored a very successful Earth Charter Dialogue Day on the campus of the University of Florida.

This activity was the culmination of almost a year of efforts spearheaded by the diligent efforts of the Jacksonville, Fla., men's division members. Monthly meetings were held to work out plans, find speakers, train facilitators, design and produce the participants' handout, and coordinate location of a facility. This meant traveling regularly to either Jacksonville or the Gainesville area, roughly a 90-mile distance. As we got closer to the event, other members caught our momentum and joined in to help.

The day of the event began with an early morning arrival at the facility to finalize our work with the last of the finishing touches. Some more last-minute flyers were put up. A reception area was set up for welcoming our many guests with nametags and programs. The stage equipment was set up and everything was in place. The chorus rehearsed their part in another area. Everything checked out. Soon it was time.

We organized our activity by leading off with two speakers, followed by a discussion period. After enjoying lunch, two more speakers offered presentations and then another discussion session. The sessions were organized as forums to more specifically examine the Earth Charter's elements and to submit individual ideas for consideration toward its final draft on a form designed just for that purpose. The children who attended were entertained by recycling enthusiast Imani Ayobunmi. The youth members hosted a Victory Over Violence Display, which was visible to all the guests in the lobby. And the chorus entertained us first with Don Besig's "Flying Free" and "Children of the World" by Karl Anthony later in the afternoon.

The two emcees then opened the meeting by welcoming the many SGI members, guests and attendees from the university and local area. "The concerns of the environment have been represented and expressed by both individuals and groups for a long time now.... We hope that the Earth Charter will develop as a set of principles and values agreeable to and supported by society as a whole that will help us sustain human life on this planet."

The speakers were sought and chosen for a wide and balanced array of issues and interests. Reverend Zack Lyde, with his talk on "Threatened People, Threatened Land," challenged listeners to support people suffering from the consequences of toxic waste dumps and to question the legitimacy of prison labor. His organization, Save Our People, Inc., challenged the construction of a five-lane highway in Brunswick, Ga. When the project seemed unstoppable, an environmental assessment revealed very serious health hazards in the area. Dr. Alex Green oversees the university's Clean Combustion Technology Laboratory and is an advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Energy. He described U.S. energy sources and their resulting pollution. He recognized room for a modest but important increase in biomass (wood and plant matter) as an energy source. Mr. Steve Kintner of the Volusia County (Daytona) Environmental Management spoke on balancing the needs of the environment with those of commercial growth. He offered creative ideas toward regulating the development of wetlands and scrub lands so that natural habitats could be conserved. And Dr. Gary Hankins, vice-chair of the Badi Environmental Consultation Network, treated listeners to a multimedia presentation on the scientific and

spiritual underpinnings of the Earth Charter. Our final speaker discussed the concept of an “ecological footprint” or the amount of land needed to sustain a population.

Our event concluded with a final session in the auditorium where everyone reviewed the day’s activities and congratulated all the participants. Among other things, we saw this as a starting point — an opportunity to learn about the Earth Charter and the process to make it reality, the importance of sharing its mission with more people, and how the participants could sponsor similar activities.

The event was separately recognized with official proclamations by both the City of Gainesville and the County of Alachua. It also gained local press coverage on two occasions in the *Gainesville Sun*.

We all went home encouraged and fulfilled!