

EARTH'S CODE OF CONDUCT:

An Overview by the EARTH VALUES CAUCUS

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A. CALL FOR EARTH VALUES

The EARTH VALUES CAUCUS (EVC) was founded to insert Earth values into the preparations and documents for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

Beginning in 2001 at PrepCom I, EVC gathered members and shaped its agenda to make a contribution to the on-going debate regarding sustainable development and the need for a profound change in global attitudes, policies and actions.

An early task was to explore the many statements and directives in a variety of UN and WSSD-related documents that addressed the need for a new set of values for today's world.

This repeated message gave purpose and momentum to the Caucus' work.*

B. DESTRUCTIVE ASSUMPTIONS OF PRESENT GLOBAL ACTIVITY.

All the great world Religions profess a set of values that its followers embrace and strive to put into practice. These values have made a tremendous contribution to the human journey and continue to shape the human/humane quest for a just and peaceful world.

And yet, in terms of effecting a compassionate relationship between the human community and the other-than-human components of Planet Earth, little progress is evident.

On every front, Earth's life-support systems are distressed to an alarming degree and species are being annihilated at an unprecedented rate. Seemingly, present ethical codes are unable to halt this human aggressive march. [Values of many Indigenous Peoples are an exception to this statement.]

In trying to better understand what lies at the base of this continued attack on the natural world, the Earth Values Caucus has explored and identified some basic ^ and destructive ^ assumptions that seem to be operative and increasingly problematic in our global culture.

They include the following :

1. Human beings are a privileged species separate from all others in the natural world.
2. Humans are superior beings and in control of Earth's processes.
3. Earth is merely a collection of "resources" meant for human use (and abuse!).
4. Other components of Earth have no intrinsic value and are not essential for the well-being of the Planet.

5. The variety, exquisite design and interplay of Earth's species make no essential contribution that cannot be altered or improved upon by human ingenuity and technology.

These assumptions...and no doubt, others... operate at a subconscious level and, for the most part, activities based on them do not raise any ethical questions for us. In fact, because they are working assumptions, most people do not even „see” them or question them.

C. EARTH'S CODE OF CONDUCT

For the EARTH VALUES CAUCUS, however, it is precisely these assumptions that give rise to many of our questions and would seem to account for much of the destruction presently undermining Earth's well-being and vitality.

Therefore, it is urgent that we explore other possibilities and open our minds to guidance from another source, EARTH ITSELF.

The EVC has turned to Earth to explore its values or modes of operation, Earth's own “code of conduct” based on a wisdom that has operated successfully over billions of years to create, maintain and support a viable planet.

We highlight the following:

1. Each component of the Earth community has intrinsic value, can claim its own worth. No outside power or source bestows value on another.
2. Each component plays an essential role in maintaining the well-being of the whole even though the contribution of each component is not understood by all other members.
3. Diversity is an essential dimension of Earth life and history. No two expressions are the same nor do they have identical functions; each component manifests its singularity.
4. Interdependence among all Earth's species demonstrates the unique relationship each component has with every other in the full community of life.
5. Co-operation is a far more influential pattern than competition for long-term viability, an ancient pattern for Earth life to flourish over time.
6. Earth embodies billions of years of “organic growth” based on the natural cycles of day and night, of seasonal activities, of rest and renewed energy, of new life rising from change, chaos and death.

D. GUIDELINES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

These manifestations of Earth's wisdom, its "code of conduct," offer powerful guidance for our own deliberations for WSSD.

For example:

1. Since each component of the Earth community has value in and of itself, then it is incumbent that we humans respect this intrinsic worth and cease to look upon the rest of creation as a "resource" at our disposal.

2. Since each member of the Earth community makes its own essential contribution then any action on our part must proceed cautiously in order not to minimize or destroy that contribution for the good of the whole.
3. Since Earth in all its diversity assures the viability of the planet, then any actions to diminish bio-diversity and move toward mono-cultures go against Earth's own time-tested pattern.
4. Since interdependence manifests itself in countless ways and demonstrates its necessity for Earth's well-being, then to act in a manner that ignores our dependence on the rest of the life community cannot be a viable option.
5. Since cooperation has ensured Earth's vitality over time, it is counter-productive to accept a paradigm based extensively on competition.
6. Since Earth's cycle is one of "organic growth", of rhythmic rest to restore energy, of decay to bring forth life, then to defy that pattern by forcing growth in plants or animals, by allowing no time or season of respite, is to ignore Earth's wisdom and risk harming ourselves and the planet's life-support system.

E. CONCLUSION

The EVC believes that many people are already sympathetic to the above critique and readily recognize Earth's wisdom.

We struggle, however, to find adequate language to express this new consciousness and incorporate it into daily life.

In addition, we must find ways to bring Earth values and language into the policy formulations and partnership practices that will shape the future of sustainable development.

The very definition of sustainable development rests on peoples and governments assuring three integrated policy directions: ecological integrity, social development and a just economic system.

If any one of these three components is missing, the result is NOT SUSTAINABLE into the future. It is not sustainable development.

This realization, this new definition of development, was the genius of the RIO EARTH SUMMIT; it remains the challenge, the splendid opportunity, for the JOHANNESBURG WORLD SUMMIT.

The primary work of PrepCom III, therefore, is two-fold:

1. To formulate policies that INTEGRATE Earth values, social equity, and just economics in order to bring about true sustainable development, and
2. To incorporate all concerned parties in decision-making processes to IMPLEMENT these policies and practices.

The MAGNITUDE of the task and the URGENCY of our times give us no choice but to pursue this work with energy and vision. The EARTH VALUES CAUCUS stands ready and eager to make its contribution.

* Among the many statements and directives in a variety of UN and WSSD-related documents that addressed the need for a new set of values for today's world, the EVC wishes to highlight the following:

1. Chairman's Working Paper to be used for discussion during PrepCom II:

„Advance formal and informal education and awareness related to sustainable development, in order to catalyze the VALUE shift necessary to bring about behavioural change”

2. Implementing Agenda 21, Report of the Secretary General, E/CN.17/2002/PC.2/7, for PrepCom II, 28 January-8 February 2002, para. #77:

"Education at all levels is a key to sustainable development. Education should provide students with the skills, perspectives, VALUES, and knowledge to live sustainably in their communities."

3. Education and public awareness for sustainable development, Report of the Secretary General, 30 April-2 May 2001, at PrepCom I, quoting the Jomtien Framework for Action Target #6:

"Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and VALUES required for better living and sound and sustainable development...with effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural change."

4. Preliminary Views of the EU: List of Issues and Proposals for Discussion at PrepCom II, 5 February 2002 - C. Changing Unsustainable Patterns of Consumption/Production:

b) "promotion of consumer awareness of sustainable consumption patterns by, *inter alia*, discussions of VALUES AND LIFESTYLES, education and better availability of environmental information."

5. United Nations Millennium Declaration, 15 September 2000:

"We consider certain FUNDAMENTAL VALUES to be essential to international relations in the 21st century." (Freedom, Equality, Solidarity, Tolerance, Respect for Nature, Shared Responsibility)

Earth Values Caucus, April 2, 2002.
JBlewett@Juno.com - Contact address