

The Hague Principles for a Universal Declaration on Human Responsibilities and Earth Trusteeship

1. Background

On 10 December 2018, the world celebrates the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. The Universal Declaration and subsequent human rights covenants are treasured as precious manifestations of the human spirit. The recognition of equal and unalienable rights of all human beings is an indispensable prerequisite for achieving just and sustainable societies. Our globalized world, however, brings new challenges to this prospect. We all belong to the community of life, the Earth community, which determines what rights and responsibilities we must recognize and honour for each other, for future generations, for all living beings and the Earth, our home.

The Earth community is in grave danger. Over the last 70 years the human population has tripled and disparities in economic wealth have greatly increased. Moreover, overall consumption of Earth's natural resources by humans has grown at such a rate that the entire Earth system with its interconnected components - the geosphere, the hydrosphere, the atmosphere, and the biosphere - are all now at risk. In this way, humanity is threatening the very living conditions that make the enjoyment of civil, political, cultural and economic rights possible in the first place. Human rights must therefore include responsibilities for the Earth community and the entire Earth system. These imply obligations and new opportunities for all human beings to act as Earth trustees.

In the course of the last 70 years, people and organisations in many countries and cultures have called for the recognition of human responsibilities. There are numerous declarations of duties, obligations and responsibilities that are acknowledged and celebrated, including those listed in the Annex hereto. Drawing on these declarations and aware of the challenges that humanity and Earth as a whole are now facing, it is urgently necessary to supplement these instruments with new ones that formally recognise the human responsibilities that exist towards the Earth community and the Earth system. Human beings must therefore act as Earth trustees individually and collectively through new arrangements of Earth trusteeship at all levels.

We, members of global civil society and representatives of organisations involved with the creation of the documents listed in the Annex, have come together in The Hague, on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to reaffirm our common course and declare our responsibilities as trustees for Earth. We celebrate and embrace the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, at the same time, call upon all peoples, the United Nations, and the international community of states, not only to reaffirm their responsibilities for human rights, but also to recognise their responsibilities to the Earth community and the Earth system, and to adopt Earth trusteeship as an active and all-encompassing way forward.

2. Principles for a Universal Declaration on Human Responsibilities and Earth Trusteeship

We, citizens of nation-states, actors in the world economy and members of global civil society,

Acknowledging that well-being of human beings, our lives, and our survival as a species and as individuals depend on the health and well-being of other beings and ecosystems,

Noting that consumerist society and competitive nationalism repeatedly inflicts unbearable injuries to Nature, leading to catastrophic climate change, unprecedented biodiversity loss, and eventual disintegration of the Earth system,

Recognizing that disintegration and collapse of ecological systems force numerous people to leave their homelands, creating political and economic instability that may lead to conflict and upheaval in many parts of the world,

Considering that the totality of beings and ecosystems on Earth forms a community of life (the 'Earth community'),

Realizing that just as human beings have rights that suit their needs, other beings have the right to exist and flourish according to their specific needs, and that these rights have their source in being part of the Earth community,

Understanding that a new, more mindful and appropriate relationship with Earth and Nature is necessary for the flourishing of all beings,

Confident that inspired common effort and dedicated collaboration between political, economic and cultural transformation movements can ultimately result in adequate responses to the challenges of the 21st century,

HEREBY DECLARE that we have agreed on the following principles as a guide for drawing up a Universal Declaration on Human Responsibilities and Earth Trusteeship:

Principle 1 Responsibilities for Earth

1.1. All human beings, individually and collectively, share responsibility to protect Nature, of which we are an integral part, the integrity of Earth's ecological systems and Earth as a whole, home of all living beings.

1.2. Each state individually, and the international community of states collectively, acknowledge that they have, and share, responsibilities for Nature, in cooperation and in alliance with their citizens as equal trustees of Earth and the integrity of Earth's ecological systems.

Principle 2 Responsibilities within the Community of Life

2.1. Human rights are grounded in our membership within the community of life, the Earth community, which qualifies what rights we are called on to honor and what responsibilities we have for each other and for Nature.

2.2. Responsibilities for Nature, the Earth community and rights of Nature are grounded in the intrinsic values of nature and of all living beings.

Principle 3 Responsibilities for Human Rights

3.1. All human beings are responsible for the protection of human rights and for affirming human rights in their ways of thinking and acting.

3.2. Each state has a prime responsibility for the protection of human rights as a trustee of its citizens and all human beings.

WE CALL UPON the United Nations to initiate a process of consultation, negotiation and eventual adoption of a Universal Declaration on Human Responsibilities and Earth Trusteeship based on these principles.

Annex - Documents referred to in the Hague Principles:

1948 American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man

<http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/mandate/Basics/declaration.asp>

1982 IUCN/UNEP/WWF World Charter for Nature

<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/37/a37r007.htm>

1990 IUCN/UNEP/WWF Caring for the Earth

<https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/cfe-003.pdf>

1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development

<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm>

1997 InterAction Council Declaration on Human Responsibilities

<https://www.interactioncouncil.org/publications/universal-declaration-human-responsibilities>

1998 Declaration on Human Duties and Responsibilities (“Valencia Declaration”)

<http://globalization.icaap.org/content/v2.2/declare.html>

2000 Earth Charter

<http://earthcharter.org/virtual-library2/the-earth-charter-text/>

2000 United Nations Millennium Declaration

<https://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

2000 United Nations Global Compact

<https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>

2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

2010 Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth

<http://www.rightsofmotherearth.com/declaration-of-the-rights-of-mother-earth>

2015 (5th ed.) IUCN Draft Covenant on Environment and Development

<https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/EPLP-031-rev4.pdf>

2015 Oslo Principles on Global Climate Change Obligations

<https://globaljustice.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/OsloPrinciples.pdf>

2016 IUCN World Declaration on the Environmental Rule of Law

https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/content/documents/world_declaration_on_the_environmental_rule_of_law_final_2017-3-17.pdf

2016-2018 Project on the Rights of Mother Earth and the Duties of Human Beings

<http://files.harmonywithnatureun.org/uploads/upload722.pdf>

2017 Proposal for a Universal Declaration of Responsibility in an Interdependent World

http://www.alliance-respons.net/IMG/pdf/eng_udir_decl_interdependence_responsibility17.pdf

2017 Draft Global Pact for the Environment

<http://pactenvironment.org/aboutpactenvironment/the-project/>