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First face-to-face meeting of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative

After five years of online collaboration to promote the Earth Charter, members of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative (ECYI) came together in their first face-to-face meeting at the Hotel Arena in Amsterdam on November 5 and 6, two days prior to the Earth Charter +5 conference.

Created in 2000, the ECYI functions as an online-based network of youth organizations and young individuals who actively promote the Earth Charter and strive to bring its vision to life in their local and national communities.

The youth conference brought together about 30 international ECYI leaders from every region of the world that mostly knew each other as names and e-mail addresses. "When I was asked to give the opening address, it felt awkward to actually use my real voice instead of the computer keyboard to welcome all those friends who I have been communicating with for several years", said volunteer ECYI coordinator Michael Slaby, of the meeting that served as a community-building event and gave the youth leaders the chance to strengthen their network.

Discussions over the two-day conference included sharing experiences with promoting the Earth Charter at the grassroots, national and international levels, assessing the past achievements of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative, and discussing the future of the ECYI. On Nov. 6, Kim Citton (Canada) led delegates in some Yoga warm-up exercises that incorporated the Earth Charter. Existing and new friendships were strengthened, leading to a stronger base to promote building a peaceful and sustainable future with the Earth Charter.

Given the time, resources and the opportunity, young people have the ability to take forward the sustainable development agenda...It is my solid hope that the Earth Charter will continue to inspire young people in the quest for sustainable development, especially during the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014, for this is the generation that absolutely cannot afford to fail. ~ Philip Osano, Kenya

Excerpt from his essay in “The Earth Charter in Action: Toward a Sustainable World,” p.109
Assessing the achievements of the ECYI

On Saturday November 5, participants came together to share the history of the ECYI, its successes and challenges, and debated the key points about how the ECYI should proceed as the Earth Charter Initiative moves into a new phase of international activity.

The discussions were based on the results of an online-conference, which was conducted during the month of October.

As achievements of the ECYI the participants identified their successes in:

1) Developing tools and resources for young people on how to create local action based on the principles of the Earth Charter.

2) Promoting the adoption and inclusion of the Earth Charter in the Declarations and Action Plans of several youth conferences such as the UNEP Global Youth Forum in 2002 or the final declaration of the Youth Caucus of the World Summit on Sustainable Development

3) Bringing ECYI members from developing countries into the Third Chamber of Dutch Development NGOs.

4) Promoting the Earth Charter online through email, the Earth Charter website and other partner sites dedicated to youth development and sustainable development including takingitglobal.org, earthyouth.net, and youthemploymentsummit.org.

5) Creating an e-mail network of youth organizations and individuals from about 35 countries

6) Encouraging the creation of local and national Earth Charter Youth Groups in 10 countries since April 2003.

ECYI film debuts at ECYI Meeting

A highlight from the ECYI meeting was added at the EC + 5 conference itself. In preparation of the Conference, NCDO produced the film "The Wonderful World" in collaboration with the youth-led media company Lokaal Mondial.

The film documents several local projects within the network of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative, from the Philippines to Sierra Leone, and gives an outline of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative's basic aims and aspirations.

Meeting with Representatives of Dutch Youth Organizations

On Sunday, November 6, the ECYI leaders introduced the Earth Charter to 20 Dutch youth, all of which were members of various development organizations. After watching the film "The Wonderful World," participants engaged in an interactive theatre workshop led by Mike Sheehan of British Columbia, Canada.
The participants were later split into small-groups to answer the questions of:

1) What value the Earth Charter would add to their work,

2) How this added value could be translated into actions

3) How to make the Earth Charter tangible in their local communities, and

4) How to work together internationally.

The reactions were very positive as the discussions fostered some inspiring results, which can be found in the appendix of this report. Several participants declared their eagerness to introduce the Earth Charter to their organizations and decided to stay connected via the Internet.

A summary of the results from the discussions is available on page 8 of this report.

**Youth and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

On Nov 6, Melanie Ashton (Australia) and Robert Sagun (The Philippines) shared with the ECYI members and participating Dutch youth the "Youth and the MDGs: Challenges and Opportunities for Implementation" Report - a global stocktaking report on the concrete contributions of youth around the world to the achievement of the MDGs as well as policy-oriented and action-focused recommendations to strengthen youth engagement at the global and national MDG processes. The panel presentation provided a platform for ECYI members to link the Earth Charter to the MDGs and the UN Decade of Education on Sustainable Development.

Our involvement in the Earth Charter Youth Initiative made us realize that we are not alone in striving to make our world a better place. ~ Khyn Yap, Philippines

*Excerpt from his essay in “The Earth Charter in Action: Toward a Sustainable World,” p.69*
In each of the seven thematic sessions, members of the ECYI shared the views, ideas and aspirations of the next generation.

ECYI representative Hamza Alamoosh participated in a side-event organized by COS Netherlands and presented the work of the Black Iris Earth Charter Youth Group in Jordan.

Hamza Alamoosh (Jordan), Camila Godinho (Brazil) and Robert Sagun (The Philippines) were invited to join an exclusive dinner and informally interact with some of the EC Commissioners on November 7.

During the plenary opening session on Tuesday, November 8, Mélanie Ashton participated in the panel discussion on "The Earth Charter in the global transition to sustainability" which was chaired by Ruud Lubbers. Mélanie summed up the results of our youth meeting.

Also during Tuesday’s plenary session, Mike Sheehan (Canada) led conference delegates in an interactive session prior to the announcement of the winners of the Earth Charter Maximo T. Kalaw, Jr. Award.

On Wednesday, Nov. 9, Dumisani Nyoni from Zimbabwe participated in a Panel on the Earth Charter as a tool for promoting economic and social justice and especially highlighted the need for creating sustainable livelihoods for young people in developing countries and how the Earth Charter can bring a fresh vision into these efforts.

Just before HRH Queen Beatrix arrived, Dumisani granted Michael Slaby an honorary youth award for his online coordination of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative during the last two and a half years.

At the closing plenary, Michael gave a keynote address on the need to further involve young people in the third phase of the Initiative.

Philip Osano from Kenya presented the book "Toward a Sustainable World - The Earth Charter in Action" with Earth Charter co-chair Maurice Strong.

The audience awarded both speakers with ovations for their speeches.

Photos of the ECYI meeting and of the conference can be viewed online at www.flickr.com/photos/richardchu.
Events in the five years since the launching of the ECYI have confirmed youths’ interest in establishing a sound, ethical foundation for the emerging global society...The more we young people work together, the more ripples of change created around the world will unite into a wave of hope. ~ Michael Slaby, Germany.

*Excerpt from his essay in “The Earth Charter in Action: Toward a Sustainable World,” p.114*
Youth Reflections of the Earth Charter +5 Conference

Liu Yang, China:
"Sooooo glad to meet all the ECYI members at Earth Charter+5. I was deeply impressed by the youth performance at the meeting, and have been very much enlightened by all the Earth Charter youths and their creativity. Lucky enough that I could be involved in this group, and so wonderful that Chinese youths would now get the chance to connect with and even join ECYI.

I am preparing a workshop to introduce the Earth Charter and the Earth Charter Youth Initiative to Chinese college green group students at Chengdu City, in a western province of China. Of course I will also try to use other ways to disseminate the information to extensive number of Chinese youths."

Namir H. Nava, Mexico:
"I'm so glad to hear your feelings coming back from our countries. I do agree with all you guys that this was a very important and historic meeting to all the youth that are promoting the EC. By this time I had a meeting with Mateo Castillo (Focal point in Mexico) and I talked about our projects to the next year with youth initiative in Mexico. I will be telling you the results of each event. Tomorrow I'll be in Aguascalientes (located in the centre of Mexico) in an event with young people from the entire region that are promoting environmental issues. That would be a chance to begin the Mexican net with the EC. Also I'll contact youth from the north and south region of my country."

Didier Gleyzes, France:
"I learnt that any "enlightenment" can only come with love and faith in you and what you do.

So many energy around me during this event finally entered into my heart, and the more you have energy into you the more you need to use it in a responsible way. I will never dream to lead the "sheeps", but only to help them (if they want) to go their own way and to live happy, and I will always lead my own "ship". I understood more how dual the world is and how sereignity and understanding are the key to struggle against some Bush, some Laden, some Sarkozy, in one word, against the industry of blood and fear.

One for all, all for one; you have to be a grass snake, when needed a viper, but never a cobra, let's reconcile Rousseau (the social contract) and Hobbes (human is a wolf for human); ... in brief let's try to achieve physical peace, and live in an eternal moral struggle of dialogue."

Robert Sagun, The Philippines:
"The ECYI meeting and Earth Charter+5 Summit was a wonderful opportunity to re-energize the global Earth Charter movement amidst recent international social, economic, political and environmental dilemmas.

The Earth Charter remains a significant ethical and philosophical framework whereby the peoples of the world must progressively embrace and act upon. It is high time that we start walking our talk!"

Hernando Bacosa, The Philippines, currently studying in Japan:
"I don't really know in what way I shall express my utmost thanks to all of you guys. Indeed, I am so grateful to everyone. It was my first time to get involved with youth from different countries and to participate in a lively and truly dynamic discussion.

Back here in Japan, I already made some discussions with other delegates from Japan about the Japanese youth involvement with the EC. The day I arrived in Tokyo, I made an appointment with Mr. Takeuchi of IGES and perhaps to link also with the office of Madam Hironaka of the Japanese Parliament.

For the upcoming 5 years, I will try my very best to contribute in any way I can. Being a graduate student of a Japanese university indeed takes much time specially in my highly technical chosen field. I hope I can find free time to interact with interested youth during my free time.

I wish everybody is happy wherever you are in our beautiful Earth."
Youth Reflections of the Earth Charter +5 Conference

Melanie Ashton, Australia:
"It's hard to believe it's all over and we're back home! It was fantastic to meet everyone and very hard to say goodbye. The week was certainly an inspiring one and thanks everyone for contributing to such an awesome experience."

Michael Cox, USA:
"The EC +5 event was profoundly inspiring for both Crystal Durham and myself and we are grateful that we had a chance to participate in what I believe will be looked back on as a historic moment.

We are bringing that inspiration and commitment back home to Los Angeles with us and have been thinking about how we can best add value to the ECI and ECYI. We see ourselves being able to contribute to the "Motivational Revolution" Maurice Strong spoke so eloquently of in three main ways: 1) Being a conduit in Los Angeles for the EC network; 2) participating in the best of our abilities to strengthen the network and build the capacity of ECYI; and 3) linking our existing endeavors with the EC in mutually beneficial ways.

I am just so excited about working together to realize what can and ought to be in the world!"

Mike Sheehan, Canada:
"I believe the event was a huge success in strengthening the community of people from around the world who are working on many levels of the promotion and integration of the EC.

The EC+5 event was useful in strengthening my understanding of how the EC was born, where it comes from, and how it is being applied around the world. Plus it has provided me with a more clear understanding of how I can use the EC with my personal work.

I witnessed and personally experienced partnerships being made. The large receptions created great opportunities to informally meet and in a lot of cases explore potential partnerships. This bolsters enthusiasm and creates synergistic effects for both people's work and the growing reach of the EC.

Richard Chu, Canada:
"First of all, I just wanted to say it was such a privilege to have met all of you who have been so active and dedicated to ECYI since it all began. I was truly moved by your sincerity and dedication in your respective specializations on promoting sustainability at both the local and global levels and I also appreciated the attention to the food we ate on two occasions where the complete meal was organic and local."

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I felt well cared for by the Grand Canyon staff all through the event. I experienced them as a well organized team taking initiative to serve the all the participants.

The event felt professional with a large representation of cultural diversity and of people working with the EC in different areas (Government, education, arts, etc).

I also appreciated the attention to the food we ate on two occasions where the complete meal was organic and local."

Kim (Kxx) Citton, Canada:
"As follow-up, I've been sharing my experience of the summit with diverse audiences since arriving home. Straight from the airport, I made my way to Vancouver Island to give a presentation of the ECYI to 57 people gathered for the "Explore the Earth Charter" Inclusive Leadership Camp (Linda Hill sends a very BIG HELLO).

This weekend I also brought the Earth Charter
Youth Reflections of the Earth Charter +5 Conference

with me when I facilitated diversity education workshops for college students and also for a group of local business people who are in a community leadership program. Tonight, I gave a brief talk at Satsang (kind of like a church service, but in yogic terms) on my experience at the EC+5 Conference. My focus has been to emphasize the call to action that I heard so clearly from the ECYI and the greater Earth Charter community.

I just want to give you a picture of what happened out at the Cowichan Lake Education Center on Vancouver Island. I went straight from the airport to the ferry to get to the Exploring the Earth Charter Leadership Camp.

Despite the jet-lag, there is no where that I would have rather been! I could see and feel that everyone there had gone through a transformative experience. I was able to be there for their last night together.

The following morning I gave a 20 minute presentation on my experience in Amsterdam. The Rabbi's words came back to me. As I looked around the room, I saw God in the bright eyes of a diverse community that had come together to celebrate life and share in the struggle for justice, peace and sustainability.

As I spoke of our experience together in Amsterdam, it brought tears to my eyes to see the compassion, care and eager potential that I had come home to. In the middle of that circle of youth and adults, two-year-old Diego was happily playing with colourful building blocks. I said that in 20 or 30 years, I don’t want to be standing up and apologizing for leaving him to deal with the mistakes of our generation, as I had heard the elders at the summit apologizing to the youth of today. I expressed the sense of urgency and call for action, not just good intentions, that I had heard in the voices of the ECYI. In my heart, I had brought the Inclusive Leadership community with me to Amsterdam. In return, I brought all of the Earth Charter Initiative, youth and adults, with me back home. Thus the circle was complete."

Results of the small-group discussions with Dutch youth

Question 1 (Value added with the Earth Charter)

* Provides a holistic vision of what sustainability is, can be and should be.
* Great inspiration - "contagious".
* International connection.
* Defines what we are working for.
* Provides an ethical framework,
* People power.
* No need to re-invent the wheel.
* Each person can make a difference.
* Clear set of goals - we are all working together.
* Applies to every sector of the society.
* Helps to prioritize actions/issues.
* Adaptable to diverse cultures.
* Local actions can have global implications.
* Sense of connection to common values.
* Used as bridge to connect conflicting groups.
* Go beyond personal values.
* Create constitution for humanitarian and ecological change.
* Helps peoples to find the action that goes to their passion and in solidarity with actions around the world.

Question 2 (translated value)

* A lot of the work is tangible, locally oriented.
* Artistic possibilities - demonstrations.
* Work on campaigns.
* Setting up regional networks.
* Promoting the Earth Charter.
* Local groups/networks and try to organize education sessions, seminars and a toolkit.
* Religion as an opportunity to apply the EC and bring people together.
* Bring to the university campus - workshops with professionals and activities to internalize the EC and its principles in the university & individuals.
* To shape environmental policy.
* To motivate people and understand the connection between the issues.
Results of the discussions with Dutch youth

Question 3 (How to make the Earth Charter tangible in a local community)

* How to make an action plan - think of "I" instead of "WE" (tangible way to go away with it).
* Strong tool for sharing and seek for opportunities in Holland (a multi-cultural society) and talk about issues that are relevant to all.
* Learn from each other - area to share and exchange experience.
* Reach out to other groups in the area.
* Identify potential collaborators.
* Do coordinated actions and get media attention.
* Have virtual meetings.
* Create a template for a profile, so people can share information and we can have the best practices available.
* Connect with awesome artists to create an arts network of individuals that could collaborate.
* Have a logo for the EC that is easily identified.
* Create thematic clusters.

Question 4 (How do we work together internationally?)

* Local orgs working around the world and making the EC alive. Use of the Internet as a tool.
* We are already working together, a major thing that we can do is to focus on specific parts of the EC - in relation to principle X we are doing Y. This way more people will be aware of the EC.
* It is more a media issue and relating the message to the EC and to this global community.
* ECYI (and its website) should be the showcase of the projects related to the EC that are going on around the world.
* Let each other know what is going on locally and have an international support. Ex: Have a supporting letter signed by all the organizations from every country (something that works well in Mexico).
* If you have a big problem you can use the EC to help the situation (Collaborative advocacy). Ex: Write articles, go to the radio.
* Introduce the EC in the ministries/governments and go forward. Push those who endorsed the EC into action.
* There are many orgs that are already working with the principles of the EC but does not know about it. Young people can be promoting it.
* We need to make a network to communicate with each other and share the information as evidence that we are doing something and that we are serious.
* Have a regional alliance network and this will be the responsible body to advocate.
* It is easy that a document becomes a dogma but the application cannot be universal.
* Go to student groups and make room for critical questions and debate - Create a dialogue with the Earth Charter.
* Not underestimate the power of creativity.
* It is a powerful thing if we choose an action and we all do the same action, take a photo and send in. It is pretty sensational and brings media attention and it is fun. (Pick a very specific action and replicate it). Have an EC Youth day once a year.
The achievements and future perspectives of the Earth Charter Initiative

Speech by Michael Slaby, Earth Charter Youth Initiative Coordinator, delivered at the Closing Plenary of the Earth Charter + 5 Conference in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, Wednesday 9 November 2005.

Your Majesty, your excellencies, dear colleagues and friends in the Earth Charter Initiative, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The last five days have underlined the unique strength of the Earth Charter. What makes the Earth Charter so unique is that it is not directed against a specific problem, but that it provides a common vision for a sustainable future. As volunteer coordinator of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative I could feel this difference, a difference which is a subtle one, a soft one, a difference that rather works in the background, but a difference which is very significant and powerful:

This difference is that we are not working against the evils of poverty, against the tragedies of war or against the massive ecological degradation, but for social and economic justice, for a culture of peace, and for ecological sustainability. It is my belief that focusing on this positive vision invites the soft and healing powers of our planet to help us and to take the lead in the processes of change which we initiate.

I could feel this difference in the e-mails I received from young people from around the world, mostly from young people in the developing countries who feel inspired and empowered by the Earth Charter. Young people who are committed to fill the Earth Charter document with life and who feel empowered by the fact that they are not alone.

On behalf of the young people participating in this conference, I would like to say that we are pleased to hear that so many Earth Charter Commissioners, so many panelists, so many renowned speakers and also some people in the audience expressed their support for us.

We hope that this support will manifest itself in a strong youth involvement on all levels of the Initiative, as we are not only the leaders of tomorrow or the "future generation", but a vibrant generation of now and active citizens of today.

I cannot find the words to express my deep gratitude to NCDO, PLAN Netherlands, The Royal Tropical Institute, the International Earth Charter Secretariat and Soka Gakkai International who made it possible that thirty core members of the ECYI could hold its first personal meeting ever.

I can’t express how I felt when yesterday Sylvanus Murray from Sierra Leone finally arrived at the conference. Sylvanus adapted the Earth Charter to the context of his country and created several Earth Charter Youth Groups which reach out to hundreds of their peers. Besides he traveled five days just to apply for a visa to come here [spontaneous applause from the audience].

In the words of Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, I would like to thank the organizers for allowing me to see God in the eyes of my friends in the ECYI.

For me, the conference has shown that it holds true, that in midst of our magnificent cultural diversity we indeed are one human family. We can feel how the bonds of friendship reach across the globe. The projects, initiatives and activities of so many of you highlighted during the last two days have shown that in spite of all the huge challenges we are facing today, there still is hope. Yes, Jane Goodall, please let me respond to this, there still is hope. There is a global partnership for ending the geo-cide that we are committing, and this partnership is growing stronger each day.

I am convinced that if each and every one of us uses his personal field of influence to bring about the needed changes, the third phase of the Initiative will transform the vision that binds us together into a supportive, caring and loving reality for more and more people and sentient beings around the globe.

Thank you very much.
Earth Charter Youth Initiative (ECYI) – Fact Sheet

What is the ECYI?

The ECYI is a network of youth NGOs and young activists from currently around 30 countries who share a common interest in sustainable development and the Earth Charter.

The main means of communication and info-sharing are the online-discussion group at http://groups.takingitglobal.org/ecyi and the interactive youth section of the international website www.earthcharter.org.

All individuals and groups who do not advocate hatred or violence are invited to join the ECYI by meeting the criterion of actively promoting and implementing the Earth Charter locally and internationally. The aim is to have a culturally diverse network of young actors with a thorough understanding of EC principles and values.

The Mission of the ECYI:

Within Youth and the global Earth Charter Initiative, the mission of the ECYI is to establish a sound ethical foundation for the emerging global society and to help build a sustainable world based on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.

The objectives of the ECYI:

- to ensure that youth play an active role in promoting the values and principles of the Earth Charter
- to work with youth organizations, networks and individuals to share the Earth Charter as a tool for promoting an ethic for justice, sustainability and peace
- to take the mission and aims of the Earth Charter Initiative and make them vital, relevant and applicable to young people around the world

Structure / Coordination:

The ECYI is not an NGO but a network of NGOs and individuals. The members are encouraged to work independently in their local settings and share their experiences through online-communication. In case there are several ECYI members in one country, it is suggested to form a national Earth Charter Youth Network and elaborate a common country vision.

On the international level, the ECYI is managed by volunteers, led by a diverse core-group of 5 individuals from 3 different continents. In the current core-group, 3 members are from Africa.

Main Program: Earth Charter Youth Groups / Networks (ECYGs)

An Earth Charter Youth Group is an inclusive committee, group or network of young activists and youth organizations working to bring to life the vision of the Earth Charter in their communities, locally and nationally. The structures, priorities and activities mainly depend on the groups themselves, yet as general guidelines we suggest:

- to inspire people locally to adopt sustainable ways of living and to be active in projects related to sustainable development and the Earth Charter
- to make the Earth Charter known and implemented in a broad public
- to empower young people to take action and change the world
- to enjoy life in giving joy to others!!!

For more info on ECYGs, check out the tool-kit: “Earth Charter Youth Groups – Why? What? How? ...And Resources!”

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