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*Vicky Rossi interviews*  
**Federico Mayor Zaragoza**  
*Earth Charter Commissioner*



**The idea and the future of the  
Earth Charter**



*By*

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*Vicky Rossi's conversations with peace visionaries around the world  
are listed at her CV page [here](#) and collected [here](#).*

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*Peace Antenna Interview with Mr Federico Mayor Zaragoza, Earth Charter Commissioner, Chairman, Fundación Cultura de Paz, former Director-General of UNESCO. Rossi interviewed Federico Mayor at the Earth Charter +5 Conference, Amsterdam, 7-9 November 2005.*

## **Background to the creation of the Earth Charter**

The idea of creating a new charter to promote the fundamental principles for sustainable development was declared by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. However, despite the impetus of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the drafting of the Earth Charter remained incomplete. In response to this delay, in 1994 Maurice Strong, the secretary general of the Earth Summit and chairman of the Earth Council, joined together with Mikhail Gorbachev, founding president of Green Cross International, to launch a new Earth Charter initiative. In 1997 an Earth Charter Commission was created to oversee the initiative and an Earth Charter Secretariat began work within the Earth Council in Costa Rica.

Contributions from individuals and organisations, from experts and grassroots communities, were compiled by the Earth Charter Commission's drafting committee and finally approved at a meeting in the UNESCO HQ, in Paris, in March 2000. On 29 June 2000, the Earth Charter was officially launched at the Peace Palace in The Hague. Its mission is to establish "an ethical foundation for the emerging world community" and "to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace."

The Earth Charter has 4 main principles/pillars, each of which has 4 sub-principles:

### **1) Respect and Care for the Community of Life**

- i) Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.
- ii) Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love.
- iii) Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.
- iv) Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

## 2) Ecological Integrity

- i) Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.
- ii) Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.
- iii) Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights and community well-being.
- iv) Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.

## 3) Social and Economic Justice

- i) Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social and environmental imperative.
- ii) Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.
- iii) Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care and economic opportunity.
- iv) Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

## 4) Democracy, Non-violence and Peace

- i) Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision-making and access to justice.
- ii) Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.
- iii) Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.
- iv) Promote a culture of tolerance, non-violence and peace.

## Earth Charter +5 Conference, Amsterdam, 7-9 November 2005

On the occasion of the Earth Charter +5 conference held at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, 7-9 November, I spoke to the former Director-General of UNESCO (1987-1999) Mr Federico Mayor, one of the Earth Charter Commissioners and Chairman of the Fundación Cultura de Paz.

*Vicky Rossi: How would you summarize the ethos and intention behind the Earth Charter?*

**Federico Mayor:** The Earth Charter is the final result of a big disappointment because we were working very, very hard in the year 1992 for the World Summit in Rio de Janeiro on sustainable development and particularly on the environment. We must take into account now that we have an environment and that we must transfer this environment and this Earth that we are utilising to the next generations. We realised that that was not the case, so we prepared - I can assure you - one of the best UN summits that has ever been prepared. We were working very hard and very late, and we were drafting documents related to the soil, the oceans, the air - everything was taken into account.

As you know, Agenda 21 contains all sorts of excellent recommendations, but we realised, when leaving Rio de Janeiro, that the United Nations was not really taken into account. After the end of the Cold War there was a dynamic aimed at not reinforcing the United Nations, but rather keeping the UN as it was, and instead creating things like the G7 and G8. At the time, we had the feeling - I say "we" as I was Director-General of UNESCO then - that we must take the excellent guidelines of Agenda 21 and reflect on these main points in one topic through what could be a World Council on Earth. Particularly in order that the education of the children, but also education at different levels, could transmit the essence - let us put it this way - of Rio de Janeiro. And this was done.

Maurice Strong, who was at that time also the secretary general of the Summit in Rio de Janeiro, created the Earth Council in Costa Rica. Then different people were asked to participate in the drafting of what is now the Earth Charter: Mikhail Gorbachev, who at that time was President of the Green Cross, was requested to participate; so too was Ruud Lubbers, who was then the Prime Minister of this country - the Netherlands - and also very supportive of the Green Cross; then of course UNESCO was asked to participate because we were one of the leaders - we have the Oceanographic Commission, for example, we have hydrologic programmes, we have so many projects related to what is now the Earth Charter. So those are the origins of the Earth Charter. We wanted to provide the world with the essence of the Rio World Summit.

*Vicky Rossi: You made reference to a World Council, where would you place the Earth Charter Initiative in terms of its similarities and differences vis-à-vis the World Wisdom Council of the Club of Budapest or the World Future Council?*

**Federico Mayor:** We consider that we must be seen to be those who have produced this particular tool, but we do not want to have any kind of "structure", although that is valid for the Club of Budapest. I have even suggested that the Culture of Peace concept should also be brought in. The same goes for declarations like the Declaration of Human Rights. Otherwise, we give the impression that we are the "sellers" of this one document. No, no, no. If we are the sellers of anything, it is of the ideas that lie behind the Charter and these ideas are things like human dignity, respect for all other persons, respect for nature, equality and solidarity. These are the important things.

Today, at the session of the Earth Charter Commission, at the proposal of Steven Rockefeller, it was decided not to change the preamble to the Earth Charter because we consider that it really gives three or four elements for general awareness raising and, in particular, for those who are in power, that are essential for good governance: that is, you must be responsible, you must realise that in this world we are all in the same boat.

*Vicky Rossi: Would you say, then, that the Earth Charter is in essence a Charter of Human Duties and Responsibilities similar to the "The Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities" by the InterAction Council, the "Trieste Declaration of Human Duties" (also known as the "Carta of Human Duties") by the International Council of Human Duties and the very comprehensive "Declaration of Duties and Human Responsibilities" by the Valencia Third Millennium Foundation?*

**Federico Mayor:** Of all the documents that I am currently familiar with, I think that there are two which are particularly related to human responsibilities such as those outlined in the Valencia Third Millennium Foundation Declaration. One of them is the Earth Charter because it emphasises that we must respect each other and we must always have in mind the human race. The Charter says that we are "committed" to doing certain things and this, in my view, is the strongest expression of responsibility. I am "committed", not I am aware or I am involved. I am "committed".

Let's look at the Earth Charter preamble itself, which I think is very important. Here you have the mission. It says, "We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a Culture of Peace." But then it says that in order to fulfil these four broad commitments, it is necessary to..... These are the commitments (pointing to the 4 main principles/pillars of the Earth Charter) - and this is the action (pointing to the sub-principles below each of the 4 main pillars). So, each of us must behave in such a way that we "respect Earth and

life in all its diversity", "care for the community", "build democratic societies" and "secure Earth's bounty and beauty".

*Vicky Rossi: Would you say that the 1st Earth Charter principle, "Respect and Care for the Community of Life", is an over-arching principle comprising the other three?*

**Federico Mayor:** Yes, that is exactly the way, but each of the four main Earth Charter principles is also itself an over-arching point of reference; so, to put these four main commitments into practise (pointing to the 4 main principles/pillars of the Earth Charter), you need to carry out the action plan (pointing to the sub-principles below each of the 4 main pillars).

In the same way, if you take the Declaration of a Culture of Peace, you will see there are declarations and then a plan of actions. It states that to achieve A, you must do the following things. For example, in education, you must do 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 - as examples of concrete actions. To promote democratic principles, you must carry out the following 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 actions. To ensure equality between women and men, you must do the following 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 actions.

*Vicky Rossi: Could you provide some examples of the kinds of initiatives that are going on at the governmental, civil society and grass roots levels to promote the Earth Charter?*

**Federico Mayor:** There are very many different initiatives being implemented, for example, there are some Central Asian countries [e.g. Tatarstan] that have already officially recognised the Earth Charter, at the governmental level. Then in my country [Spain], I have been discussing world citizenship education with government ministers and I have suggested that they should refer in particular to the Declaration of Human Rights, the Declaration on Tolerance, which is currently very important for the co-existence of different immigrant groups, and the Earth Charter. The Spanish government has now advised the autonomous regions that they should follow this lead. Then, the Catalan government has integrated the Culture of Peace into their statutes, so now the Culture of Peace is officially incorporated into all of the schools there.

It is our intention with the Earth Charter to "advise" - because it is not necessary to put this as a "compulsory" thing - at all levels of government. I have focused especially at the city level. When we think about "power", we tend to think about power in the government, but we have other local powers too. One very sure place to go is the city because "citizens" live in the "city" and as such one of the most important ways of mobilizing support for the Earth Charter is in the cities.

On another point, although it is wonderful if we can from time to time appear in the most well-known journals and newspapers - through an editorial or an article

- there are publications which exist apart from the normal mass media, that is, there are hundreds of thousands of people who receive free of charge their bulletin, their proceedings. For example, in Spain, all teachers receive 2 kinds of journals related to their teaching profession. These professional publications are very good for wide-spreading things like the Earth Charter because they are free of charge. So, it would be good to be in the journals for lawyers or the journals for health professionals, etc. This is a wonderful way of wide-spreading the concept of the Earth Charter because if you are reading the newspaper, perhaps you would not take as much notice of an article on the Earth Charter as you would if you were reading one in a professional, monthly publication. So this is another way of concrete action.

*Vicky Rossi: As well as finding new ways of raising awareness amongst people and governments on the Earth Charter, what do you hope the Earth Charter +5 conference here in Amsterdam will achieve?*

**Federico Mayor:** Normally, I must tell you sincerely, that most of the +5 meetings are meetings of complete disappointment. Most of them. With regards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), these were a necessity because we realised that instead of getting better we were going backwards. For example, in the very important issue of people that are living on less than \$1 a day, we were seeing that instead of reducing the numbers, we were getting worse. So the MDGs were a real necessity, but the Millennium +5 was a disaster. It is true that in the middle was 11 September 2001, but the net result has been "nothing" - very, very little has been done - and this happens in nearly all the +5.

The Earth Charter, however, I must tell you is another kind of event as you can see. The people who have been working with the Charter have been doing quite a good job. Many NGOs and institutions around the world have realised that the Earth Charter is a good thing. In particular, the reaction of young people has been very interesting. I can accept that young people can find many answers in the Earth Charter. So, in short, I think the +5 of the Earth Charter is much better than the normal +5. In any case, it is having a catalyst effect, which is good, because even if somebody thinks they haven't really done a lot yet with the Charter, now they will have a new impulse for action.

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*Vicky Rossi: Is there a link between the 3rd Earth Charter principle, "Social and Economic Justice", and the drafting of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)?*

**Federico Mayor:** I see the Earth Charter as a tool for the MDGs because it is more of an over-arching declaration. In turn, the MDGs are an expression of how to put into practise many of the principles contained in the Earth Charter. [Vicky Rossi: In a speech on Tuesday 8 November, Maurice Strong indicated that the MDGs came after the Earth Charter -the drafting of the Charter began in 1997 - and that the MDGs were in many ways stimulated by the Earth Charter.]

As I said before, at the Millennium +5 nothing happened despite the "solemn" declarations made by governments. However, on 22 July 2005, Secretary General Kofi Annan gave proposals for the Millennium +5 saying, "Well, whatever we have done or not done, let us now concentrate on...." But then "Hurricane Bolton" came and well... Nevertheless, the outcome has not been bad as now they say that they recognise that the United Nations is indispensable. This is not bad. It was better in the Declaration and it was better, in my view, in the document of the Secretary General, but the official outcome, "We recognise that now more than ever the United Nation...", means that we must try an in-depth reform, but not just of the Security Council. For example, we should make the General Assembly 50% States, 30% elected people from the different countries - then we will be "We, the peoples" - and 20% NGOs and institutions. If they say, "No, this is impossible", well, the League of Nations was like this. The only institution that remains from the former League of Nations is the ILO (International Labour Organisation). The ILO has one third States, one third patronat and one third workers. Then, this is a good example. You see, before the War they already recognised that if you say, "We, the peoples", then you cannot only put the States.

On another theme, now they are saying that we must work to establish what unites the different cultures and not what separates them. Here again is an immense space for work because this is the Alliance of Civilizations. What we need to say is that we can accept everything except imposition, except violence. But we can accept everything. We must also accept that we are not the good and the others are not the evil. We must accept that all of us need to make many improvements in our beliefs. For example, in the context of the Alliance of Civilizations, one European leader said, "We, the civilized..." And I thought, "Oh, no, that's exactly against what we're talking about here." An Alliance of Civilizations means that we cannot say that we are the civilized ones. We are one civilization that is willing to have contact with other civilizations.

*\* This transcript represents an accurate but non-verbatim representation of the original interview.*

**Quotes from speech made by Federico Mayor**



Vicky Rossi took down the following quotes from the speech made by Federico Mayor at the Culture of Peace thematic group meeting, 7 November 2005, at the Earth Charter +5 conference.

"It is indispensable that the young people realise that it is up to them to help us in this very important venture of trying to change the present trends in the world."

"We have one main responsibility that is to design a different future. This is our duty. We must avoid to succeeding generations the horror of war."

"All the people, we must contribute everyday with our behaviour, in a peaceful manner, to give alternatives to violence, alternatives to imposition. We must change this imposition into dialogue, into understanding, into listening to others."

"Very often I say that my dream is that the 21st century will be finally the century of people."

"I do not like globalization because the only thing I have seen globalized is poverty."

"We can be members of a global democracy. [That does] not mean there is only one country. No, no, no. There are many countries; there are many people; there are many cultures; but with a single vision of democracy being participation. Participation, that means that from now on, I hope, progressively, we will not only be counted (...) every 4 years, every 5 years, every 7 years. (...) Democracy is not to be counted. Democracy is to count. Democracy is to be taken into account. This is democracy and for this we must participate. And now it's very difficult sometimes to participate except for opinion polls or elections because we have not the possibility, we are not requested for this participation, but now with the internet, with the SMS, progressively, we will be able to express ourselves: to dissent or to applaud. We will be able to count and, therefore, to be taken into account."

"Silence has been unfortunately, until now, the reason for so many - in history - victories of those that have power because they decide and the people say, 'Well, there's nothing to do, you know.' So the citizens accept these decisions in a silent way. (...) It's the silence of those who are able to express themselves but they are not used to it. It's not a part of our behaviour - of citizens to express ourselves in a non-violent way."

"Now, progressively, we have this possibility of this transition from a culture of imposition, of violence, of force, to a culture of dialogue, of understanding, of reconciliation, of peace."

"1995 was a very important moment, the Declaration of Tolerance. This Declaration is, in my knowledge, the first time that one important declaration

mentions a Culture of Peace, and mentions a Culture of Peace in the first article. They say tolerance is the art of living peacefully altogether and realising that we are all equal. They say this is fundamental for the transition from a culture of violence to a Culture of Peace."

"In the Earth Charter there are many references - not only one but many - to a Culture of Peace. It is one, precisely, of the missions of the Earth Charter."

"I think that even after this position of the United States, it doesn't matter. The outcome of the 14 September this year is extremely important. (...) It's worse than it could be, of course. Now we can improve it, of course. But believe me if you read the outcome of the 14 September, it's very, very important. First of all because we have all these heads of State and governments saying that they put again the democratic principles where they have, during many years, said the only rule, the only law, was the market. Very important. (...) Now they say, 'justice, solidarity and tolerance and equality'. (...) We have so many things concerning social improvement, concerning equality, of all the civilizations and the people; concerning - and this is for me very important - the dialogue and alliances of cultures, regions and civilizations."

"You cannot have enthusiasm for any endeavour in your life if you really do not think that you are building something relevant for the generations to come."