

A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange glow that reflects on the water. The sky is filled with large, dark clouds that are illuminated from below by the sun. A small figure of a person stands in the water in the distance. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

# Let's Take Care of the Water Continent

Aotearoa – New Zealand, Vanuatu, Samoa

This is the South Pacific Charter, repersented by Aotearoa – New Zealand at the Lets Take Care of Our Planet 2010 Childrens and Youth Conference in Brazil.

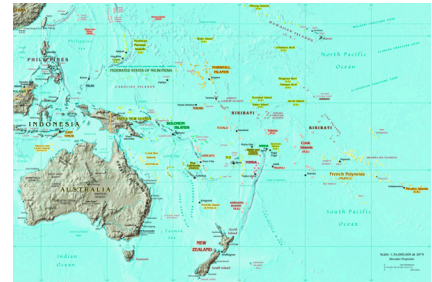




## Let's Take Care of the Water Continent

*Toitu te whenua, whatungarongaro te tangata.  
We may pass on, but the land will always remain.*

We, the young people of Aotearoa New Zealand and Vanuatu, bring these thoughts from the water continent at this crucial point in time. Our future is in jeopardy. We are committed to a world in which we have a positive and regenerative impact. In New Zealand this means keeping our local and national identities, our clean green image, our friendly and relaxed way of being, our rich cultures, our freedom of speech, and our role of providing international leadership.



An international achievement of which we are proud is the acknowledgement of Maori culture and knowledge. An Indigenous-Maori perspective of Human Responsibility for our environment is that we think of ourselves as tangata whenua – people of the land, with a role as kaitiaki or guardians of the land. Being tangata whenua means we understand ourselves as descendants of the earth. The earth – Papatuanuku is our primal mother. As descendants of the earth, all living things are regarded as our relatives. We do not see ourselves as superior to our environment with the right to treat it badly. You don't treat your relatives badly. Instead because we are related to everything in the world we therefore have responsibilities for them. Kaitiakitanga means guardianship and responsibility for the earth's well being and the well being of all the earth's descendants. Kaitiakitanga involves respect and care for the land, including consciousness of our actions and relations with our environment. In particular it means the sustainable use of resources and their preservation for future generations. The indigenous way of thinking about our responsibility and relationships to our environment could be adopted by all people, because we all share the earth, this is why it is our environment not 'the environment'.

### Our Beliefs

Climate Change is a defining issue of our time. Responding to this challenge will cause us to transform our way of life and the way we think about the world in which we live. Leadership at all levels from the individual, to the community, from the political, to corporate. We all need to step up. We need to understand that government, business, media, society, individuals, groups, communities, nature, plants, water, waste, animals, the kiwi which we are named after, the turtles from Vanuatu, are all one! Integration requires integrity. Both nationally and internationally, this transformation will involve confronting the exploitive aspects of our past and present. We, as young people, can offer a fresh approach. We exchange ideas via the latest technology, using them to communicate, tapping into networks that allow us to learn from each other. We can affect the market through our buying power; we endeavour to find out about where our products come from.

Water is our lifeblood. Healthy waterways mean healthy ecosystems. Healthy ecosystems mean happy, healthy people. Reforestation and riparian planting is the easiest way we can improve our water quality, encourage indigenous plant and animal species and prevent soil erosion. Added on to this is the importance of the sea in our nation's history and our influence in



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the Oceania region. Our relationships with our pacific neighbours are as deep as the ocean that both separates and joins us. We are facing a future where the rising oceans mean that our fresh water is turning salty and land is being covered by the sea. Our friends and neighbours are becoming climate refugees.

Human intelligence is part of nature. Ecosystems and the individual plants and animals in them can teach us so much about how to cooperate, innovate and mutually benefit each other. A culture of giving and sharing is needed for equality and necessity, also for connection, community and happiness. We rely on the natural environment for our life support. We need to stop the biodiversity loss that humans are causing and work to restore endangered species. Getting connected to the people and the place in our own local environment and for taking care of what we have is what gives us our sense of belonging. The ni-Vanuatu group provides this analogy that "we must recognise the interconnectedness and hence fragility of our world:

*If we poison our land, then we poison our plants and trees  
If we poison our plants and trees, then we poison our air that we breathe  
If we pollute our rivers, then we pollute our ocean  
If we pollute our ocean, then we cause our coral reefs and fish to get sick  
If we cause our coral reefs and fish to get sick, then we either have no food or get sick ourselves"*

Good things are happening and even more good things are possible. We need to celebrate the good things if we want people to get involved. Imagine if we really celebrated and grew the diversity in our global family. Diversity fosters innovation and resilience. We look forward to becoming a bilingual nation and to a world in which languages, cultures, and lifestyles are not threatened. We are working for a fairer New Zealand and a more just global order; being willing to trade places with anyone else in the world. Education is essential to achieve this. Empowered young people can help educate society. 21st century education involves thinking, feeling and taking action. This needs to be free to all. If we measured happiness and caring rather than just consumption and economic activity, people would realise that rising GDP doesn't automatically make you happy. Our current economic system does not ensure a fundamental need for everyone such as connection to the land, belonging and feeling valued by society. Consider this: Humans are the only species without full employment.

New Zealand is lucky to have the advantage of access to resources. With our 'kiwi' ingenuity' we have the potential to create a regenerative future.

Our generation has inherited the guardianship of our planet, and we are committed to change. This can only be achieved by supporting each other, so we ask you to join us in being the change. We will step back from our orthodox environmental views and begin to consider the interconnectedness of humans and nature, the past and the present and our role as kaitiaki, or guardians. As the water continent, we challenge you and your governments to explore other cultural viewpoints and realise the oceans' importance to our future.

### **Some Examples of What We Can Offer**

Governments need to understand that young people are the natural partners in creating a regenerative future.

- We can take responsibility for the education of our peers and remind others of their responsibilities to our environment.
- Our goal is to make people see the positive, not the negatives and by leading the way we make change seem possible. This is especially true of the tough issues like peak oil, energy use, transportation and water conservation. All the things that adults have come to take for granted.
- We will organise projects that clean up and preserve our ecosystems.

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- We are already creating campaigns and enterprise initiatives based on regenerating our natural environment. Our projects promote public access and responsible use of common ground.
- We can conserve water and support the harvesting and recycling of water
- We are also the key to supporting our parents and families to vote for change, both in local and national elections, but also in their purchasing and lifestyle decisions.

### The Support We Need

While we are already creating change, there is so much that other people can do to get involved and to support us:

- Government policy and legislation can be changed to empower young people to get involved in decision making at a much earlier age.
- A 'Let's Take Care' dimension must be integrated into school's curriculums' around the world.
- We want the wisdom and experience of local communities to inform the management of powerful economic interests.
- National governments need to develop policies and legislation that make climate change and environmental protection more important than business and profit.
- Public transportation is essential for the future we want to create. It is very difficult to promote change when there is literally no alternative available, even basic bus services.
- Access to our own media so we can produce non-biased information and connect with young people directly and free of advertising culture.
- We need big business to start acting morally as well as legally. Businesses can help with apprenticeship and mentoring as well as project partnership and sponsorship.
- Education, particularly environmental education needs to be mandatory in all schools and in all countries. Wealthy countries need to help those in need (with their guidance). Schools need places that empower young people to make real change.

***Toitu te whenua, whatungarongaro te tangata.***

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