

International Forum on Ethics & Responsibility¹



Aotearoa-New Zealand, Pacific



International



A Charter of Universal Responsibilities – proposal for the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

Introduction

This proposal for a Charter of Universal Responsibilities comes from the International Forum on Ethics and Responsibility which originates with the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind, an international independent foundation in France <<http://www.irenees.net/en/fiches/partenaire/fiche-partenaire-8.html>>. The international committee of the Forum works in all regions of the world with over fifty participating countries undertaking diverse initiatives appropriate to local contexts.² New Zealand-based RESPONSE³ is an organization representing New Zealand and the Pacific region on the International Forum since 2003.

Currently the Forum is engaged in bringing a Charter of Universal Responsibilities to the agenda of the Rio+20 conference in June 2012. RESPONSE is working with national and international organizations in support of this initiative for Rio+20. In New Zealand RESPONSE is working with the NZ NGO Platform for Rio+20, which includes Association of NGOs of Aotearoa (ANGOA), UNICEF, UNANZ, Environment and Conservation Organizations of New Zealand (ECO), Council of International Development (CID) and other NGOs and groups.

Rationale for a Charter of Universal Responsibilities

¹ www.ethica-respons.net

² For example: the Brazil committee, in partnership with the Government have introduced a programme of education 'Lets Take Care of the Planet'

³ RESPONSE is a Charitable Trust focussing on Governance and environmental responsibility and working in partnership with tangata whenua/Māori. In keeping with the Oceania regional context RESPONSE has particular interest in water and aquatic ecosystems in the broad communication, research and with the Government have introduced a programme of education 'NZ and Pacific Care of the Planet' example: RESPONSE conducted a study of water resource management in five Pacific countries and is engaged in a rain water harvesting project in Samoa. For further information see www.response.org.nz

³ RESPONSE is a Charitable Trust focussing on Governance and environmental responsibility and working in partnership with tangata whenua/Māori. In keeping with the Oceania regional context RESPONSE has particular interest in water and aquatic ecosystems and is involved in education, research and initiatives relating to environment and governance in Aotearoa NZ and Pacific countries. For example: RESPONSE conducted a study of water resource management in five Pacific countries and is engaged in a rain water harvesting project in Samoa. For further information see www.response.org.nz

The Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are two ethical and political pillars of the international community. Over the last sixty years these instruments have engendered international and national institutions, jurisprudence, education and norms to improve global equity and welfare. However, in today's world there is the question as to whether these two instruments and the institutions they have created are sufficient to manage our interdependencies and safeguard the integrity of the planet on which our future depends.

There is considerable interest and discussion on the need for a third and complementary pillar. Long experience of inter-religious and inter-cultural work has shown that the notions of responsibility and co-responsibility are at the heart of the ethics and the law of the 21st century, thus constituting the basis of this third pillar. Hence, the framing of a draft Charter of Universal Responsibilities (see <http://www.ethica-respons.net/rubrique107.html?lang=fr>).

Responsibility to safeguard the environment and to ensure a life of dignity for present and future generations can be considered as a *common* responsibility for all human beings, for all actors at various levels of national and international life. The protection of Human Rights is laid down in the Universal Declaration of 1948 and the subsequent conventions for implementation that gave rise to national and international jurisprudence. But there is no such international reference text pertaining to the obligation to assume responsibility and to evaluate the impacts of far-reaching decisions and account for the consequences of actions, whether the actors are individuals, organisations, corporate businesses or governments.

A new *international* ethical protocol is needed, a “third pillar” for international life, as an indispensable complement to the Charter of the United Nations on *Peace and Development* and corollary of the Universal Declaration of *Human Rights*. A Charter of Universal Responsibilities is to chart a course for development which seeks social equity and wellbeing, promotes use of natural resources which is sustainable and exercises the precautionary principle in the interests of future generations and to safeguard planetary ecosystems. A Charter of Universal Responsibilities is expected to provide an *international* juridical basis for counteracting breaches of responsibility at various levels and sectors of human activity.

The Rio+20 Summit is an opportunity to create *momentum* for the adoption of clear orientations that guide the decisions to come, responding to four major questions:

1. On which common ethics are we to build the management and safeguarding of the planet?
2. How are we to contribute to the emergence of a world community that shares the belief in a common destiny?
3. What kind of governance and in particular what kind of world governance has to be put in place progressively?
4. How is the transition towards sustainable societies to be organized?

Proposal for a Charter of Universal Responsibilities at Rio+20

Seven months from now, the Rio+20 Earth Summit will take place. Twenty years ago the first summit was prepared with great enthusiasm. Twenty years after, despite the pathway provided by the concept of sustainable development, the world faces unprecedented and multiple crises stemming from the immense impact of human beings on each other's social, economic, political and cultural lives, and on the biosphere that supports all life on the planet.

Identifying the key issues underlying these crises and developing effective outcomes is recognised as crucial to success of the Rio+20 conference and its objectives to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, and address new and emerging challenges.

It is essential to address the issue of interdependence between nations, between humanity and nature and between human generations. Keeping the discussion of a Charter of Universal Responsibilities on the Rio+20 agenda gives an instrument to identify and acknowledge the responsibilities inherent in this interdependence – and a pathway forward.

Responsibility can be found in every culture, as it is at the core of the social fabric, the basis of reciprocity in the human relations and the corollary of human rights. With modern understanding of the global impacts of human activities there is greater awareness of trans-boundary effects and of the need for regulation at the global level. The interdependence between nations that has emerged with globalization requires a framework of responsibility to give direction, coherence and accountability for the global impacts of development. However there is no internationally accepted global statement on universal human responsibilities to guide international, national and community norms and accountability. Global politics lack coherent systems of accountability with forms of regulation to safeguard shared human destiny.

It is envisaged that such a Charter will be ultimately endorsed by the UN General Assembly as a Declaration, providing a third pillar of the global community. Rio+20 can be the start for this process.

Resolution 64/236 describes the focus of Rio+20: "The focus of the Conference will include the following themes to be discussed and refined during the preparatory process: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and the institutional framework for sustainable development"

If the agenda is limited to green economy and poverty alleviation these alone will be insufficient to address the current global development model which is failing both humanity and nature. A common ethical framework of responsibility will provide recognition of interdependencies and coherence in further institutional and regulatory provisions to achieve sustainable development

In September 2011, Michel Rocard, former Prime Minister of France, took the initiative which began at the Den Haag conference of Heads of States in 1988, to discuss the issue of interdependence. The Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation (CLM Foundation) supported the international dialog from which the Charter of Universal Responsibilities emerged in 2003. More recently there have been extensive exchanges between Michel Rocard, the CLM Foundation, and the Forum on Ethics and Responsibility with key members of the Brazilian cabinet.

Brazilian advisors have conveyed support for a Charter of Universal Responsibilities being on the Rio+20 agenda, and that Brazil wants to be sure that key countries at the Rio+20 Conference will support a Charter for Universal Responsibilities in the preparatory process and at the Conference itself. According to this advice it is against protocol for the host country, Brazil, to initiate an agenda item. Hence Brazil's position that they will support an initiative from another country.

Leaders of the Forum on Ethics and Responsibility in Asia are working with high level government officials and at this stage, officials of India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Bangladesh have given very positive indications of support for a Charter of Universal Responsibilities to be on the Rio+20 agenda. RESPONSE, as part of the Forum is seeking support in New Zealand, Australia and Pacific Island states. Perhaps Asian and Pacific countries could be at the forefront of support?

What is needed

At present the Charter is identified on the Zero draft. The shortlisting of the Zero draft is taking place between in mid January. The immediate need is for governments to support the Charter to be included in the short list for the agenda. Beyond the shortlisting process, the main actions will be for organizations to communicate with their Government to express support for a Charter of Universal Responsibilities. Such support will provide a mandate for governments to support this proposal at the Rio+20 Conference in June. If the Charter is not shortlisted, Governments may propose an amendment to the UN to have the Charter on the agenda for the UN Conference. Any support through UN agencies such as UNDP will be most welcome.

The international Forum on Ethics and Responsibility is engaged in enabling the Charter of Universal Responsibility to be brought to the table of the Rio+20 Conference. We are seeking support for this from UN agencies, the New Zealand Government, Australia, Pacific Island States and Civil Society organizations.

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