

2011 UN ECOSOC High Level Segment in Geneva

Submission for NGO Joint Statement
on

"Implementing the Internationally Agreed Goals and Commitments in regard to Environmental Education"

This statement is jointly submitted by 20 Organizations (listed hereafter) in ECOSOC consultative status and reflects discussions facilitated by the NGO Committee on the Environment and the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CoNGO).

- World Movement of Mothers
- Planetary Association for Clean Energy (PACE)
- African Commission on Health Promoters and Human Rights (CAPSDHR)
- Al-Hakim Foundation
- Fundación Intervida
- GAIA MATER
- North South XXI
- Institute for Global Education (IGE)
- Institute for Planetary Synthesis (IPS)
- International Association of Peace Messenger Cities (IAPMC)
- International Alliance of Women (IAW)
- International Federation of University Women (IFUW)
- International Islamic Relief Organization-Saudi Arabia (IIROSA)
- International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)
- OCAPROCE International
- OSMTH (Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem)
- PAX ROMANA
- Women's World Summit Foundation (WWSF)
- World Federation for Mental Health
- Worldwide organization for Women

We appreciate the constructive work by Member States and the efforts in the various intergovernmental negotiations relating to the urgent problems posed by environmental degradation. We also value the recognition by many member states of the need to engage all of civil society to strengthen the work in partnership to deliver further progress. However, much work still lies ahead.

There has been a concerted effort related to environmental matters with the 2010 COP10 on the Convention on Biodiversity in Nagoya - Japan, the 2010 International Year on Biodiversity, preparatory meetings being convened for the forthcoming UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Durban - South Africa, and the 2011 International Year of Forests.

With such emphasis on the environment, we consider that Environmental Education and human rights education related to environmental issues are an important part of the overall environmental agenda, and we call upon all Member States to demonstrate in practice their commitment to education by including Environmental Education as a means to understand and reconnect to the natural world, our environment, our home upon which we all rely for our physical, spiritual and cultural well-being.

As recalled in the Annex of this Statement, the need for Environmental Education has been highlighted in many international conferences and declarations since it first gained international recognition at the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. In recent years however, the focus has somehow shifted.

Environmental education concerns every individual, irrespective of their sex, age, race, religion or economic and social status, as well as every human group at every level from families to communities, from villages to regions and nations, from small local businesses to large transnational corporations.

Recalling the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill and the recent Fukushima nuclear reactor accidents we also call for environmental education at the corporate level in order to prevent such ecological disasters and the ensuing human rights violations and abuses, and ensure the effective realization of a human rights-based approach related to a development agenda that takes into account environmental issues and recognition of duty-bearers and rights-holders.

Environmental Education should also include the principles of human dignity, inclusion, non-discrimination and equality, as well as economic, social, cultural human rights and most notably the Right to Life, Right to Food, the Right to clean drinking water and sanitation, the Right to Health, the Right to Peace...

Women form the most vulnerable group and have the most to lose as the Environment suffers, and yet women are also the main potential positive actors: caring is one of their core values, e.g. for each others, for future generations and for the larger environment. Girls and women should be the main target group for education in general and Environmental Education in particular.

The important role of families in informal Environmental Education should also be recognized and supported: families can be powerful actors in raising children awareness on the beauty and importance of Nature and the need to protect it; and it is mostly within the Family that Values can be transmitted, most notably Respect for other human beings and for Nature.

We therefore call on all Member States to make Environmental Education a reality and focus within the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and their national sustainable development strategies.

We also call on all Member States from the UNECE region to recognise and implement Environmental Education in their Education for Sustainable Development program at their seventh UNECE Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" which will take place this year in Kazakhstan. We believe that a healthy and sustainable environment is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

Annex: International declarations and agreements on Environmental Education

The need for Environmental Education first gained international recognition at the Stockholm 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment¹⁾ wherein Principle 19 of the corresponding Declaration states: "Education in environmental matters, for the younger generation as well as adults [...] is essential in order to broaden the basis for an enlightened opinion and responsible conduct by individuals, enterprises and communities in protecting and improving the environment in its full human dimension".

This was followed in 1975, with an international workshop in Environmental Education held in Belgrade and which resulted in a framework of understanding on Environmental Education, later referred to as "the Belgrade Charter"²⁾, with goals, objectives and guiding principals for Environmental Education programmes.

According to the Belgrade Charter, the goal of Environmental Education is "to develop a world population that is aware of and concerned about the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations and commitment to individually and collectively work toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones"; the objectives of Environmental Education are: awareness, knowledge, attitude, skills, evaluation ability and participation. The principal audience for Environmental Education

is the general public, in both the formal education sector (from schools to Universities), but also in the non-formal education sector (family, workplace, decision makers...)

In 1977, 66 Member States participated in the first Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education that was jointly organized by UNESCO and UNEP in Tbilisi in 1977. The Tbilisi Declaration³⁾ recommended the adoption of 10 criteria to develop Environmental Education at the national, regional and global levels. It also endorsed goals, objectives and guiding principles for Environmental Education.

This first Tbilisi Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education was followed by 3 anniversary conferences, held every 10 years. The last one, Tbilisi+30⁴⁾ was held in 2007 in Ahmedabad, India, and drew "attention to a new sense of urgency and the need for a new, broader approach to Environmental Education in a very different social, economic and political climate, and knowledge environment to that of 1977 when the Tbilisi Declaration was formulated".

Indeed, at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, Environmental Education became part of Agenda 21⁵⁾, Chapter 36: promoting education, public awareness and training. Agenda 21 built on the achievement of the Tbilisi Declaration that notably highlights the interdependence between social, cultural, economic and political aspects of human behaviour, and the way we treat the environment and each other. Environmental education is not only about nature: environmental problems are social problems, caused by the behaviour of people.

More recently, the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development⁶⁾ (2005-2014) was launched, with UNESCO as the lead agency. The idea is to "integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, in order to address the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems we face in the 21st century". Education for Sustainable Development broadens the concept of Environmental Education.

In 2000 UNESCO had already endorsed the Earth Charter⁷⁾, whose 14th principle is to "Integrate into formal education and lifelong learning the knowledge, values and skills needed for a sustainable way of life", and whose 11th principle "affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care and economic opportunity". The first 3 recommendations (out of 10) of an Earth Charter +10 Conference in India in November 2010 relate to formal and non-formal education.

At the regional level, the UNECE strategy for Education for Sustainable Development⁸⁾ was adopted in Vilnius in 2005 "to encourage UNECE member States to develop and incorporate education for sustainable development into their formal education systems, in all relevant subjects, and in non-formal and informal education. This will equip people with knowledge of and skills in sustainable development, making them more competent and confident and increasing their opportunities for acting for a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature and with concern for social values, gender equity and cultural diversity".

In 2007 the sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" was held in Belgrade, Serbia. It was the first time in the history of this process that a Joint Session of Environment and Education Ministers took place and Ministers and Heads of delegation from 51 countries from the UNECE region adopted a joint Declaration "Building Bridges to the Future⁹⁾".

References

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<http://www.envir.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=1011467/The%2BBelgrade%2BCharter.pdf>
- 3) The Tbilisi declaration - 1977: <http://www.gdrc.org/uem/ee/tbilisi.html>
- 4) The Tbilisi +30 Declaration - 2007: <http://tbilisiplus30.org>
- 5) Agenda 21, Chapter 36: Promoting education, Public awareness and training:
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