

## *Outline of comparison*

# **Earth Charter - Charte des Responsabilités Humaines**

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The Earth Charter and *La Charte de Responsabilités Humaines* are both foundational documents with similar goals and they share many similar ideas. The documents were launched at roughly the same time and both try to establish an ethical guideline and serve as a call to action to fulfill their respective visions. While there are some notable differences, either document may serve as a set of principles for guiding society towards a more just, peaceful, and sustainable future.

The Earth Charter is both more concise and more detailed than *La Charte de Responsabilités Humaines*. The Earth Charter is composed of a preamble, the body of the Charter consisting of 16 main principles and another 61 sub-principles, and “The Way Forward”, a call to action. *La Charte* also has a preamble, a short set of ten principles, and several other sections expanding on the meaning of responsibility, the importance of establishing ethical guidelines for the future, the current social status in which *La Charte* is necessary, and the history of *La Charte*.

Both documents offer a strong motivation: *La Charte*, “...l’humanité se trouve à un moment clef de son histoire” and the Earth Charter, “We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history...” The embedding of the importance of each document in the time and situation sets the tone for both of them. Each document clearly reinforces ideas of interconnection, interdependence, intergenerational obligations, and unity. Both documents also promote the precautionary principle, human rights, and governance accountability explicitly. Regarding the precautionary principle, the Earth Charter Principle 6 states: “Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach” which refers to *La Charte des Responsabilités Humaines* : « le développement et la consommation des ressources naturelles nécessaires aux besoins humains et la recherche de la prospérité doivent être appuyés d’un engagement au principe de la précaution, assurant la protection proactive de l’environnement, la gestion vigilante de sa diversité et le partage équitable des richesses ». Concerning human rights, the Earth Charter states in Principle 3a « Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential » when *La Charte des Responsabilités Humaines* states that “Ensemble, nous avons la responsabilité de faire en sorte que les Droits Humains soient réaffirmés dans nos modes de pensées et nos actions ». Finally, *La Charte* specifically mentions accountability in its principle 8 « l’exercice du pouvoir est légitime lorsqu’il sert le bien commun et répond de ses actes devant ceux et celles sur lesquels il est

exercé » which matches with Earth Charter Principle 13 « Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice. »

La Charte states, “A travers le monde, des organisations et des individus se servent de La Charte des Responsabilités humaines comme point de départ d’une réflexion sur leurs propres situations et pour éclairer leurs actions” and this echoes the use of the Earth Charter over the past 13 years to clarify values and principles of sustainability and as a tool for mediation, intercultural, and interreligious dialogue. Both documents seek to foster peace, care, responsibility, and sustainability through dialogue and shared values.

There are also several differences that merit mention. While both documents speak to human responsibility, the Earth Charter also fosters an Earth rights discourse. This is not the case in La Charte, which focuses on human behaviors, responsibilities, justice, and liberties from a human rights perspective. La Charte’s language places nature as an object of human action or inaction. La Charte has a clear focus on human rights as can be seen in the repeated use of the word “liberty”, which harkens to French and American Revolutionary thought. The Earth Charter articulates a very strong eco-centric worldview stressing the notion of care and respect for the community of life. It also brings a cosmological view of our place in the universe “humanity is part of a vast evolving universe”. Both documents address the importance of human rights, although the EC seems to offer a bit more of importance to this.

La Charte also pulls occasionally on the Marxist concept: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” While the Earth Charter is often accused of espousing a socialist philosophy, it has no language as clearly political as is found in La Charte. The concept of common but differentiated responsibilities may be implied here in La Charte, a concept that may also be implied in the Earth Charter, while the Earth Charter emphasizes universal responsibilities, it also addresses the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities principle in the following way: “Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

Another difference between the two documents is La Charte’s focus on history and reconciliation. The Earth Charter is a forward -looking document that, although firmly embedded in an historical context, keeps its language focused strictly on the present and acting towards the future. La Charte includes several passages related to historical responsibilities, which may also imply the common but differentiated responsibility concept.

A further rift between the two documents is the Earth Charter’s clear call to nation states and their commitment to global governance through the United Nations. The Earth Charter has always been closely tied to the UN and its processes. La Charte makes little explicit mention of

global governance apart from insisting that any global governance system must act within a set of universal principles.

A few other divergences exist in the lack of detail in La Charte compared to the detail of the Earth Charter. The Earth Charter explicitly mentions sustainable development, gender, women, indigenous people, children and youth, genetic modification and information, energy, renewable energy, nuclear energy, radioactivity, pollution, renewable and non-renewable resources, the military, technology transfer, social costs, health, poverty, water, air, food, soil, sanitation, social security, education, wealth distribution, debt, trade, labor, government and corporate accountability, family strength, discrimination, cultural and spiritual places, democracy, participatory decision making, civil society, freedom of opinion and dissent and expression and association and peaceful assembly, corruption, local communities, arts, sciences, mass media, moral and spiritual education, animal cruelty, and a culture of peace, among others. La Charte's concept may include these but does not specifically mention them in the document.

Overall, both documents promote a common vision of understanding the world through the lens of values and ethics in order to build a better future and provide guidance for individuals, communities, organizations, and governments to make responsible choices.