

CONCEPT NOTE

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON HARMONY WITH NATURE IN COMMEMORATION OF INTERNATIONAL MOTHER EARTH DAY

THEME: EARTH JURISPRUDENCE

UN HQ New York, 21 April 2017, Trusteeship Council

Background

Since 2009, the General Assembly has adopted nine consecutive resolutions on Harmony with Nature including one designating 22 April as International Mother Earth Day.¹ The aim of the General Assembly in adopting the above-mentioned resolutions has been to promote and reflect upon a non-anthropocentric, or Earth-centred, worldview. At the core of this worldview is the recognition of the intrinsic value of Nature, within which relationships between humankind and the planet are symbiotic, interconnected and in harmony with the natural laws of the Universe.

General Assembly resolutions have increasingly recognized the importance of giving due consideration to living in Harmony with Nature. On 24 September 2015, the General Assembly, at its seventieth session, adopted resolution 70/1, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, in which, under Sustainable Development Goal 12 to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, target 12.8 states that Member States should ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness needed for sustainable development and lifestyles in Harmony with Nature.

On 22 December 2015, the General Assembly adopted resolution 70/208, specifically acknowledging Earth Jurisprudence in advancing Harmony with Nature. Earth Jurisprudence recognizes that the Earth is the source of natural laws that govern life. It provides a cohesive framework that underpins many disciplines, weaving them together to create a more effective, holistic governance approach, one that reflects the integrated nature of the world in which we live. Earth jurisprudence inspires citizens and societies to reconsider how they interact with the natural world.

The General Assembly, in the same resolution 70/208, decided to initiate in 2016 a virtual dialogue on Harmony with Nature, among experts on Earth jurisprudence worldwide, including those who had been active in the interactive dialogues of the General Assembly. Over 120 international experts from different continents, totaling 33 nationalities, joined the virtual dialogue, which began on 22 April 2016 in commemoration of International Mother Earth Day, and concluded on 22 June 2016. The dialogue built upon the conclusions of the five interactive dialogues on Harmony with Nature held from 2000 to 2015, with a focus on how to reshape human governance systems to operate from an Earth-centred perspective.

The international experts addressed Earth jurisprudence from the following eight disciplines, drawn from the six previous reports of the Secretary-General on Harmony with Nature: Earth-centered law; ecological economics; education; holistic science; the humanities; philosophy and ethics; the arts, media, design and architecture; and theology and spirituality.

¹ <http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/documents.html>

The experts' report on Earth jurisprudence (A/71/266) advances that given the fundamental interconnections between humanity and Nature, the urgent need to inspire citizens and societies to reconsider how they interact with the natural world and the importance of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda over the next 14 years, Earth Jurisprudence principles should be included and applied in the implementation of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The experts' report further recommends that our governance systems "recognize the fundamental legal rights of ecosystems and species to exist, thrive and regenerate," observing that nature's rights "are not in opposition to human rights: as part of Nature, our rights are derived from those same rights". The report concludes that human rights "are meaningless if the ecosystems that sustain us do not have the legal right to exist".

Finally, the eighth resolution adopted by the General Assembly A/71/232 on 12 December 2016, requests the President of the General Assembly to convene, at the seventy-first session of the Assembly, an interactive dialogue, to be held at the plenary meetings to be convened during the commemoration of International Mother Earth Day, with the participation of Member States, United Nations organizations, independent experts and other stakeholders, to discuss the recommendations of the experts' report on Earth jurisprudence (A/71/266). In accordance with resolution 70/208 the purpose is to inspire citizens and societies to reconsider how they interact with the natural world and to improve the ethical basis of the relationship between humankind and the Earth in the context of sustainable development.

The resolution further invites Member States to consider existing studies and, as appropriate, the findings and recommendations of the reports of the Secretary-General on Harmony with Nature, the experts' summary report of the virtual dialogue, addressing Earth jurisprudence, and the past interactive dialogues of the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature.

Objective

The Dialogue will examine the key characteristics of, and implementation strategies for, an Earth-centred paradigm. It will advance the importance of the inclusion and application of Earth jurisprudence principles in the implementation of Agenda 2030 and all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Panelists will draw from the recommendations of the experts' report from the 2016 virtual dialogue, showcase how Earth jurisprudence is currently being applied across different disciplines, and offer new Earth jurisprudence implementation strategies consistent with Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Dialogue will explore how Earth-centred governance policies could ensure sustainable development patterns consistent with Earth jurisprudence principles.

Questions

1. How can Earth jurisprudence help us to better implement the Sustainable Development Goals?
2. What promising approaches and actions should be implemented, replicated or scaled-up to advance an Earth-centred approach to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals?
3. How would a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Nature help guide implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals?