

Living Draft
Declaration of the Rights Held by Future Generations
and
Bill of Responsibilities for Present Generations

What follows is a *living draft* Declaration of the Rights Held by Future Generations and Bill of Responsibilities for Present Generations. These were first drafted by those who attended a Congress for the Rights of First Generations convened in Moab, Utah in the fall of 2012, a gathering inspired by the long line of community leaders and visionaries, especially women, who have worked on behalf of Future Generations. Those who attended the Moab Congress felt their voices represented only a fraction of the world's women and of the diverse communities of Future Generations to come. Not wanting to speak on behalf of those whose voices were not represented, they conceived of these as working documents to be amended *in perpetuity*, as an ever-widening circle add their voices to these statements, and as these rights and responsibilities are passed down from generation to generation.

All are invited to join in this effort. We are building a blog to house this document so that it can be debated, amended, and edited by a wide group. We seek your wisdom. We invite you to draft what might be absent from current iterations of this document, to add to it rights, responsibilities and principles that reflect your experiences; to challenge and push back; to add nuance; and, to delight in the places where you feel resonance with what others have contributed. Even more, we hope that we find ways of translating these working ideas into concrete action.

This document is not so much a product as a reflection of a process of relationship and movement building.

A volunteer group of women will form a council to guide the declaration through this process of vetting, networking, and revisions. The initial council will be women who participated in the Congress. For the time being it will be housed at the Science and Environmental Health Network that convened the Women's Congress with Peaceful Uprising and Moab Community Radio (KZMU).

The document has four sections: a **Preamble**, a **Bill of Rights**, a **Bill of Responsibilities** and a set of **Guiding Principles**. A working draft of the preamble and principles was written collaboratively by Carolyn Raffensperger in conversation with Bob Gough, Osprey Oreille Lake, Polly Higgins, Peter Montague and Rebecca Altman in advance of the Moab gathering to facilitate group discussion. The rights and responsibilities were distilled from discussions held at the Moab Congress on the gifts and rights of all beings and the responsibilities present generations carry to honor those gifts and rights. Those gathered in Moab focused their deliberations on the principles and preamble, but due to time constraints, were not able to deliberate over the content, language or organization of these rights and responsibilities as currently written, however.

What appears here is our best effort to reflect and articulate the wisdom that emerged through group discussions in Moab. These themes were used to redraft the preamble and principles, and to define the rights and responsibilities. Important discussions need

to consider (a) does this honor the sentiment of what emerged from the discussions in Moab? (b) what rights, principles and responsibilities must be added or changed, and/or what tweaks must be made to the overarching message of the preamble? (c) could we collapse, condense or combine any of the rights, responsibilities or principles? And (d) does our language and the metaphors used honor our goal of radical inclusion of all earthly communities, in all their diversity, human and non-human?

The Congress was an experiment. This process of making the Declaration a living document is another experiment. Key questions that guide our deliberations include: Can we galvanize a civil rights movement for future generations through the collaborative articulation of core ideas? Can we make policies and take actions based on these ideas?

We invite you to comment on this draft and help carry forward the rich dialogue that both inspired the Women's Congress and was transmitted through it.

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Preamble

Towards a Declaration of the Rights Held by Future Generations

and Bill of Responsibilities for the Present Generations
... a beginning ...
Fall 2012

We women, speaking from our authority and responsibility as the first environment for Future Generations, honor and uphold all relationships in the Earth community so that we may leave a healthy, humane and beautiful world to Future Generations.

We live in a world tipped out of balance by pollution, war and conflicts of all kinds, and injustice; a world diminished by declines in the rich diversity that once existed; a world less whole because too many are sick before their time, struggling to breathe, to be nourished, to reproduce, or facing an environment less stable than the one into which they were born. As the oceans grow more acidic and less able to support life, our old-growth forests are clear-cut, the countryside stripped of its natural abundance and mined for that last ounce of fossil fuel, minerals or radioactive atoms. We are altering, in some cases, irrevocably, the landscape and all the relationships sustained by it. Climate change shifts weather patterns, making extreme weather, in many places, the norm. As a result, a growing number of communities face strife of varying magnitude – extinction of species, loss of diversity, disruption of vital ecosystem cycles, land loss, drought, inadequate food supplies, conflicts and threatened infrastructure and community ties. These effects are felt worldwide, but are distributed unevenly, leaving some communities to bear far more of these burdens to life and wellness.

Present laws, policies and social norms allow for the continued destruction of the Earth and of all earthly communities—animate and inanimate. We continue to squander and plunder without recognition of a system's regenerative limits and without full consideration of the long-term consequences, consequences estimated on the order of centuries, even millennia. We continue to struggle within our own movements and communities to honor all voices from all earthly beings. This is not the legacy we wish to leave Future Generations, but it will be, and our legacy will only continue to encroach upon a livable future if we do not act now.

In drafting this document, we withdraw our complicity in this future. We seek to create a forum through which we, as women, can articulate an alternative vision of the relationship we share with each other and with Future Generations. We seek to create an alternate legacy, with an abiding sense of humility that acknowledges our place within humanity, as one species dependent on complex ecological systems, and with a sense of our lives relative to the infiniteness of deep, geologic time.

To those who came before us, our generation was once a Future Generation whose lives were cradled by the hopes of our ancestors. The foundation for our world was laid by them. We realize we have an opportunity — and a responsibility — to those who will follow us. We acknowledge the interdependence of the innumerable communities and systems — past, present and future — that comprise our shared planet, and work from the core values of respect, interrelationship, radical inclusion, and reciprocity. What we give unto each other, the Earth, and Future Generations, so shall be given unto us.

We stand for the rights of Future Generations. We see these rights as inalienable. We call out our responsibilities as guardians and ancestors for those who will follow. We acknowledge that our sacred responsibilities to Future Generations requires us to listen, to address injustices that exist among present generations, to seek the wisdom of

indigenous peoples, and to create opportunities for each and every earthly community to speak on behalf of its own Future Generations.

We call for a fundamental shift in politics and discourse as we know it. We call for a new wave of policies, alliances, norms and movements that can redirect human activities in service of sustaining an interconnected, all inclusive world in which Future Generations can thrive. We acknowledge the deep connections between present generations and those that will follow, and that look beyond our immediate needs into deep time. We wish to enliven our societies and governance with wonder, gratitude and humility.

We seek to create an alternate legacy, with an abiding sense of humility that acknowledges our place within humanity, as one species dependent on complex ecological systems, and with a sense of our lives relative to the infiniteness of deep, geologic time.

Towards a Bill of Rights Held by Future Generations

Right of individuals to a clean and healthy environment

Individuals of all species have a right to a clean and healthy environment. This right cannot be bought or sold. It is unalienable.

Right of nature to exist

Nature and all ecosystems have the right to exist, whole and intact.

Right of Future Generations to whole, biologically diverse, unpolluted ecosystems

Future Generations of all communities, human and ecological, animate and inanimate, have the right to a wholesome ecosystem that is biologically rich and diverse with its vital integral cycles and systems intact, to be respected, and to not be wasted, degraded, polluted, devalued, excluded or cast aside. This right cannot be bought or sold.

Right to peace

Communities, human and ecological, animate and inanimate, have the right to a peaceful (and cooperative) living in their communities, generating meaningful relationships or partnership based on respect, trust and humility with fellow members and natural systems.

Right of Future Generations to have ecosystems restored

Present and Future Generations of all communities, human and ecological, animate and inanimate, have the right to have their ecosystems restored to their naturally dynamic and healthy equilibrium.

Right of communities to self-representation and self-determination

Communities, human and ecological, animate and inanimate, have the right to self-representation and self-determination. A key component of this right is Free, Prior, and Informed Consent to activities that could harm present or Future Generations, nature, or the commons.

Right to return or remain in place of origin, heritage or ancestors

Present and Future Generations of all communities, human and ecological, animate and inanimate, have the right to return to or remain in the place of their origin, heritage or ancestors.

Right not to be coerced into or implicated in harm

Present and Future Generations of all communities, human and ecological, animate and inanimate, have the right not to be coerced into or implicated in harm.

Right to environmentally sustainable economies

Present and Future Generations of all communities, human and ecological, animate and inanimate, have the right to an environmentally sustainable work practice, commerce and economic system that does not sacrifice our ecosystem nor puts it in jeopardy to fulfill the greed and profit driven goals of the market place.

Corporations do not have inherent rights

Corporations are not people and do not have inherent rights. Corporations exist because states enact laws defining corporations and specifying what they can and cannot do. Accordingly, corporations are creatures of government and thus granted limited privileges and have delegated responsibilities based upon the rights of the community and governments, and not solely derived from the rights of their shareholders. The privileges of corporations may be revoked if they violate the terms of their charters, repeatedly break laws, no longer serve the general welfare, or violate the rights of individuals or communities.

Towards a Bill of Responsibilities Carried by Present Generations**Responsibility to honor Earth's systems**

Present Generations carry the responsibility to honor the continuity of life and Earth's systems, to hold reverence for life, respect and protect the integral limits, boundaries, relationships and natural organization of the Earth and its natural systems, rhythms and cycles.

Responsibility to act as guardians for Future Generations

Present Generations carry the responsibility to act as guardians for Future Generations. Present Generation will take active responsibility to speak and openly discuss matters that affect Future Generation. Present Generations carry the responsibility to educate Present Generations, decision-makers and children.

Responsibility to uphold the right of communities to self-representation and self-determination

Present Generations carry the responsibility to uphold the right of communities, human and non-human, animate and inanimate, the rights of self-representation and self-determination.

Responsibility of economic practices aligned with the balance of life

Present Generations carry the responsibility of sustainable economic practices and to not denigrate the environment by wasteful practices, polluting beyond its means to regenerate, and by avoiding practices that cause harm to the Present and Future

Generation. Present Generations carry the responsibility to align economic, governance and social systems with the balance of life.

Responsibility to prevent harm

Present Generations carry the responsibility to assess and predict impacts of social, ecological, political and technical systems on Future Generations, and to apply this knowledge to prevent harm.

Responsibility to heed early warnings

Present Generations carry the responsibility to heed the warnings of sentinel species, and of beings and systems that face threats to dignity, survival and integrity.

Responsibility to listen to indigenous communities

Present Generations carry the responsibility to listen to indigenous communities, and to act on and learn from their wisdom.

Responsibility to warn Future Generations

Present Generations carry the responsibility to warn Future Generations in instances where our actions or decisions have already compromised the health and well-being of Future Generations.

Responsibility to uphold United Nations treaties on rights

Present Generations carry the responsibility to uphold all United Nations treaties on Human Rights, Indigenous Rights, Rights of Nature, Rights of Future Generations, and the Rights of the Child.

Responsibility to restore and regenerate ecological systems

Present Generations carry the responsibility to restore and regenerate ecological systems.

Responsibility to admit mistakes and course correct

Present Generations carry the responsibility to admit mistakes, recognize incomplete knowledge and to course correct upon early indication of harm.

Responsibility to replace harmful systems

Present Generations carry the responsibility to replace, re-imagine, and create systems that heal rather than harm.

Responsibility to respect

Present Generations carry the responsibility to treat all beings, systems and communities with respect, and to not exploit.

Guiding Principles that Inform this Covenant between Present and Future Generations

Health and well-being is a function of ecological relationships

Health and well-being is a function of relationships. Without whole, intact and healthy systems, the capacity for Future Generations to live full and healthy lives is diminished.

Rights held in common to the commons

The rights of present and Future Generations of all communities, human and ecological, animate and inanimate, are rights with each other to a whole and healthy commons. The commons include what is shared among all and that are necessary for life and community integrity. This includes but is not limited to: air, water, seeds, climate, belonging and beauty.

Rights create responsibilities

Rights create responsibilities. Responsibilities for protecting rights must be located in specific bodies that can be held accountable, such as government commissions and agencies.

Governments hold two responsibilities: protect rights and care for the commons

Governments hold two foundational responsibilities derived from the rights of the governed: to protect rights and to serve as the trustee of the common wealth and the common health.

Precautionary principle is key to fulfilling responsibilities

The precautionary principle is a key method for governments, communities or corporations to fulfill their responsibilities to protect the rights of Present and Future Generations of nature and of communities.

Economies must not destroy ecosystems

Economies are situated within ecosystems, and thus, economic activities are dependent on intact ecological systems. Economies must honor ecological principles, and be regenerative. For example, economic activities must not take things from the Earth faster than the Earth can regenerate them nor put things into the Earth faster than it can assimilated. Economic activity must not destroy the very basis of economy and life itself.

Ecocide is a violation of the rights of individuals, communities and nature

Ecocide is a fundamental violation of the rights of the individual, communities, and nature. It is the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been or will be severely diminished. This includes the large-scale destruction of the environment by war, mining, discharge of nuclear or hazardous materials or other act. Ecocide, is a crime against nature and humanity and will not stand.

Inter and intra generational justice are inseparable

Some places, and the communities that inhabit them, bear a disproportionate burden of harm and threats to common wealth and common health. True justice for Future Generations is predicated on justice within this generation. Inter and intra generational justice are inseparable.

Restorative justice

Restorative justice views criminal offenses as an injury to the community as well as the individual and as injuries that must be repaired. Restorative justice is an effective form of justice to address current environmental destruction, to prevent it from being repeated and to restore relationships among people and between people and the natural world.

Call for new institutions and ideas

The scale and scope of environmental problems call for new institutions and new ideas to address the problems facing humankind. These include the respectful person standard, ecocide as a crime, laws that recognize the rights of nature and Future Generations, and legal guardians for nature and future generations. Many cultures, particularly indigenous cultures have practiced these principles for millennia.

We seek guidance from them in how to live respectfully and to fulfill our responsibilities to the Earth and Future Generations.

Humanity is capable of critical and mass change. The time for exercising that capability is upon us and the rights of Creation demand it.