

The Harmony with Nature initiative: Why it matters and what it might achieve

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About the author

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As the evidence of climate change reveals itself around the world more dramatically every year, and the ecological crisis deepens, we desperately need nation states and major corporations to engage with and implement Earth-centred governance. Despite around 30,000 people creating the *Universal Declaration for the Rights of Mother Earth* in Bolivia in 2010,¹ and a growing global movement of people advocating for Earth jurisprudence and Earth-centredness, the ‘official’ work of the United Nations (UN) and its nation state members continues to focus on human-centred, albeit ‘sustainable’, growth.

Within this context, the UN Harmony with Nature (HwN) programme can be seen as an extremely important initiative that aims to build momentum for an ecocentric worldview within the UN. The HwN website (www.harmonywithnatureun.org) states:

The Harmony with Nature initiative speaks to the need to move away from a human-centered worldview – or “anthropocentrism” – and establish a non-anthropocentric, or Earth-centered, relationship with the planet. Under this new paradigm, Nature is recognized as an equal partner with humankind and is no longer treated as merely the source of raw materials to produce ever more commodities and feed the indefinite private accumulation of capital.

The HwN initiative began in 2009, under the leadership of the plurinational state of Bolivia, who began intergovernmental negotiations about the principles of harmony with nature. Since that time, the UN has hosted six annual HwN dialogues, which see spokespersons address the UN General Assembly about

key issues regarding the human–nature relationship. The sixth dialogue, held in 2016,² achieved an important milestone. For the first time, a virtual dialogue was created, which invited experts in Earth jurisprudence from around the world to provide short discussion pieces from a range of perspectives. In all, 127 international experts, from 33 nations, participated in the virtual dialogue and addressed Earth jurisprudence from eight disciplines:

- earth-centred law;
- ecological economics;
- education;
- holistic science;
- the humanities;
- philosophy and ethics;
- the arts, media, design and architecture;
- theology and spirituality.

I participated in this process and can strongly recommend that anyone interested in Earth jurisprudence and Earth-centredness read the papers submitted.² They provide a snapshot of current thinking about how Earth-centredness can be understood, and implemented, in a range of disciplines and across different aspects of human societies. The final experts’ summary report from the 2016 HwN dialogues was presented to the UN General Assembly, and on 21 December 2016 the General Assembly adopted eight resolutions from the report (United Nations, 2016).

The outcomes from this process are important. The resolution called for an interactive dialogue of the General Assembly, in which the experts’ summary report will be further discussed, in April 2017, ahead of the next HwN dialogue. It also called for a report on how the

Sustainable Development Goals could be implemented in harmony with nature, to be submitted to the General Assembly.

The stated goals of the dialogues are to “inspire citizens and societies to reconsider how they interact with the natural world in order to implement the Sustainable Development Goals in harmony with nature” (United Nations, 2016). But the Sustainable Development Goals are fundamentally human-centred, rather than Earth-centred. So with the continued work of Earth jurisprudence advocates around the world, let’s hope that the UN can be influenced by the

HwN dialogues, and that the concepts and practice of Earth-centredness can be understood and implemented. ■

Notes

- 1 See <https://is.gd/8fwpbW> for more information on this.
- 2 For more information on this, please visit <https://is.gd/mef3QG>. The papers submitted can be viewed at <https://is.gd/Os7ofo>.

References

United Nations (2016) *Sustainable development: Harmony with Nature* (report of the Second Committee). Available at <https://is.gd/ZUwgYg> (accessed March 2017).

“Let’s hope that the United Nations can be influenced by the Harmony with Nature dialogues, and that the concepts and practice of Earth-centredness can be understood and implemented.”

Turf Bank by Angie Shanahan

Original: Pastel on paper.

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Higher-resolution version: <https://is.gd/ecoartwork>

