

**RESTORING OUR COMMON HOME:
DECLARATION FOR STOCKHOLM+50**



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Humanity at a Crossroads – Breakdown or Breakthrough

The world's dire ecological situation, and the challenges faced by present and future generations, are increasingly clear. Youth are protesting in the streets and in the courts, as calls for deep transformation and renewal are heard from all segments of society. On October 8, 2021, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) recognized the "right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment". For this right to be implemented, structural changes to the legal, economic, social, political, and technological spheres will be required to restore a stable and well-functioning Earth System¹. A shared consciousness of our global interdependence must give rise to a new common logic, to define and recognize the global commons that support life on Earth — the planetary system that connects us all and on which we all depend. This is a foundational step toward the establishment of a governance system to effectively manage human interactions with the Earth System. Fifty years after the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the signatories of this civil society Declaration call upon the United Nations, its agencies, and all Member States to act upon a four-step pathway towards the critical paradigm shift we all need.

1 - Implement the Right to a Healthy Environment. Member States should implement UNHRC Resolution 48/13 recognizing this right. This requires acknowledging and acting upon intra- and intergenerational equity which, in turn, requires that principles are progressive and include obligations of non-regression – e.g., enshrining a "regeneration" agenda – in all spheres of environmental law. Non-regression must prevent erosion of protection, while principles of regeneration and progression will ensure that environmental laws and regulations consistently advance in both ambition and effectiveness. It entails ensuring procedural environmental rights, including access to information, public participation, and access to justice. The right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment (itself a core global public good) can only be achieved if our shared life support system – the Earth System – is protected as a single, indivisible whole.

2 – Recognize, Restore and Safeguard the Global Commons.

The foundational step for successfully managing a common good is to recognize and define it. This will facilitate the establishment of a genuinely effective global environmental governance framework, consistent with the indivisibility of the natural system that supports life on this planet. A well-functioning Earth System, keeping humanity in a "safe operating space" within all vital and interdependent Planetary Boundaries, must be recognized as a fundamental global common in need of urgent stewardship. It thus should be legally recognized as the "Common Heritage" of humankind. A stable climate is a manifestation of the Earth System functioning and represents more than an issue of "Common Concern," as expressed in the Paris Agreement. Due to the urgency of the climate crisis, the recognition of a stable climate as Common Heritage, to allow for its restoration and safeguard, must become an immediate flagship issue and central priority in the "Our Common Agenda" process.

3 – Establish a Regenerative Economy. Our current economic system treats the consumption of physical natural resources as "wealth creation," despite the resulting destruction of natural infrastructure. A prosperous future requires an economy in which the natural processes that support all life on Earth and maintain a stable climate become economically visible. Recognizing the Earth System and a stable climate as a "Common Heritage" will enable the proper valuation of these benefits for human societies, which today are considered mere "externalities". This will provide the legal basis and catalyst to build a regenerative economy and a system of governance that restores and maintains a stable climate and other vital Planetary Boundaries.

4 - Prioritize Governance and Institutional Solutions. The long-term governance of the global commons, the delivery of global public goods, and management of global public risks all require a permanent system of effective governance to reliably manage our interactions with the Earth System as a whole. For example, a proposal to repurpose the inactive United Nations Trusteeship Council has been widely discussed, including most recently in the UN Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda (OCA) report. The OCA report calls for a Declaration for Future Generations and highlights the desirability of transforming the Council into a multilateral space for the governance of the commons and to give voice to the interests of succeeding generations. Ensuring adequate global ecological governance and strengthening today's fragmented institutional frameworks, and making them inclusive, representative and accountable to global citizens, must be made a central priority for the international community.

(1) The Earth System is the "global environment as an integrated whole." The set of global interacting physical, chemical, and biological cycles that allows and is regulated by life on Earth. It is the integration of the geophysical properties of our planet with the living biosphere – including humans and human activities – that forms the Earth System. Self-regulation through synergistic feedback loops is a key dimension of a functioning Earth System. See Steffen, W. et al. (2020). The emergence and evolution of Earth System Science. *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment*. 1: 54-63. 10.1038/s43017-019-0005-6.