

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
International Mother Earth Day 22/04/2009

**Discurso pronunciado por Leonardo Boff
en el día 22 de abril de 2008
en la Asamblea General de la ONU**

President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann
Evo Morales Ayma, President of Plurinational State of Bolivia,
Distinguished representatives
Brothers and Sisters All

In the year 2000, the Earth Charter presented us with this important warning: "We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future... The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life."

If the economical and financial crisis is worrying, the crisis of the Earth's non-sustainability has become threatening. Scientists who follow the state of the planet, specially the Global Footprint Network had talked about the Earth Overshoot Day, the day in which the limits of the Earth would be exceeded, and on exactly September 23, 2008 the Earth surpassed its resources regeneration capacity necessary for human demands by 40%. At the moment we need more than one Earth to survive.

How can we guarantee the sustainability of the Earth as a premise to solve the other crises: the social, alimentary, energetic and climatic? We don't have Noah's Ark anymore, which would save some and let all the others die.

As the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon, appropriately declared recently: "we cannot allow urgent matters to jeopardize the essential." Solving the economic chaos is an urgent matter, but it is essential to guarantee the Earth's vitality and integrity.

It is important to overcome the financial crisis, but the indispensable and essential predicament is -- how are we going to save our common home and humanity that is part of it?

This is the reason to adopt the resolution of approving the celebration of an International Mother Earth Day on April 22 of each year.

Given the worsening of the Earth's environmental situation, especially regarding global warming, we must act together and fast. If not, there is the risk that the Earth will continue without us.

I beg you in the name of the Earth, our Mother, the mother of your suffering sons and daughters, and the rest of the members of the community of life, to approve this resolution.

With this in mind, I would like to make a short presentation on the basis for regarding the Earth as our Mother.

Since the beginning of time, cultures and religions have testified to the belief of the Earth as the Gran Madre, Inana, Terra Mater, Magna Mater and Pachamama.

The original peoples from yesterday and today had and have been very clearly aware that the Earth is the generator of all living beings. Only a living being can produce life in its different forms. Therefore, the Earth is our universal Mother.

For centuries this vision prevailed until the emergence of the scientific spirit in the 16th century. Since then, the Earth has no longer been seen as a Mother, but as a reality without a soul, given to humanity to be subdued, even with violence. Mother Nature that should have been respected was transformed in wild nature that must be dominated. The Earth was converted in a chest full of resources, available to humans for accumulation and consumption.

Within this paradigm, neither the problem of the limits of the Earth's support systems nor limited natural resources are considered. It is presupposed that resources are infinite, and that we can grow without limitations towards the future, which is clearly an illusion. The main preoccupation is -- how to earn more? And the desire to earn more and more has created an archipelago of richness surrounded by an ocean of misery.

Last year UNDP confirmed it: 20% of the richest people absorb 82.4% of the riches of the world, while 20% of the poorest have to be content with only a 1.6%. This is to say, that a small minority monopolizes consumption and controls the economic processes which involve the devastation of nature and extreme social injustice.

But since the late 1970s it has been proved that a small, old and limited planet, such as the Earth, can no longer support an unlimited project. Another model is needed which considers the Earth, life and planetary well-being as the axis within a spirit of collaboration and care. The core concern is -- how can human beings live in harmony with the Earth's cycles? How can we live longer with less?

It is within this context that the vision of the Earth as our Mother has been salvaged. It is no longer the perception of the old, but an empiric and scientific attestation. The credit for demonstrating that the Earth is a living super-organism belongs to the scientists James E. Lovelock, Lynn Margulis and José Lutzenberger, who accomplished it in the 1970s. She is permanently articulating physical, chemical and biological processes in such a subtle and balanced way that life is always being produced and maintained under the sun. Is not that there is life on Earth, but that the same Earth is alive and is called Gaia, the Greek goddess for the living Earth.

That the whole Earth is alive was proven by the well known biologist Edward O. Wilson who writes: "in a single gram of earth, less than a handful, nearly ten thousand millions microorganisms live, which belong to six thousand different species." Without a doubt the Earth is a fecund Mother.

The Earth has existed for four million four hundred thousand years. In an advanced moment of its evolution and complexity it started to feel, think and love. It was the emergence of the human being. For this reason, in western languages homo/man comes from humus, fecund earth, and Adam comes from adamah, cultivable earth. As the Argentinean indigenous poet and singer Atahualpa Yupanqui used to say the human being is the Earth that walks, thinks, feels and loves.

The vision of the astronauts confirms the symbiosis between the Earth and humanity. From their spaceships they made the following remark: from here, looking at that bright white and blue planet, no difference between the Earth and humanity is perceived. They are a sole entity. More than peoples, nations and races we must look at ourselves as creatures of the Earth, as sons and daughters of the same Mother.

But looking at the Earth from the closest perspective, we can notice that our Mother has been crucified. She has a face of a third or fourth world because she is being continuously attacked. Almost half of her children are hungry or die before their time. This is why social policies, carried out in many countries like those, for example, in Brazil under the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, especially with the Hunger Zero Program and "Bolsa Familia," are signs of love to Mother Earth. In six years they have returned life and dignity to 50 million children of the Earth.

We must get the Earth down from the cross and resuscitate her. For this there is already a beautiful document that could inspire us: the Earth Charter. It was born from the global civil society, its elaboration involved more than one hundred thousand people in 46 countries and UNESCO in a resolution in 2003 recognized the Earth Charter as "an educational instrument and an ethical reference for sustainable development." Mikhail Gorbachev, Maurice Strong and Steven Rockefeller, among others, actively participated in its conception.

The Charter considers the Earth as full of life and as our home. It presents concrete directions for us on how to save her -- taking care of her with understanding, compassion and love, as should be our loving behavior towards our Great Mother. I hope some day this Earth Charter can be presented to, discussed and embraced by this Assembly, if it was to be approved, we would have an official document about the dignity of Mother Earth and offering the ethical framework, guidelines or parameters of how to achieve a more peaceful and sustainable world for humanity and our common home.

In order to regard the Earth as Mother, the prevailing reason, that is functional and instrumental, is not enough. We must enrich it with sensible, emotional and cordial reason where the profound sentiment takes root, where values are elaborated, the essential care, compassion and the dreams which inspire saving actions. Our mission as a group of beings is to be guardians and caretakers of this sacred heritage received from the Universe.

To finish, I want to make a suggestion if I may. When the resolution of celebrating the Mother Earth Day on April 22 is approved, my suggestion would be to put on the cupola of the Assembly one of these beautiful images of the Earth from outside, suspended in the black background of the Universe which evokes in us sentiments of reverence and mutual ownership. Looking at her we realize that this is our Common Home, our dear and generous Mother Earth.

I would also asked that the recommendation of having everybody, on April 22, in all places, at schools, in factories, at the parliaments, before starting work keeping a moment of silence in order to get our hearts in tune with Mother Earth.

As it is, the Earth cannot continue. We must change our mindsets, our hearts and our ways of production and consumption if we wish to have a future of hope. The solution for the Earth will not come from heaven, but will be the result of a coalition of forces around an integral ecological conscience, ethical values, humanitarian means and a new sense of being. Only then we will honor our Common Home, the Earth, our great and generous Mother.

MANY THANKS

Leonardo Boff

Representative of Brazil and Earth Charter Commissioner

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