

# EARTH AND FAITH

A BOOK *of* REFLECTION  
*for* ACTION



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## UNEP IN BRIEF

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was created in 1972 as the environmental conscience of the UN system, to create an awareness in other agencies of the environmental impact of their activities. Since then, UNEP has leveraged a small budget into a program of major significance and lasting influence. It assesses the state of the world's environment, helps formulate international environmental law, strengthens the environmental management capacity of developing countries, and raises environmental concerns as social and economic policies and programs are considered.

UNEP advocates environmentally sound "sustainable development," a concept inspiring Agenda 21, the action plan adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development—the Earth Summit—in Rio de Janeiro.

UNEP helps solve problems that cannot be handled by nations acting alone, by providing a forum that allows countries to come to the table for negotiations, to build consensus and forge international agreements. UNEP also promotes the participation of faith traditions, non-governmental organizations, business, the scientific and academic communities, women, youth and others to achieve environmentally sustainable development.

The organization is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, with six regional offices: Washington, DC, for North America, Geneva/Europe, Nairobi/Africa, Bangkok/Asia and the Pacific, Mexico City/Latin America and the Caribbean, and Bahrain/West Asia. It also has a New York Office to liaise with UN agencies. UNEP is headed by an Under Secretary-General, and its Governing Council has a rotating membership of 58 countries.

In 1986, the New York Office initiated the Environmental Sabbath (now the celebration of Earth in faith) as a time for people of faith to renew their relationship with the forces of creation. By combining a knowledge of the earth sciences with those of spiritual values, the goal is to transform our fundamental relationship with Earth from one of destruction to one of redemption and rejuvenation.

## UNEP IN ACTION

- 1973** Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
- 1975** Mediterranean Action Plan (1st of 13 regional plans); International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals; Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS)
- 1979** Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
- 1985** Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer
- 1987** Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer; Global 500 Roll of Honour
- 1988** UNEP-WMO Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- 1989** Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes
- 1991** UNEP-UN Development Programme-World Bank Global Environment Facility
- 1992** UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit);  
UN Convention on Biological Diversity; UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
- 1993** UNEP International Environmental Technology Centre
- 1994** UN Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought
- 1995** Global Program to Protect the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities
- 1996-2000** Negotiations toward treaties on trade in chemicals and persistent organic pollutants
- 2000** Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

# EARTH AND FAITH



A BOOK *of* REFLECTION  
*for* ACTION

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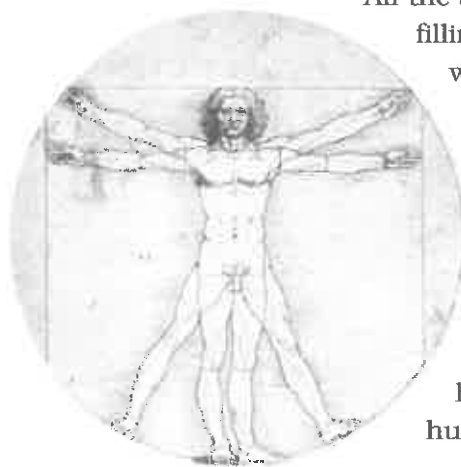
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This book is printed with soy-based inks on paper containing only recycled fiber, with 30% post-consumer waste, and treated with a chlorine-free process.



All the animals languish,  
filling the air  
with lamentations.

The woods fall in ruin.

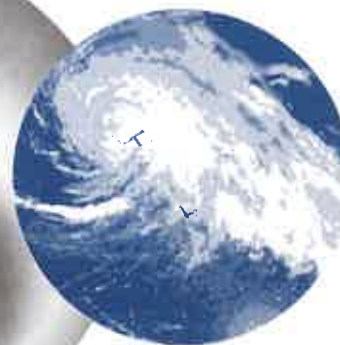
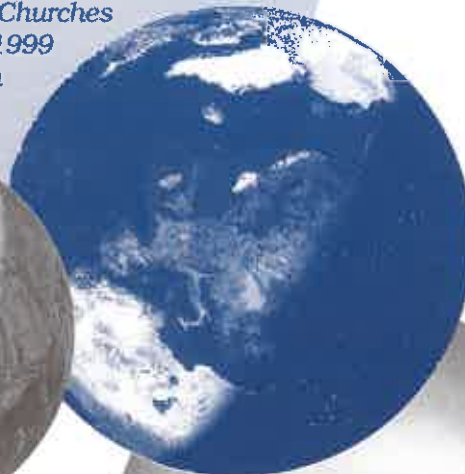
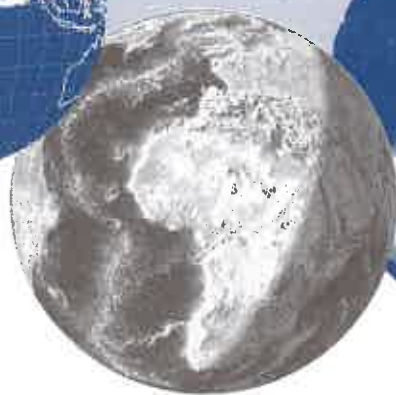
The mountains are torn open  
in order to carry away the metals  
which are produced there.

But how can I speak of anything more  
wicked than men who, with greater zeal,  
have injured their country and the  
human race.

*Leonardo da Vinci, Prophecies, 1490s*

**We  
have entered a new  
age. An age where all of us  
will have to sign a new compact  
with our environment . . . and enter  
into the larger community of all living  
beings. A new sense of our communion  
with planet Earth must enter our minds.**

*Klaus Töpfer, United Nations Under-Secretary-General  
and Executive Director, UN Environment Programme  
in an address to the  
World Council of Churches  
31 October 1999  
in Bonn*



Actual and enhanced satellite photos of Earth.  
Left to right:

Mt. Pinatubo eruption, June 20, 1991

Topographical, Hotbird 3, September 4, 1999

Day and night over the Arctic, Europe and North  
Africa, Hotbird 3, Sept. 4, 1999

Ozone hole over Antarctica, October 1998

Hurricane Faith, NASA, August 1996



**Klaus Töpfer**  
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PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT • برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة • 联合国环境规划署  
PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE  
ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

Dear Friend,

As we enter a new century, characterized not only by sweeping and fundamental changes and immense new opportunities but also by greatly increased risks, the need to foster a new spirit of international cooperation has never been greater. As trade, economic and physical barriers among countries have progressively fallen and as wealth has increased in some countries, poverty and misery continue to be the lot of a large and growing segment of humanity.

It is in this context that we increasingly witness new challenges to the security and sustainability of the planet. At the same time, we also are witnessing an era where the fundamental lessons for humanity contained in the religious and faith traditions of the world are increasingly coming to the fore and guiding and motivating our actions to meet those challenges.

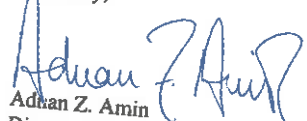
One of those challenges, environmental sustainability, is based on the realization that we can no longer blindly trust in the regenerative capacity of ecosystems. The need to meet social demands, address demographic pressures and poverty in developing countries, counterpoised against the excessive and often wasteful consumption habit in the developed countries, continues to provide the rationale for much of the work of the United Nations.

UNEP's "Global Environment Outlook 2000" confirms in its findings that the environmental crisis facing humanity in the new millennium is a world threatened, either because people have too much, or too little. The continued poverty of the majority of the planet's inhabitants and excessive consumption by the minority are the two major causes of environmental degradation. "GEO 2000" concludes that the present course is unsustainable and postponing action is no longer an option. However, no meaningful result can be envisaged without both a reflection on the ethical implications of our plans of action and a moral urgency for their implementation.

"Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action" is the result of a unique effort to continue the dialogue between the scientific and faith communities from which, we hope, will emerge a greater commitment to taking responsible actions for the protection of our environment for our common good. We, at UNEP, view the convergence of spiritual values and their respect for the environment as an inspiration for environmental actions today so that our succeeding generations may all be beneficiaries of a healthy planet and a development that is sustainable.

I would like to invite you to join us, through this publication, in exploring the lessons that the various faith traditions provide through the profound respect they teach for our planet. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to John Kirk, Director of the New Jersey School of Conservation, and to my predecessor, Noel J. Brown. Through their insight and perseverance, and with the commitment of the Interfaith Partnership for the Environment, they launched one of UNEP's successful initiatives which, "by combining a knowledge of the earth sciences with the forces of spiritual values aims at transforming our fundamental relationship with the earth from one of destruction to one of redemption."

Sincerely,

  
Adnan Z. Amin  
Director UNEP/New York Office

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Dear Friend,

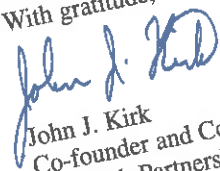
This publication from the Interfaith Partnership for the Environment is the result of nearly 14 years of work with the United Nations and members of many faith communities. It began in the fall of 1986 when a few of us met at UN headquarters in New York with the leaders of several faith communities. With guidance and support from the United Nations Environment Programme, we began developing a project that would inform North American congregations about the serious environmental problems facing life on Earth, so we could work to protect this magnificent work of creation.

In June of 1987, our first Environmental Sabbath kit went to congregations across the United States and Canada. The goal was to create a sabbatical for our beleaguered planet — an Earth Rest Day to be celebrated annually by faith communities, at any time but especially on the weekend nearest the UN World Environment Day, June 5th. From that early effort, the program expanded to faith communities worldwide. Since our very humble beginning in 1986, we have learned that more than 130,000 religion and ecology projects have taken root worldwide. Today, the Interfaith Partnership's outreach is global and includes religions that do not celebrate a sabbath, although all have a powerful environmental ethic.

Today, we dedicate this publication and our efforts to a celebration of Earth in faith, to be held at any time throughout the year, but with the same purpose: to increase the ecological awareness of your congregation so that together we can act to save our sacred Earth.

All of us participating in this project welcome your good faith efforts to help protect all life on Earth. If we may be of any assistance, please feel free to contact us through UNEP in New York.

With gratitude,



John J. Kirk  
Co-founder and Co-chair  
Interfaith Partnership for the Environment

An International Field Center for Environmental Studies  
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## INTERRELATED ELEMENTS OF AN EARTH AGENDA

### WATER

Protect fresh water sources.

Protect oceans, coral reefs,  
coastal areas and small islands.

Protect the atmosphere by  
climate change and transboundary

### LAND

Conserve biological diversity.

Combat deforestation and desertification.

Protect land resources from nitrogen overload.

Manage biotechnology in an eco

Manage hazardous wastes and  
in an environmental

### HEALTH

Protect human health and the quality of life,  
especially the living and working  
environments of the poor, from pollution  
and environmental degradation.

Examine and  
and unsustainable cons

Analyze the effects  
on the environ  
appropriate prote

\*When UNEP's first Earth and Faith book, *Only One Earth*, was published in 1991, atmospheric ozone was  
Today, the effort to combat ozone depletion is a success story! By early 2000, 172 countries had rat  
brokered Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Without it, levels of tho  
would have been five times higher by 2050 than they are today. The purpose of the 1987 Protocol  
out production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances to protect human health and  
ronment. The level of these substances peaked in the late-1990s and is now starting to de  
but the incidence of skin cancer may not begin to fall until about 2060 due to the time  
involved while these long-lasting substances dissipate in the stratosphere.



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