

A DRAFT AFRICAN CHARTER FOR THE RIGHTS OF MOTHER EARTH

*The African Declaration is a **DRAFT** document, it is not a complete document and will need to be continually discussed. The idea is to work with citizens across South Africa to further develop, comment, translate, and critique the African Declaration, to open up a form of exchange around the Universal Declaration of Rights for Mother Earth. This declaration feeds into and contributes to the universal declaration, and should not be seen as a conflicting document but rather a complimentary process.*

<http://www.naturerightsafrica.org/draft-charter.html>

As people who are:

Grateful to Africa for feeding our bodies, sheltering us, inspiring our imaginations, and shaping our many cultures and spiritual beliefs; Mindful that the ancestral wisdom of Africa teaches that we come into being through our relationships with the whole community of life and that to unfold our full humanity we must respect and live in peace with all beings; Inspired by our love for this ancient land and for the animals, plants, mountains and rivers that are our kin and who safeguard the wellbeing our people; Mourning the harm that has been caused to the community of life by the arrogant and disrespectful manner in which industrialised societies treat other members of that community; Convinced of the need to take decisive action to turn the course of our societies away from selfishness, greed, exploitation, and separateness; Determined to create healthy human communities in which everyone lives well through respecting Earth in all her many forms; Standing in solidarity with all who defend the rights of the natural communities to which we belong; Pledge ourselves to strive wholeheartedly together to live in harmony within the community of life and to respect and defend the rights of all beings to fulfil their role within that community.

Earth is sacred

Earth is sacred to us and no person or legal entity has the right to pollute or degrade the soils, waters, and atmosphere that sustain life. All plants, animals and other creatures are our kin and we shall respect, uphold and defend their rights to play their unique role within the community of life. Sacred forests, pools, mountains and other places shall remain wild.

Each has the right to its place in the community

Every creature, large or small, every plant, rock, mountain, river, or sea that has come into being has the right to exist in its place, to be respected and to fulfil its role within the community of life.

All shall live well

We shall respect the rights of all the other members of the natural communities to which we belong so that all may live well in harmony with one another. We shall safeguard the fertility of the soils, the purity of water and air, and the health of natural communities that make living

well possible so that all beings can live well now and in the future. Human communities shall provide their people with food, water, shelter and social opportunities in ways that do not prevent natural communities from doing the same for their other members. No person has the right to pursue their own wellbeing at the expense of the natural communities, systems and processes that sustain us all.

A giving for every taking

Every person and each generation shall maintain natural balances by giving to natural communities in return for what they receive. Until the composition of the atmosphere is restored to balance each person and each generation must ensure that their presence on Earth causes more carbon to be removed from the atmosphere than is release into it.

Healing shall replace exploitation

Human activities that disrupt vital ecological balances and functions shall be stopped and replaced with practices that improve the health of natural communities. Practices that erode the land and deplete the natural fertility of the soil shall be replaced with growing and harvesting practices that work with natural processes to enhance the fertility of the land and the health and resilience of natural communities.

Communities shall decide for themselves

The rights of people to benefit from the land and other beings flows from our relationships with them and decisions that impact on the integrity or health of a natural community shall be made by people who have deep relationships with that community and will experience the consequences of the decisions most directly. Those who are not part of a natural community do not have the right to make decisions or take actions that harm or threaten the integrity, health or functioning of that community. Those who intentionally or recklessly damage natural communities or put them at risk shall forfeit the right to make decisions that may harm them.

Communities shall protect themselves

Each community has the right to defend itself from being harmed by outsiders. People who respect and live in harmony with the other members of a natural community shall care for and defend that community and stop human activities that they have good reason to believe may harm the community.

Life before property and profit

The rights of present and future generations to live in harmony within healthy natural communities shall prevail over the rights of any person or legal entity to property or profits. The interests of corporations, the state and other artificial entities shall not be permitted to take precedence over the interests of natural communities.

Those that harm Earth shall be held accountable

Any person or legal entity that harms or profits at the expense of a natural community shall be held accountable for restoring its integrity, functioning and health. No person shall be permitted to use corporations or other legal devices to avoid or limit their responsibilities to their fellow members of natural communities. Corporations and legal entities that harm or violate the rights of natural communities shall forfeit their privileges as legal persons.