

PART 2

ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE SOCIAL EQUITY & HUMAN RIGHTS

The activities that follow raise awareness and encourage action regarding social issues. The following specific Earth Charter Principles address social factors and can be read at the beginning of each activity in Part 1 and after the reading the Preamble

11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.

- a. Secure the human rights of women and girls and end all violence against them.*
- b. Promote the active participation of women in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social, and cultural life as full and equal partners, decision makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.*
- c. Strengthen families and ensure the safety and loving nurture of all family members.*

12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the right of indigenous peoples and minorities.

- a. Eliminate discrimination in all forms, such as that based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic, and social origin.*
- b. Affirm the right of indigenous people to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihood.*
- c. Honor and support the young people of our community, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.*
- d. Protect and restore outstanding places of cultural and spiritual significance.*

SOCIAL EQUITY ACTIVITY 1

HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL EQUITY

PURPOSE: a- To explore the role that discrimination has played in people's lives.

b- To understand the subtle forms in which we claim white privilege and discriminate against others.

c- To explore ways of balancing power between humans of different races and ethnic groups.

SAMPLE MINI LECTURE: The core concept of the Earth Charter is the notion that humanity is an integral aspect within life's complex web and not dominant over it. Social equity and human rights are central to this concept and are manifested through the principles of care and compassion for all peoples. Recognition of the shared humanity in each of us is essential for a sustainable, just, and peaceful world. Most of us, even the best intentioned, have been guilty of negative judgments or stereotypes. Some of these forms of discrimination have emerged overtly, and some have emerged covertly, outside of our awareness.

To combat discrimination author, Michael Lerner in his book, *Politics of Meaning* (1996) states, "Racism, classism, ageism, and sexism can be ways of externalizing anger that has been internalized previously. The task of anyone involved in trying to combat any of the 'isms' is to provide people with a legitimate focus for externalizing their anger, to replace the illegitimate target of the scapegoated other." Lerner invites us to take a close look at what we are truly angry about instead of misdirecting our anger unjustly towards someone who is different. This is something worth thinking about as we explore the role discrimination has played in our lives.

DISCUSSION: The guide distributed Handout A-2, *On The Invisibility of Privilege*, reads the first paragraph, and then invites participants to read a few of the beliefs that foster white privilege. One participant at a time can read some of the beliefs as they go around in a circle and all of the beliefs are read. The guide then invites participants to discuss their thoughts and insights about whether they have felt privileged or not. The guide can also decide to use the questions in Handout A-3 to facilitate self-awareness.

HANDOUT A-1

ON THE INVISIBILITY OF PRIVILEGE

Doors of advantage swing open so silently and invitingly to whites, says Dr. Peggy McIntosh of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. "I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but I had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets, which I can count on having in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible, weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, code books, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks." Whites, stated Dr. McIntosh, are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, formative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us".

Dr. McIntosh has identified the following tacit or subconscious beliefs that foster a sense of white privilege. These beliefs, she states, are so deeply embedded in the psyche of many white people, that they are not aware they have them.

- 1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.*
- 2. I can avoid spending time with people who I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.*
- 3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and which I want to live in.*
- 4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such location will be neutral or pleasant to me.*
- 5. I can go shopping along most of the time pretty well-assured that I will not be followed or harassed.*
- 6. I can turn on the television or open the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.*
- 7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization", I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.*
- 8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the*

existence of their race.

9. If I want to I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece of white privilege.

10. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.

11. I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's voice in a group in which she/he is the only member of her/his race.

12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.

13. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

14. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

16. I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern other's attitudes towards their race.

17. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down due to my color.

18. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.

19. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

20. I can well in challenging situations without being called a credit to my race.

21. I am never asked to speak for all people of my racial group.

22. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such

oblivion.

23. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.

24. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge”, I will be facing a person of my race.

25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I have not been singled out because of my race.

26. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children’s magazines featuring people of my race.

27- I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feelings somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.

28- I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize his/her chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.

29- I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting even if my colleagues disagree with me.

30- If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn’t a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.

31- If I choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.

32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.

33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, coloring, or body odor will be taken as a reflection of my values.

34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.

35. *I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.*
36. *If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.*
37. *I can be pretty sure of finding people who will be willing to talk to me and advice me about my next steps professionally.*
38. *I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative, or professional without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.*
39. *I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.*
40. *I can choose public accommodations without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.*
41. *I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.*
42. *I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.*
43. *If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that my race is not th problem.*
44. *I can easily find academic courses and institutions, which give attention only to people of my race.*
45. *I can expect figurative language and imagery in all the arts to testify to experience of my race.*
46. *I can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color and have them more or less match my skin.*
47. *I can travel alone or with my spouse without expecting embarrassment or hostility in those who deal with us.*
48. *I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.*
49. *My children are given texts and classes which implicitly support our kind of family*

unity and do not turn them against my choice of domestic partnership.

50. I will feel welcomed and “normal” in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

HANDOUT A2

QUESTION EXPLORING DISCRIMINATION

- 1. What did you learn about yourself as we read these statements?**
- 2. Did you gain any insights regarding how discrimination occurs that you were not previously aware of?**
- 3. Did anything surprise you?**
- 4. Did you experience any discomfort as these beliefs were read? If so what was your discomfort about?**
- 5. Like the incessant dripping of water on a rock, subtle and not so subtle acts of racial and social discrimination erode a sense of self worth. It can be found in the tone of a voice, a bypassing taxi, someone stepping to the other side of the street, and demeaning jokes. What subtle acts of discrimination have you recognized or experienced?**
- 6. Have you ever caught yourself acting improperly based on your own stereotyping or discrimination against others?**
- 7. Part of the task of any social equity movement is to provide positive ways to achieve genuine recognition of all people regardless of gender, sexual orientation, culture, age, religious preference, political party, and ethnicity. What are some small steps you can take to address the need people have for genuine recognition?**
- 8. Is there anything you can do to lessen the imbalance of power and privilege?**
- 9. Will we use “any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems?”**

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WERE TAKEN FROM THE “MANUAL FOR DISCUSSION PROGRAMS ON RACISM AND RACE RELATIONS” OF THE TAMPA URBAN LEAGUE.

- 1. What is your racial, ethnic, or cultural background? Listen to each other’s story.**
- 2. How has your background and experience contributed to your attitude about particular cultures and race relations in general?**
- 3. How have you experienced racism personally? How have you seen it in practice? How has it affected you or people you know? How would your life be different if you did not have to deal with it?**
- 4. In what ways do your attitudes towards persons of other racial or ethnic groups reflect and differ from those of your parents and other family members?**
- 5. As you think about your own attitudes, do any of them run counter to the ideal that you hold? If so, how do you deal with that internal conflict?**
- 6. You probably have heard expressions of prejudice from family members, friends, co-workers, or neighbors. How do you think they learned their prejudice? How do you feel when you hear these expressions? How do you react? Why is it difficult to speak up in certain groups when things are said that conflict with your beliefs and ideals?**
- 7. How often do you have contact with people of other races or ethnic groups? What is that like?**
- 8. Do you have friends of other races? If so how did you get to know them? Is it hard to make friends with people of other races? If so, why?**
- 9. Many white people have friends of other races, but they often see these friends as “exceptions to the rule”. Why do you think this is so?**
- 10. How do you help your children deal with racism? How do you help them understand race relations?**

After the discussion spurred by the above questions the guide can close the group by reading the following two quotes:

“Every human being is born with an intrinsic need for recognition from others, and it is through this recognition that we become ourselves.”

*Peter Gabel
President, New College
Berkley, CA*

“While I know myself as a creation of God, I am also obligated to realize and remember that everyone else...is also God’s creation.”

*Maya Angelou, Poet
Wouldn’t Take Nothing For
My Journey Now*

SOCIAL EQUITY ACTIVITY 2

AFFIRMING GENDER EQUITY

PURPOSE: *a- To raise awareness of the effects of world wide discrimination against women.*

b- To provide encouragement and inspiration through a real life example.

c- To facilitate the exploration of empowering options.

SAMPLE MINI-LECTURE: *Whether it is searching for water in parched dried river basins or drought prone plateau regions, or sustaining families with protracted make-shift camps in disastrous flood areas, or fighting for survival in cyclone devastated zones, or creating a balanced water management approach in fragile eco-systems, the story is the same. Women are central. Yet, as critical as women are to the pervasive and essential efforts towards survival in areas like the sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, they are seldom given an equal voice in decision making relative to access to natural resources and participation in the community’s economy.*

Partly due to gender inequality and discrimination in many countries, girls are twice as

likely than boys to die from malnutrition and preventable childhood diseases. It is estimated that almost twice as many women as compared to men suffer from malnutrition (Jean Bolen, M.D.; Urgent Message From the Mother: Gather the Women and Change the World; revised in 2008).

Both in Africa and the United States the majority of the poor population are women with children. In the United States 42% of single mothers live at or below the poverty line. That translates into thousands, perhaps millions of children. On November 21, 2007 the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a draft resolution on the Right to Food by a recorded vote of 176 in favor and one against (the United States). This resolution states that it is intolerable that more than six million children die every year from food deprivation illnesses before their fifth birthday.

When women have greater access to education and, most particularly, to economic opportunities, there is a drop in birth rates and a significant reduction of stress in families. With economically viable and fulfilling roles, women are less apt to see children as potential providers and therefore less likely to procreate for economic reasons. Instead, women begin to see their children in a much healthier way, as the carefree recipients of the fruits of the mother's labor. This economic condition leads to smaller, more manageable families.

DISCUSSION: *The guide invites participants to share their thoughts and responses to the mini-lecture. Perhaps participants have personal stories to share about their own situation or from traveling within or outside their country. At the appropriate moment the guide distributes Handout A-1 (The Words of Wangari Maathai) and asks participants to take a moment to read it. This handout could also be read out loud. After the handout has been read the guide poses the questions implied in Wangari Maathai's statement: What can I or we do? What can I do to bolster myself when I feel discouraged or overwhelmed? How can I remind myself that the small actions that I take make a difference? What are the unique qualities that I can offer my community? The guide can facilitate this discussion by encouraging participants to share and by feeding back to the group what is being said.*

CLOSING: *The guide gathers everyone in a circle and asks each participant to share what he or she is willing to start doing that will contribute to more gender equity and equality. The guide reminds everyone that no act is too small.*

HANDOUT B-1

THE WORDS OF WANGARI MAATHAI, PH.D. (Nobel Peace Laureate & Founder of the Green Belt Movement)

I placed my faith in the rural women of Kenya from the beginning, and they have been key to the success of the Green Belt Movement. Through this very hands-on methods of growing and planting trees, women have seen that they have real choices about whether they are going to sustain and restore the environment or destroy it. In the process of education that takes place when someone joins the Green Belt Movement, women have become aware that planting trees or fighting to save forests from being chopped down is part of a larger mission to create a society that respects democracy, decency, adherence to the rule of law, human rights, and the rights of women. Women also take on leadership roles, running nurseries, working with foresters, planning and implementing community-based projects for water harvesting and food security. All these experiences contribute to their developing more confidence in themselves and more power over the direction in their lives.

And I want to share with you a story because for me it represents my philosophy also. It is a story about a fire breaking out in the forest and there being a huge fire, and all the animals running away and feeling overwhelmed, feeling there is nothing they can do because the fire is too big, waiting for other animals maybe to come and do something. There is this small hummingbird which decides, "I'll do something." It flies off to the river, takes a little drop of water with its beak and comes and puts it on the fire, and goes back and forth and back and forth- committed, persistent, patient, knowing that the fire does not go out over night. It won't go away because of the first drop. And so as it does this, the other animals laugh at it, mock it, and ask, "What do you think you are? Why do you think you can make a difference?" The little hummingbird says, "I'm doing what I can." And I think for all of us, for me anyway, that's the message that was very strong, and I think for many of us who sit in this room, who feel overwhelmed at times, let us be hummingbirds. Let us do what *we* can.