

**A Declaration of Rights for Future Generations, and a Bill of
Responsibilities for those Present**

Initiated by the 2012 Women's Congress for Future Generations



with

**A Declaration of Rights of All Waters, and a Bill of
Responsibilities for those Present**

Expanded by the 2014 Women's Congress for Future Generations

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This document is the manifestation of a process, a relationship, and the beginning of a radical new movement on behalf of future generations.

The process began in Moab, Utah in the fall of 2012. There, the first draft of the Declaration was prepared. It was inspired by a long line of community leaders and visionaries, especially women. At the 2014 2nd Women’s Congress for Future Generations we organized into caucuses to identify the rights held by the waters of Rivers, Clouds, Lakes, Aquifers and the Ocean as well as humans’ corresponding responsibilities to these waters. The various caucuses presented the rights of Water at the Congress. Those rights and responsibilities were distilled into the Declaration of the Rights of All Waters. The Declaration sings. It has poetry. It flows. It is a true collaboration. But the power of the Declaration will emerge when it is put into practice. That is where you come in. It is up to us to make the Declaration have force in public policy.

Because the voices of those who attended the Moab Congress and the Minneapolis Congress represented only a minute fraction of the world’s

women and of the diverse communities of Future Generations to come, this document is defined as a working document to be amended in perpetuity. It will live, breathe, and *evolve* as an ever-widening circle add their voices and pass down the rights and responsibilities from generation to generation.

You are invited to join. We seek your wisdom. We invite you to draft what might be absent from current iterations of this document, to add to it rights, responsibilities and principles that reflect your experiences; to challenge and push back; to add nuance; and, to delight in the places where you feel resonance with what others have contributed. Even more, we hope that we find ways of translating these working ideas into concrete action.

A Declaration of Rights for Future Generations, and a Bill of Responsibilities for those Present

Preamble

We seek to galvanize a civil rights movement for future generations through the collaborative articulation of ideas and to influence policy.

We call for new institutions, ideas and laws that recognize the rights of nature and Future Generations, and legal guardians for nature and future generations. Many cultures, particularly indigenous cultures have practiced these principles for millennia. It is time to bring them back. Humanity is capable of critical and mass change. The time for exercising that capability is upon us.

We withdraw our consent from the institutions and practices that have put the world in peril.

Therefore, we women, speaking from our authority and responsibility as the first environment for Future Generations, honor and uphold all relationships in the Earth community so that we may leave a healthy, humane and beautiful world to Future Generations. We adopt and give our consent to the following Bill of Rights for Future Generations, Present Generations Bill of Responsibilities and Guiding Principles.

Bill of Rights for Future Generations

The right of individuals, communities and future generations to a clean and healthy environment. This right cannot be bought or sold. It is unalienable.

The right of nature to exist, whole and intact, to persist and to continue the vital cycles, structures, functions and processes that sustain all human beings.¹ Biologically diverse ecosystems with their vital integral cycles and systems intact, must be respected, and not wasted, degraded, polluted, devalued, excluded or cast aside. This right cannot be bought or sold and will require the restoration of ecosystems to their naturally dynamic and healthy equilibrium.

The right of communities to self-representation and self-determination, including the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent to activities that could harm present or Future Generations, nature, or the commons.

The right to return or remain in place of origin, heritage or ancestors.

The right to environmentally sustainable economies that include work practice, commerce and economic system and that do not sacrifice ecosystems nor puts them in jeopardy to fulfill single interest goals.

The right of all communities, human and ecological, animate and inanimate are superior to the rights of corporations. Corporations are not people and do not have inherent rights. They exist because people through their states grant them limited privileges and require certain responsibilities

¹ 2008 pamphlet distributed at the UN including, 10 "commandments" set out as Bolivia's plan to "save the planet" — beginning with the need "to end capitalism."

based upon needs of the community and governments. Corporate privileges are revocable when there is a violation of their charter, if they break laws or no longer serve the general welfare, or violate the rights of individuals or communities.

The right to peace which includes the opportunity to live in community and generate meaningful relationships or partnership based on respect, trust and humility with fellow members and natural systems.

The right not to be coerced into or implicated in harm.

Present Generations Bill of Responsibilities

Responsibility to honor the continuity of life and Earth's systems, to hold reverence for life, respect and protect the integral limits, boundaries, relationships and natural organization of the Earth and its natural systems, rhythms and cycles.

Responsibility to act as guardians for Future Generations. Present Generation will take active responsibility to speak and openly discuss matters that affect Future Generation. Present Generations carry the responsibility to educate Present Generations, decision-makers and children.

Responsibility to uphold the right of communities human and non-human, animate and inanimate, **to self-representation and self-determination.**

Responsibility of economic practices aligned with the balance of life, and to not denigrate the environment by wasteful practices, polluting beyond its means to regenerate, and by eliminating practices that cause harm to the Present and Future Generation. Present Generations carry the responsibility to align economic, governance and social systems with the balance of life.

Responsibility to prevent harm, assess and predict impacts of social, ecological, political and technical systems on Future Generations, and to apply this knowledge to prevent harm.

Responsibility to heed early warnings of sentinel species, and of beings and systems that face threats to dignity, survival and integrity.

Responsibility to listen to indigenous communities, and to act on and learn from their wisdom.

Responsibility to warn Future Generations in instances where our actions or decisions have already compromised the health and well-being of Future Generations.

Responsibility to uphold United Nations treaties on Human Rights, Indigenous Rights, Rights of Nature, Rights of Future Generations, and the Rights of the Child.

Responsibility to restore and regenerate ecological systems.

Responsibility to admit mistakes, recognize incomplete knowledge and to course correct upon early indication of harm.

Responsibility to replace, re-imagine, and create systems that heal rather than harm.

Responsibility to treat all beings, systems and communities with respect and to not exploit.

Guiding Principles that Inform the Covenant between Present and Future Generations

Health and well-being is a function of ecological relationships. Without whole, intact and healthy systems, the capacity for Future Generations to live full and healthy lives is diminished.

Rights held in common to the commons, that which is shared among all and that is necessary for life and community integrity. Our commons include our air, water, seeds, climate, belonging and beauty.

Rights create responsibilities, responsibilities for protecting rights must be located in specific bodies that can be held accountable, such as government commissions and agencies.

Governments hold two responsibilities: protect rights and care for the commons and they are derived from the rights of the governed.

Precautionary principle is key to fulfilling responsibilities. It is a key method for governments, communities or corporations to fulfill their responsibilities to protect the rights of Present and Future Generations of nature and of communities.

Economies must not destroy ecosystems. Since an economy is situated within ecosystems, economic activities are dependent on intact ecological systems. Economies must honor ecological principles, and be regenerative. For example, economic activities must not take things from the Earth faster than the Earth can regenerate them nor put things into the Earth faster than it

can assimilate. Economic activity can't destroy the very basis of economy and life itself.

Ecocide is a violation of the rights of individuals, communities and nature. It is the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been or will be severely diminished. This includes the large-scale destruction of the environment by war, mining, discharge of nuclear or hazardous materials or other act. Ecocide is a crime against nature and humanity and will not stand.

Inter and intra generational justice are inseparable. Some places, and the communities that inhabit them, bear a disproportionate burden of harm and threats to common wealth and common health. True justice for Future Generations is predicated on justice within this generation. Inter- and intra-generational justice are inseparable.

Restorative justice views criminal offenses as an injury to the community as well as the individual and as injuries that must be repaired. Restorative justice is an effective form of justice to address current environmental destruction, to prevent it from being repeated and to restore relationships among people and between people and the natural world.

A Declaration of the Rights of All Waters, and a Bill of Responsibilities for those Present

We, the women and men of the second Women's Congress, have gathered on behalf of the waters of the world. Water speaks as one voice. She weaves together and through the lands of the world, has deep seas above and below the surface, flows from the mountaintops and in the veins of every living being. She has spoken and we are opening our ears to listen. The song she sings is one of deep anguish. She is calling upon us to be her guardian.

We, the waters of the world and all who rely on us, must have our voices heard loudly and clearly. No longer is there an option to neglect or betray us – for our survival is entangled with yours.

Bill of Rights Held by All Waters

As the Ocean I have a right

To be clean, healthy and unpolluted: free of pesticides, chemicals, and toxicity

To be wild and free

To be powerful and playful, rageful, and joyful

To freely connect with, and welcome in, other bodies of water

To allow my intrinsic inbreath and outbreath to flow freely

To create, nourish and replenish life, and to take life, in sacred balance

To maintain and regenerate my inherent, teeming diversity

To maintain my natural and rightful temperature and pH balance

To be respected for my inherent value and beauty, and to not be commoditized

To be in relationship with all that is in the sky: to give water to clouds, to make tides with the moon

To be recognized with gratitude as the sacred source of life

To be protected as a part of the Commons, in perpetuity

As Lakes I Have a Right

To be loved, honored and respected as a full participant in the water cycle

To reflect the brilliant sky

To maintain my natural and rightful temperature and volume

To offer abundance for all beings who are dependent on me

To be clean, healthy, unpolluted, and free of invasive species

To receive clean, unpolluted water from the clouds and the bodies that replenish me

To change shape, form and phase; to lap gently and wave wildly
To meet untrammelled shores with my waves
To be recognized and honored as majestic, sacred, and great
To be protected as a part of the Commons, in perpetuity

As Rivers I have a Right

To flow freely without impediment by dikes, dams, and human-made channels
To be honored for my natural rhythms of flooding and retraction
To be clean and unpolluted
To be in intimate relationship with the land and with time, as a shaper of the earth
To connect to other beings and bodies of the watershed, including the ocean
To receive clean, unpolluted waters from the creeks, streams, tributaries, and rain clouds that feed me, and to give clean, unpolluted waters to the water bodies that I feed
To maintain my natural and rightful temperature and levels
To be enlivened with sunlight and embraced by moonlight
To support all the birds, fish, mammals, plants, and beings in the ecosystem around me
To be recognized as beautiful, sacred, blessed, and life-giving
To meander gently and to rush fiercely
To be protected as a part of the Commons, in perpetuity

As the Waters Above I Have a Right

To fulfill our role as a full participant in the water cycle
To travel through clean air, absorbing, and releasing clean water
To rumble, roar, and sing
To dance in our own way with the sun

To receive the prayers of the people, and to reflect the yearning of the human heart

To be free from the pain and horror of the human-made abomination – the mushroom cloud

To move, grow, and release water based on our own inherent rhythms

To be protected as a part of the Commons, in perpetuity

As the Waters Below I have a Right

To be respected, listened to and understood

To be honored and unexploited

To be free of contamination

To be carefully preserved, not wasted, knowing the immensity of time it took to create me

To be held as sacred, and honored as the divine life giver that I am

To be protected as a part of the Commons, in perpetuity

Present Generations Bill of Responsibilities to All Waters

As Humans We Have Responsibilities:

To honor, love, respect, and acknowledge all water bodies as wild, free, powerful, essential components of an interconnected water cycle that is living and the source and sanctuary of ALL LIFE.

To have empathy, compassion, and reverence for the integral boundaries and relationships of these water bodies.

To learn from these water bodies by heeding the warnings from beings and systems under duress, and to act with urgency to repair and restore these water bodies.

To take active responsibility to educate ourselves, children, and decision-makers to better understand the interconnectedness of the water cycle. Part of this responsibility is to revive traditional wisdom from communities that hold intimate and long-term knowledge of the interconnectedness of these water bodies, and to act on and learn from their wisdom.

To uphold existing laws and policies to protect these water bodies, and to create new laws and policies and new institutions to safeguard these waters, such as to create Guardians and to elect people who will defend the aforementioned rights.

To protect these water bodies by not damaging their ecosystem or the ecosystems from above and below which feed them.

To treat other humans with justice and fairness, giving and sharing water with respect for the needs of each person and our mutual dependence on water. Each commoner has an equal right to share in the Commons.

To withdraw our consent from practices that do not fulfill our responsibilities to uphold the rights of all waters and to give our free, prior and informed consent to practices that repair, restore and protect the waters.

To cultivate relationships with the waters, shared across all cultures, of partnership rather than domination.

Commitment to the Declaration

I acknowledge these Principles that inform the Covenant between Future Generations and Present Generations.

I acknowledge these Rights held by all Future Generations—human and non-human—which I see as inalienable.

I recognize these Responsibilities held by Present Generations. Beginning with myself, here and now, as a member of the Present Generation,

I commit to:

Respect myself and enliven my days with wonder, gratitude, and humility;

Strive to establish respect and equality in my relationships with all other beings;

Hold an abiding sense of humility by acknowledging we are all members of interdependent communities, and by so doing, I commit to honoring and creating space for each and every community to speak on its own behalf, on behalf of its own Future Generations. For those natural communities who cannot speak for themselves, I commit to serving as a conscious guardian speaking on their behalf;

Work from the core values of respect, radical inclusion, and reciprocity;
Engage my responsibilities as an opportunity, not a burden, as a way to expand my ability to respond and create positive change in the world, and as an opportunity to expand myself;

Honor and uphold all relationships in the Earth community so that we may leave a healthy, humane and beautiful world to Future Generations.

Appendix

The Why

We live in a world tipped out of balance by pollution, war and conflicts of all kinds, and injustice; a world diminished by declines in the rich diversity that once existed; a world less whole because too many are sick before their time, struggling to breathe, to be nourished, to reproduce, or facing an environment less stable than the one into which they were born. As the oceans grow more acidic and less able to support life, our old-growth forests are clear-cut, the countryside stripped of its natural abundance and mined for that last ounce of fossil fuel, minerals or radioactive atoms. We are altering, in some cases, irrevocably, the landscape and all the relationships sustained by it. Climate change shifts weather patterns, making extreme weather, in many places, the norm. As a result, a growing number of communities face strife of varying magnitude – extinction of species, loss of diversity, disruption of vital ecosystem cycles, land loss, drought, inadequate food supplies, conflicts and threatened infrastructure and community ties. These effects are felt worldwide, but are distributed unevenly, leaving some communities to bear far more of these burdens to life and wellness.

Present laws, policies and social norms allow for the continued destruction of the Earth and of all earthly communities—animate and inanimate. We continue to squander and plunder without recognition of a system's regenerative limits and without full consideration of the long-term consequences, consequences estimated on the order of centuries, even millennia. We continue to struggle within our own movements and communities to honor all voices from all earthly beings. This is not the legacy we wish to leave Future Generations, but it will be, and our legacy will only continue to encroach upon a livable future if we do not act now.

In drafting this document, we withdraw our consent to this future. We seek to create a forum through which we, as women, can articulate an alternative vision of the relationship we share with each other and with Future Generations.

To those who came before us, our generation was once a Future Generation whose lives were cradled by the hopes of our ancestors. The foundation for our world was laid by them. We realize we have an opportunity — and a responsibility — to those who will follow us. We acknowledge the interdependence of the innumerable communities and systems — past, present and future — that comprise our shared planet, and work from the core values of respect, interrelationship, radical inclusion, and reciprocity. What we give unto each other, the Earth, and Future Generations, so shall be given unto us.

We stand for the rights of Future Generations. We see these rights as inalienable. We call out our responsibilities as guardians and ancestors for those who will follow. We acknowledge that our sacred responsibilities to Future Generations requires us to listen, to address injustices that exist among present generations, to seek the wisdom of indigenous peoples, and to create opportunities for each and every earthly community to speak on behalf of its own Future Generations.

We call for a fundamental shift in politics and in discourse, as we know it today. We call for a new wave of policies, alliances, norms and movements that can redirect human activities in service of sustaining an interconnected, all-inclusive world in which Future Generations can thrive. We acknowledge the deep connections between present generations and those that will follow, and that look beyond our immediate needs into deep time. We wish to enliven our societies and governance with wonder, gratitude and humility.

We seek to create an alternate legacy, with an abiding sense of humility that acknowledges humanity's place as one species dependent on complex ecological systems, and with a sense of our lives connected to all species and to the infiniteness of deep, geologic time.

Authors

A working draft of the preamble and principles was written collaboratively by Carolyn Raffensperger in conversation with Bob Gough, Osprey Oreille Lake, Polly Higgins, Peter Montague and Rebecca Altman in advance of the Moab gathering to facilitate group discussion. The rights and responsibilities were distilled from discussions held at the Moab Congress on the gifts and rights of all beings and the responsibilities present generations carry to honor those gifts and rights. The rights and the responsibilities of all waters were distilled from discussions held at the Minneapolis Congress.

Questions

Here are some questions about the content, language, or organization of these rights and responsibilities on which we actively seek your responses, comments, and feedback:

(a) How can this document more fully capture the state of environmental harms and injustice experienced in this generation as well as how current injustice threatens the well-being of future generations?

(b) How can this work best acknowledge and address the dynamics of social stratification by race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation within our movements? Within present generations? How do these dynamics relate to how we advocate on behalf of Future Generations' well-being?

(c) How can we incorporate a more structural critique of the political and economic structures contributing to environmental injustice within this generation? How do these injustices translate forward to Future Generations?

(d) Even if Future Generations were granted rights, persistent political and economic structures as well as power differentials would still distribute the consequences of environmental policies, programs, and decisions (or the lack thereof) in inequitable and intolerable ways. How can such a formation of rights and responsibilities address these underlying forces? What is the role of proclamations of rights of Future Generations to address these underlying structures and redistribute their power?

(e) As more voices and communities add their wisdom to the document, what rights, principles, and responsibilities must be added or changed? Are there any changes that must be made to the overarching message of the preamble?

(f) Does the language, metaphors, and discourse we used honor our goal of radical inclusion of the diversity of all earthly communities?

(g) How can we more fully acknowledge and encapsulate the dynamic relationship between women and Future Generations?

(h) How might we use the process of editing and applying these ideas in the service of building a collaborative community? In building a radical new movement on behalf of future generations?

(i) What are the ideological tensions present within environmental, social, and climate justice movements? How can the process of articulating the rights of Future Generations explore these tensions and map new paths through them?