

**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**

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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. Because the voices of those who attended the Moab 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.

To make suggestions, changes, and additions to the draft, please visit the Women's Congress [blog](http://bit.ly/18Hf6R9) and leave a comment. <http://bit.ly/18Hf6R9>. This edited version has more 'white space', yet expresses the essence of the concepts.

# Preamble

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

Imagine your community, your country, and our world if a “respectful person standard” guided its governance and if it considered ecocide as a crime. 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, and the rights of Creation demand it.

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.

**These Bill of Rights of Future Generations and Bill of Responsibilities that we hold today extend to all communities, human and ecological, animate and inanimate.**

# **Bill of Rights for Future Generations**

**A 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.

**A clean and healthy environment.** This right cannot be bought or sold. It is unalienable.

**Whole, biologically diverse and unpolluted ecosystems.** Ones that are biologically rich and diverse with its vital integral cycles and systems intact, to be respected, and to not be 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 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.

# **Commitment to the Rights of Future Generations**

I acknowledge these Principles that inform the Covenant between Future Generations and Present Generations. I acknowledge these Rights held by 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:

Respecting myself and enlivening my days with wonder, gratitude, and humility;

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

Holding 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;

Working from the core values of respect, relationship, radical inclusion, and reciprocity;

Engaging 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;

I commit to honor and uphold all relationships in the Earth community so that we may leave a healthy, harmonious, and beautiful world to Future Generations.

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Name

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# 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 complicity in 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.

## **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 there of) 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?

## **Platforms**

The Declaration and Bill of Rights are hosted on two platforms: our own [WCFFG website](#) and our [WCFFG blog](#), created specifically to include all voices and ideas in new articulations of these rights. We invite you to comment on this draft, and this process by submitting your comments to our [blog](#). We hope you will help carry forward

the rich dialogue that both inspired the Women's Congress and was transmitted through it.

We have created a Council to oversee the amendments and changes to the Declaration. Every month, beginning September 2013, the Women's Congress will hold a Briefing call dedicated to a key concept or framework guiding the Declaration. Every 3 months the Council will hold a conference call to review the proposals, additions, changes, and suggestions submitted on our [blog](#).

## **Contacts**

If you would like to join our monthly *Declaration Briefing Series* on key concepts and frameworks guiding the Declaration and on translating these working ideas into concrete actions, please email Kaitlin Butler ([kaitlinannbutler@gmail.com](mailto:kaitlinannbutler@gmail.com)).

If you'd like to serve on the Declaration Council, please email Sherri Seidmon ([sseidmon@aol.com](mailto:sseidmon@aol.com)).

If you have plans or ideas for using the Declaration or furthering the work of the Congress, please [contact us](#) ( <http://www.wcffg.org/contact.cfm> ) or [comment on our blog](#) (<http://bit.ly/18Hf6R9>) to let us know.