



**Does  
Nature  
Have Rights?**

Transforming Grassroots Organizing  
to Protect People and the Planet

## Does Nature Have Rights?

Despite the perilous stakes for people and the planet, the failure of international leaders gathered in Copenhagen in 2009 to reach agreement on a solution for human-induced climate change was predictable. Predictable because the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is based not on the root causes of environmental exploitation—but ‘market fixes’ to the same corporate-led economic model and ‘endless-more’ value system that have driven us to the cliff’s edge.

Entire human societies, our global economic system and indeed our structures of law, have been built from a colonial mindset that places humans not just apart from, *but actually above nature*. But what is climate change but Nature telling us we have lived beyond the limits of *nature’s law*?

*Old paradigm thinking will not generate a solution.* The questions before us now are: can we envisage for ourselves a future based not on exploiting nature but upon recognizing that nature has inherent rights? How different would our human societies, economies, and structures of law look as part of a connected, Earth-centered community? And, how do we get there?

Despite a global structure of law based on privatizing and exploiting nature, many Indigenous peoples throughout the world have maintained a culture of balanced relationships with all life. It is from these ancient roots that a modern movement for the rights of Mother Earth begins to emerge. In 2008 Ecuador became the first nation to constitutionally recognize nature’s rights to “exist, flourish and evolve.” Less than two years later, 35,000 people gathered for the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Led by indigenous communities of Latin America, the Conference produced a People’s Agreement which affirms the thought and practices of “Living Well,” recognizing Mother Earth as a living being with which we have an indivisible, interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship. The proposed Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth, a companion to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a key outcome of the conference that the Bolivian government is supporting.

Following the conference in Bolivia, the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature was created to support and build a movement. And in October 2010, Pittsburgh, PA became the first major U.S. city to ban natural gas drilling while elevating community decision-making and the rights of nature over corporate “rights.”

To be released in Spring 2011, *The Rights of Nature: The Case for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth* gathers the wisdom of indigenous cultures, scientists, activists, small farmers, medicine people and spiritual leaders. The book includes essays and interviews from Maude Barlow, Vandana Shiva, Desmond Tutu, Thomas Goldtooth, Nimo Basse, Eduardo Galleano, Cormac Cullinan among many other thought leaders. The book, upon which this report is based and excerpted, begins to reveal the path of a movement driving the cultural and legal shift that is necessary to transform our human relationship with nature away from being property-based and toward a rights-based model of balance.

*Who will protect the planet—Globalizers, Governments or the Grassroots?* A small minority found in corporate boardrooms, courtrooms and ministerial conference halls, is currently scripting the tale of humanity’s demise. It is up to the rest of us to change our human story. This report begins to explore what a radically different law-driven consciousness might look like, and how we get there.



GLOBAL EXCHANGE





**We Must Stop Playing Deaf to Nature**

*Eduardo Galeano, page 2*

**The Heart of the World: U'Wa perspectives on  
Mother Earth**

*Interview with Atossa Soltani, page 4*

**Building the Case for the Universal Declaration of  
The Rights of Mother Earth**

*Maude Barlow, page 6*

**The Universal Declaration of The Rights of Mother  
Earth: An overview**

*Cormac Cullinan, page 12*

**Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth**

*Draft February 2010, page 13*

**A New Paradigm for Nature – Turning our Values  
into Law**

*Shannon Biggs and Mari Margil, page 16*

**Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature**

*Natalia Greene and Bill Twist, page 18*

*Author Biographies, page 20*

*Get Involved! / Contacts, back cover*

# **We Must Stop Playing Deaf to Nature**

*By Eduardo Galeano*

The world is painting still lifes, forests are dying, the poles are melting, the air is becoming unbreatheable, and the water undrinkable, flowers and food are becoming increasingly plastic, and the sky and earth are going absolutely insane.

At the same time, a country in Latin America, Ecuador, is debating a new constitution that opens up the possibility for the first time ever of recognizing the Rights of Nature.

Nature has a lot to say, and it has long been time for us, her children, to stop playing deaf. Maybe even God will hear the cry rising from this Andean country and add an eleventh amendment, which he left out when he handed down instructions from Mount Sinai: "Love nature, which you are a part of."

## **Nature, never a holder of rights**

For thousands of years, almost all people had only the right not to have rights. In reality, quite a few remain without rights today, but at least now the right to have rights is recognized, and this is considerably more than a gesture of charity by the masters of the world to comfort their servants. And nature? In a way it could be said that human rights extend to nature because she is not a postcard meant to be viewed from afar. But nature knows full well that even the best human laws treat her as a piece of property, never as a holder of rights.

Reduced to no more than a source of natural resources and good deals, she can legally be gravely wounded and even exterminated without her complaints being heard, and there is no law preventing those who harm her from acting with impunity. At the most, in the best of cases, it is the human victims who can demand a more or less symbolic indemnity, and this will always come after the damage has been done, as the law neither prevents nor deters assaults on the earth, water, and air.

It sounds odd, doesn't it, that nature could have rights? Sheer madness. As if nature was a person. And yet it sounds perfectly normal in the United States that major businesses take advantage of human rights. In 1886, the U.S. Supreme Court, that model of universal justice, extended human rights to private corporations. They were recognized as having the same rights as people: the right to life, free expression, privacy, and all the rest, as if companies could breathe. More than 120 years have passed since then and it is still the same. Nobody has paid attention to it.

## **Cries and Whispers**

There is nothing odd or abnormal about the Bill that would include the Rights of Nature in the constitution of Ecuador. This country has suffered repeated devastation over its history. To give just one example, for more than a quarter of a century, until 1992, the Texaco oil company spewed 18 billion gallons of poison into the rivers, land, and the people. Once this gesture of beneficence in the Ecuadorian Amazon was completed, the company, which was born in Texas, was married to Standard Oil. By then Rockefeller's Standard Oil had changed its name to Chevron and was being run by Condoleezza Rice.

Afterwards, a pipeline carried Condoleezza to the White House, while the Chevron-Texaco family continued to pollute the world.

But the wounds cut into the body of Ecuador by Texaco and other companies are not the only source of inspiration for this great juridical innovation that some are trying to carry forward. Moreover, and this is equally important, the revindication of nature is part of a process of recuperating some of the most ancient

traditions of Ecuador and all of Latin America. The Bill under consideration would have the state recognize and guarantee to vital natural cycles the right to continue and regenerate. It is not by chance that the constituent assembly started by identifying their objectives of national growth with the ideal of “sumak kausai,” which means “harmonious life” in Quechua: “harmony among people and between us and nature, which engendered us, feeds us, shelters us, and which has her own life and values independent of us.”

These traditions remain miraculously alive despite the heavy legacy of racism, which in Ecuador, as in the rest of the Americas, continues to mutilate reality and memory. And it isn't just the patrimony of its large indigenous population, which knew how to perpetuate them over the five centuries of prohibition and scorn. They belong to the whole country, and the entire world, these voices from the past that help us to divine another possible future.

Since the days when the sword and the cross made their way into the Americas, the European conquest punished the adoration of nature, which was seen as the sin of idolatry, with the punishments of whipping, hanging, and burning. The communion between nature and people, a pagan custom, was abolished in the name of God and later in the name of civilization. Throughout the Americas, and the world, we are paying the consequences of this divorce.



# The Heart of the World: U'Wa perspectives on Mother Earth

*Interview with Atossa Soltani. Global Exchange's Shannon Biggs asked her to share her thoughts on nature and the indigenous experience.*

## **How do the indigenous communities you work with, like the U'Wa, understand their relationship with Mother Earth?**

*Atossa: Many indigenous cultures hold that they are born from Mother Earth, sustained by her and to her they return in death. Forests, rivers and mountains are often sacred places critical for their spiritual and cultural survival. These are the places of their creation stories, their spirit guides and their legends. Often, indigenous people express their holistic worldview by describing their forest homelands as their cathedral, supermarket, medicine chest, library and their University.*

*The U'wa are a traditional community of about 6,000 people. They call their territory "Kera Chikara," meaning, "the heart of the world." Within their mountainous cloudforest homelands, there are areas they hold so sacred that they prohibit all access, including their own. Such areas are meant only for spirits, the animals and occasionally their medicine people. Among these sacred areas — which serve as de facto biological reserves — are crystalline lakes, forest lagoons and cloud-shrouded snowy peaks, the subject of songs and legends.*

*The U'wa believe their purpose for existence is to defend their territory and all species therein. The U'wa follow a higher law, the law of nature and of their creation. Their purpose for existing is to uphold the balance of the physical and spiritual world. The U'wa live by this deeply held ethos in every aspect of their lives and pass on their teachings to their children. This is why they have managed to successfully preserve their territory and culture despite centuries of encroachment by the industrial world.*

*To the U'wa, the rivers and streams are channels of communication that the Werjayas (medicine people or wise men) use to communicate with the gods. A Werjaya may ask for guidance from their God, Sira, by praying to the river. The U'wa say that the river carries their message to the Mother Ocean who then sends back a response from Sira. The response comes back to the U'wa in the form of rain, mists, clouds, or lightning. In this way, rivers and water are sacred elements to the U'wa culture and must be protected and allowed to flow freely.*

*When rivers and streams are polluted, dammed or diverted, their ability to listen and speak to Sira is impaired, and they are in danger of falling out of balance with their world. They say this is already happening. Like many other traditional cultures, the U'Wa see that nature and all living things serve a higher purpose and possess an inherent right to exist.*

## **Can you speak to how activities, such as oil drilling, impact indigenous livelihoods, culture and the balance of nature?**

*Atossa: The U'wa also consider petroleum as the blood of Mother Earth, and hold that it serves an important function in maintaining the balance of the underworld. For decades the U'wa have successfully stopped oil companies from drilling for oil in the heart of their territory on the grounds that the "bleeding of the earth" is for them "worse than killing and selling off your mother." However, there is now a push to drill for natural gas on sacred land, and the government has refused to acknowledge their territorial claims to the area.*

Looking elsewhere in the Amazon, the Achuar people live along the Ecuadorian and Peruvian border. Much like the U'wa, the Achuar also consider their territory sacred and depend on the forests for their survival. They claim that after nearly 30 years of reckless oil drilling, U.S.-based Occidental Petroleum has



polluted a vast area, leaving a tragic cultural and health legacy. In addition to a public health crisis among the Achuar, today what you see are toxic rivers and wetlands unfit for drinking, fishing or bathing; massive deforestation, destroyed agricultural lands, and the demise of countless species of plants and animals. The Achuar have taken legal actions to hold corporations responsible.

### **What is the future for indigenous cultures—and all of us—if we don't change our relationship to the earth and all species?**

*Atossa: During his recent visit to California, U'wa leader, Berito Cobaría, told audiences that, "The U'wa see that drilling for so much oil around the world is causing mother Earth to move way out of Balance. This is causing our skies to turn black, our rivers to fill with poison. Mother Earth will retaliate. She will bring on tempest, hurricanes, and climate chaos. Our little brothers (the white man) will ask God for help but it will be too late."*

*Science now agrees with indigenous knowledge that the earth is a living system and that our fossil fuel economies are causing irreversible climate chaos putting our own futures at risk.*

*It is clear that indigenous cultures have survived for tens of thousands of years precisely because one of their principal values is honoring the earth. Indigenous cultures believe in respect for all living things. The Iroquois say that the current generation must consider the implications of their actions on seven future generations. How would government and corporate leaders behave if their actions had to meet the 7<sup>th</sup> generation criteria? I heard a respected LaKota leader, Rosalie Little Thunder recently say that, "What our elders always asked of us was to be good ancestors."*

*Many of us recognize that our future survival may well depend on our ability to live in greater balance with the planet. Shifting to the indigenous paradigm of honoring the Earth and becoming better ancestors may hold the key to our own survival.*

### **How would giving nature rights in law support indigenous communities and sustainable practices in both the global North and South?**

*Atossa: The Ecuadorian government took a huge step forward by enshrining the rights of nature in the country's new constitution. This pioneering leap for human evolution should serve as a model for other governments. The environmental movement should use the Ecuador example to fight for the greater ecological systems of our planet. Ecuador's constitution represents a paradigm shift that recognizes humanity's interdependence on the rest of nature. The right of nature movement is the antidote to reigning in the unbridled power of corporations whose drive for short-term profits is pushing humanity and countless species to extinction.*

*In places like the Amazon where hundreds of proposed dams, roads, massive oil and gas drilling, pipelines, and biofuel plantations are threatening to push the larger hydrological systems of the Amazon Basin towards the tipping point of ecological collapse within the next 10-20 years, it is critical that indigenous peoples and environmentalists unite in supporting legal rights for nature.*



# Building the Case for the Universal Declaration of The Rights of Mother Earth

*By Maude Barlow - from her speech to the Environmental Grant Makers Association Fall Retreat, 2010*

It is a great honour to spend this time with you this morning and may I begin by thanking this community for the work you do, the projects you fund that lead to real and lasting change and your commitment to use the funds you have at your disposal to make a better world for us all.

We all in this room know that the earth and all upon it face a growing crisis. Global climate change is rapidly advancing, melting glaciers, eroding soil, causing freak and increasingly wild storms, and displacing untold millions from rural communities to live in desperate poverty in peri-urban slums. Almost every human victim lives in the global South, in communities not responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. The atmosphere has already warmed up almost a full degree in the last several decades and a new Canadian study reports that we may be on course to add another 6 degrees Celsius (10.8 degrees Fahrenheit) by 2100.

Half the tropical forests in the world – the lungs of our ecosystems - are gone; by 2030, at current rate of harvest, only ten% will be left standing. Ninety% of the big fish in the sea are gone, victim to wanton predatory fishing practices. Says a prominent scientist studying their demise “there is no blue frontier left.” Half the world’s wetlands – the kidneys of our ecosystems - were destroyed in the 20th century. Species extinction is taking place at a rate one thousand times greater than before humans existed. According to a Smithsonian scientist, we are headed toward a “biodiversity deficit” in which species and ecosystems will be destroyed at a rate faster than Nature can create new ones.

We are polluting our lakes, rivers and streams to death. Every day, 2 million tons of sewage and industrial and agricultural waste are discharged into the world’s water, the equivalent of the weight of the entire human population of 6.8 billion people. The amount of wastewater produced annually is about six times more water than exists in all the rivers of the world. A comprehensive new global study recently reported that 80% of the world’s rivers are now in peril, affecting 5 billion people on the planet. We are also mining our groundwater far faster than nature can replenish it, sucking it up to grow water-guzzling chemical fed crops in deserts or to water thirsty cities who dump an astounding 200 trillion gallons of land-based water as waste in the oceans every year. The global mining industry sucks up another 200 trillion gallons, which it also leaves behind as poison, and fully one third of global water withdrawals are now used to produce biofuels, enough water to feed the world. A recent global survey of groundwater found that the rate of depletion more than doubled in the last half century. If water is drained as rapidly from the Great Lakes, they will be bone dry in 80 years.

The global water crisis is the greatest ecological and human threat humanity has ever faced. As it is now vast areas of the planet are becoming desert as we suck the remaining waters out of living ecosystems and drain remaining aquifers in countries as diverse as India, China, Australia, most of Africa, all of the Middle East, Mexico, Southern Europe and US Southwest. Dirty water is the biggest killer of children: every day more children die of water borne disease than HIV/AIDS, malaria and war together. In the global South, dirty water kills a child every three and a half seconds. And it is getting worse, fast. By 2030, global demand for water will exceed supply by 40% - an astounding figure foretelling of terrible suffering.

Knowing there will not be enough food and water for all in the near future, wealthy countries and global investment, pension and hedge funds are buying up land and water, fields and forests in the global South, creating a new wave of invasive colonialism that will have huge geo-political ramifications. Rich investors have already bought up an amount of land double the size of the United Kingdom in Africa alone.



I do not think it possible to exaggerate the threat to our earth and every living thing upon it. Quite simply we cannot continue on the path that brought us here. Einstein said that problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them. While mouthing platitudes about caring for the earth, most of our governments are deepening the crisis with new plans for more invasive investment, expanded resource exploitation, unregulated free trade deals, the privatization of absolutely everything and unlimited growth. This model of development is literally killing the planet.

Unlimited growth assumes unlimited resources and this is the genesis of the crisis. Quite simply, to feed the increasing demands of our consumer based system, humans have seen nature as a great resource for our personal convenience and profit, not as a living ecosystem from which all life springs. So we have built our economic and development policies based on a human-centric model and assumed either that nature would never fail to provide or that, where it does fail, technology will save the day.

From the perspective of our movement, I see two problems that hinder us in our work to stop this carnage. The first is that, with notable exceptions, most environmental groups either have bought into the dominant model of development or feel incapable of changing it. The main form of environmental protection in industrialized countries is based on the regulatory system, legalizing the discharge of large amounts of toxics into the environment. Environmentalists work to minimize the damage from these systems, essentially fighting for inadequate laws based on curbing the worst practices, but leave intact the system of economic globalization at the heart of the problem. Trapped inside this paradigm, many environmentalists essentially prop up a deeply flawed system, not imagining they are capable of creating another.

Hence, the support of false solutions such as carbon markets, which, in effect, privatize the atmosphere by creating a new form of property rights over natural resources. Carbon markets are predicated less on reducing emissions than on the desire to make carbon cuts as cheap as possible for large corporations.

Another false solution is the move to turn water into private property rights, which can then be hoarded, bought and sold on the open market. The latest proposals are for a water pollution market, similar to carbon markets, where companies and countries will buy and sell the right to pollute water. With privatization comes a loss of public oversight to manage and protect watersheds and puts watershed health at risk. Commodifying water renders an earth-centred vision for watersheds and ecosystems unattainable.

Then there is PES, or Payment for Ecological Services, which puts a price tag on ecological goods – clean air, water, soil etc, - and the services such as water purification, crop pollination and carbon sequestration that sustain them. A market model of PES is an agreement between the “holder” and the “consumer” of an ecosystem service, turning that service into an environmental property right. Clearly this system privatizes nature, be it a wetland, lake, forest plot or mountain, and sets the stage for private accumulation of nature by those wealthy enough to be able to buy, hoard sell and trade it. Already, northern governments and private corporations are studying public/private/partnerships to set up lucrative PES projects in the global South. Says Friends of the Earth International, “Governments need to acknowledge that market-based mechanisms and the commodification of biodiversity have failed both biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation.”

The second problem with our movement is one of silos. For too long environmentalists have toiled in isolation from those communities and groups working for human and social justice and for fundamental change to the system. On one hand are the scientists, scholars, and environmentalists warning of a looming ecological crisis and monitoring the decline of the world’s freshwater stocks, energy sources and biodiversity. On the other are the development experts, anti-poverty advocates, and NGOs working to address the inequitable access to food, water and health care and campaigning for these services, particularly in the global South. The assumption is that these are two different sets of problems, one needing a scientific and ecological solution, the other needing a financial solution based on pulling money from wealthy countries, institutions and organizations to find new resources for the poor.

The clearest example I have is in the area I know best, the freshwater crisis. It is finally becoming clear to even the most intransigent silo separatists that the ecological and human water crises are intricately linked and that to deal effectively with either means dealing with both. The notion that inequitable access can be dealt with by finding more money to pump more groundwater is based on a misunderstanding that assumes unlimited supply, when in fact humans everywhere are over pumping groundwater supplies. Similarly, the hope that communities will cooperate in the restoration of their water systems when they are desperately poor and have no way of conserving or cleaning the limited sources they use is a cruel fantasy. The ecological health of the planet is intricately tied to the need for a just system of water distribution.

The global water justice movement, of which I have the honour of being deeply involved, is, I believe, successfully incorporating concerns about the growing ecological water crisis with the promotion of just economic, food and trade policies to ensure water for all. We strongly believe that fighting for equitable water in a world running out means taking better care of the water we have, not just finding supposedly endless new sources. Through countless gatherings where we took the time to really hear one another – and most especially those grassroots groups and tribal peoples closest to the struggle – we developed a set of guiding principles and a vision for an alternative future that are universally accepted in our movement and have served us well in times of stress. We are also deeply critical of the trade and development policies of the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the World Water Council (whom I call the “Lords of water”) and openly challenge their model and authority.

Similarly, a fresh and exciting new movement exploded onto the scene in Copenhagen and set all the traditional players on their heads. The climate justice movement whose motto is Change the System, Not the Climate, arrived to challenge not only the stalemate of the government negotiators but the stale state of a too cosy alliance between major environmental groups, international institutions and big business – the traditional “players” on the climate scene. Those climate justice warriors went on to gather in Cochabamba Bolivia, where we produced a powerful alternative declaration to the weak statement that came out of Copenhagen and put the world on notice that business as usual is not on the climate agenda.

I deeply believe it is time for us to extend these powerful new movements, which fuse the analysis and hard work of the environmental community with the vision and commitment of the justice community, into a whole new form of governance that not only challenges the current model of growth and economic globalization but promotes an alternative that will allow us and the Earth to survive. Quite simply, human-centred governance systems are not working and we need new economic, development, and environmental policies as well as new laws that articulate an entirely different point of view from that which underpins most governance systems today. At the centre of this new paradigm is the need to protect natural ecosystems and to ensure the equitable and just sharing of their bounty. It also means the recovery of an old concept called the Commons.

The Commons is based on the notion that just by being members of the human family, we all have rights to certain common heritages, be they the atmosphere and oceans, freshwater and genetic diversity, or culture, language and wisdom. In most traditional societies, it was assumed that what belonged to one belonged to all. Many indigenous societies to this day cannot conceive of denying a person or a family basic access to food, air, land, water and livelihood. Many modern societies extended the same concept of universal access to the notion of a social Commons, creating education, health care and social security for all members of the community. Since adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, governments are obliged to protect the human rights, cultural diversity and food security of their citizens.

A central characteristic of the Commons is the need for careful collaborative management of shared resources by those who use them and allocation of access based on a set of priorities. A Commons is not a free for all. We are not talking about a return to the notion that nature’s capacity to sustain our ways is unlimited and anyone can use whatever they want, however they want, whenever they want. It is rooted rather in a sober and realistic assessment of the true damage that has already been unleashed on the

world's biological heritage as well as the knowledge that our ecosystems must be managed and shared in a way that protects them now and for all time.

Also to be recovered and expanded is the notion of the Public Trust Doctrine that underpins, in law, that certain natural resources, particularly air, water and the oceans, are central to our very existence and therefore must be protected for the common good and not allowed to be appropriated for private gain. Under the public trust, governments exercise their fiduciary responsibilities to sustain the essence of these resources for the long-term use and enjoyment of the entire populace, not just the privileged who can buy inequitable access.

The Public Trust Doctrine was first codified in 529 A.D. by Emperor Justinian who declared: "By the laws of nature, these things are common to all mankind: the air, running water, the sea and consequently the shores of the sea." U.S. courts have referred to the Public Trust Doctrine as a "high, solemn and perpetual duty" and held that the states hold title to the lands under navigable waters "in trust for the people of the State." Recently, Vermont used the Public Trust Doctrine to protect its groundwater from rampant exploitation, declaring that no one owns this resource but rather, it belongs to the people of Vermont and future generations. The new law also places a priority for this water in times of shortages: water for daily human use, sustainable food production and ecosystem protection takes precedence over water for industrial and commercial use.

An exciting new network of Canadian, American and First Nations communities around the Great Lakes is determined to have these lakes named a Commons, a public trust and a protected bioregion.

Equitable access to natural resources is another key character of the Commons. These resources are not there for the taking by private interests who can then deny them to anyone without means. The human right to land, food, water, health care and biodiversity are being codified as we speak from nation-state constitutions to the United Nations. Ellen Dorsey and colleagues have recently called for a human rights approach to development, where the most vulnerable and marginalized communities take priority in law and practice. They suggest renaming the Millennium Development Goals the Millennium Development Rights and putting the voices of the poor at the centre.

This would require the meaningful involvement of those affected communities, especially Indigenous groups, in designing and implementing development strategies. Community based governance is another basic tenet of the Commons.

Another crucial tenet of the new paradigm is the need to put the natural world back into the centre of our existence. If we listen, nature will teach us how to live. Again, using the issue I know best, we know exactly what to do to create a water secure future: protection and restoration of watersheds; conservation; source protection; rainwater and storm water harvesting; local, sustainable food production; and meaningful laws to halt pollution. Martin Luther King said legislation may not change the heart but it will restrain the heartless.

Life and livelihoods have been returned to communities in Rajasthan, India through a system of rainwater harvesting that has made deserts bloom and rivers run again through the collective action of entire villages. The City of Salisbury South Australia has become an international wonder for greening the desert in the wake of historic low flows of the Murray River. It captures every drop of rain that falls from the sky and collects storm and wastewater and funnels it all through a series of wetlands, which clean it, to underground natural aquifers, which store it, until it is needed. In a "debt for nature" swap, Canada, the U.S. and The Netherlands cancelled the debt owed to them by Colombia in exchange for the money being used for watershed restoration. The most exciting project is the restoration of 16 large wetland areas of the Bogotá River, which is badly contaminated, to pristine condition. Eventually the plan is to clean up the entire river. True to principles of the Commons, the indigenous peoples living on the sites were not removed, but rather, have become caretakers of these protected and sacred places.



The natural world also needs its own legal framework, what South African environmental lawyer Cormac Cullinen calls “wild law.” The quest is a body of law that recognizes the inherent rights of the environment, other species and water itself outside of their usefulness to humans. A wild law is a law to regulate human behaviour in order to protect the integrity of the earth and all species on it. It requires a change in the human relationship with the natural world from one of exploitation to one of democracy with other beings. If we are members of the earth’s community, then our rights must be balanced against those of plants, animals, rivers and ecosystems. In a world governed by wild law, the destructive, human-centred exploitation of the natural world would be unlawful. Humans would be prohibited from deliberately destroying functioning ecosystems or driving other species to extinction.

This kind of legal framework is already being established. The Indian Supreme Court has ruled that protection of natural lakes and ponds is akin to honouring the right to life – the most fundamental right of all according to the Court. Wild law was the inspiration behind an ordinance in Tamaqua Borough, Pennsylvania that recognized natural ecosystems and natural communities within the borough as “legal persons” for the purposes of stopping the dumping of sewage sludge on wild land. It has been used throughout New England in a series of local ordinances to prevent bottled water companies from setting up shop in the area. Residents of Mount Shasta California have put a wild law ordinance on the November 2010 ballot to prevent cloud seeding and bulk water extraction within city limits.

In 2008, Ecuador’s citizens voted two thirds in support of a new constitution, which says, “Natural communities and ecosystems possess the unalienable right to exist, flourish and evolve within Ecuador. Those rights shall be self-executing, and it shall be the duty and right of all Ecuadorian governments, communities, and individuals to enforce those rights.” Bolivia has recently amended its constitution to enshrine the philosophy of “living well” as a means of expressing concern with the current model of development and signifying affinity with nature and the need for humans to recognize inherent rights of the earth and other living beings. The government of Argentina recently moved to protect its glaciers by banning mining and oil drilling in ice zones. The law sets standards for protecting glaciers and surrounding ecosystems and creates penalties just for harming the country’s fresh water heritage.

The most far-reaching proposal for the protection of nature itself is the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth* that was drafted at the April 2010 World People’s Conference on Climate Change in Cochabamba, Bolivia and endorsed by the 35,000 participants there. We are writing a book setting out our case for this Declaration to the United Nations and the world. The intent is for it to become a companion document to the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Every now and then in history, the human race takes a collective step forward in its evolution. Such a time is upon us now as we begin to understand the urgent need to protect the earth and its ecosystems from which all life comes. The Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth must become a history-altering covenant toward a just and sustainable future for all.

What might this mean for funders who share these values? Well, let me be clear: the hard work of those fighting environmental destruction and injustice must continue. I am not suggesting for one moment that his work is not important or that the funding for this work is not needed. I do think however, that there are ways to move the agenda I have outlined here forward if we put our minds to it.

Anything that helps bridge the solitudes and silos is pure gold. Bringing together environmentalists and justice activists to understand one another’s work and perspective is crucial. Both sides have to dream into being – together – the world they know is possible and not settle for small improvements to the one we have. This means working for a whole different economic, trade and development model even while fighting the abuses existing in the current one. Given a choice between funding an environmental organization that basically supports the status quo with minor changes and one that promotes a justice agenda as well, I would argue for the latter.

Support that increases capacity at the base is also very important, as is funding that connects domestic to international struggle, always related even when not apparent. Funding for those projects and groups fighting to abolish or fundamentally change global trade and banking institutions that maintain corporate dominance and promote unlimited and unregulated growth is still essential.

We all, as well, have to find ways to thank and protect those groups and governments going out on a limb to promote an agenda for true change. A very good example is President Evo Morales of Bolivia, who brought the climate justice movement together in Cochabamba last April and is leading the campaign at the UN to promote the Rights of Mother Earth.

It was this small, poor, largely indigenous landlocked country, and its former coca-farmer president, that introduced a resolution to recognize the human right to water and sanitation this past June to the UN General Assembly, taking the whole UN community by surprise. The Bolivian UN Ambassador, Pablo Solon, decided he was fed up with the “commissions” and “further studies” and “expert consultations” that have managed to put off the question of the right to water for at least a decade at the UN and that it was time to put an “up or down” question to every country: do you or do you not support the human right to drinking water and sanitation?

A mad scramble ensued as a group of Anglo Western countries, all promoting to some extent the notion of water as a private commodity, tried to derail the process and put off the vote. The U.S., Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand even cooked up a “consensus” resolution that was so bland everyone would likely have handily voted for it at an earlier date. But sitting beside the real thing, it looked like what it was – an attempt, yet again, to put off any meaningful commitment at the UN to the billions suffering from lack of clean water. When that didn’t work, they toiled behind the scenes to weaken the wording of the Bolivian resolution but to no avail. On July 28, 2010, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly voted to adopt a resolution recognizing the human right to water and sanitation. One hundred and twenty two countries voted for the resolution; 41 abstained; not one had the courage to vote against.

I share this story with you not only because my team and I were deeply involved in the lead up to this historic vote and there for it the day it was presented, but because it was the culmination of work done by a movement operating on the principles I have outlined above.

We took the time to establish the common principles that water is a Commons that belongs to the earth, all species, and the future, and is a fundamental human right not to be appropriated for profit. We advocate for the Public Trust Doctrine in law at every level of government. We set out to build a movement that listens first and most to the poorest among us, especially indigenous and tribal voices. We work with communities and groups in other movements, especially those working on climate justice and trade justice. We understand the need for careful collaborative cooperation to restore the functioning of watersheds and we have come to revere the water that gives life to all things upon the Earth. While we clearly have much left to do, these water warriors inspire me and give me hope. They get me out of bed every morning to fight another day.

I believe I am in a room full of stewards and want, then to leave you with these words. This is Gandalf facing that night when all living beings are threatened by a terrible evil. His words are for you.

*The rule of no realm is mine, but all worthy things that are in peril, as the world now stand, those are my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail in my task if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair, or bear fruit, and flower again in the days to come.*

*For I too am a steward, did you not know? J.R.R. Tolkien*

# **The Universal Declaration of The Rights of Mother Earth: An overview**

*By Cormac Cullinan*

The *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth* was proclaimed on April 22, 2010 (Mother Earth Day) by the more than 32,000 participants in the People's World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth held in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The Declaration recognises that Earth is an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with inherent rights, and defines fundamental human responsibilities in relation to other beings and to the community as a whole. (The Declaration uses the ancient term "Mother Earth" to refer to this community in order to emphasise that humans should relate to the being that gives them life in a deeply respectful manner and not as an inanimate "resource" to be managed.)

All people, organisations and states are invited to adopt the Declaration, to co-operate in implementing it, and to support its adoption by the United Nations in order to promote the universal acceptance and observance of the rights and obligations recognised in it.

The Declaration recognises that all natural entities which exist as part of Mother Earth, including plants, animals, rivers and ecosystems, are subjects that have the inherent and inalienable right to exist and to play their role within the community of beings. The international community and most countries recognise and defend human rights, but do not recognise that other beings also have inherent rights that humans must respect. This has created an imbalance in the relationships between humans and other beings and has led to the establishment of political, economic and legal systems that are designed to enable people to exploit other beings instead of to balance the interests of all beings in a way that maintains the integrity and health of the whole community. These exploitative relationships are unsustainable and have already damaged and disrupted ecosystems and natural cycles to such an extent that phenomena such as climate change now threaten the wellbeing and rights of many humans and other beings.

The Declaration recognises that because humans derive everything necessary for a good life from the living communities within which we live, we cannot maintain human rights and the freedom to live well unless we respect and defend the Rights of Mother Earth. This understanding is shared by indigenous peoples throughout the world, as well as by many wisdom traditions and faiths. It is also consistent with contemporary scientific understandings which have revealed the complex subatomic, chemical, ecological and other interactions which bind all beings into a single living community. However it is incompatible with the belief that human wellbeing should be achieved by rapidly exploiting "natural resources" in order to maximise economic growth indefinitely, which is the foundation for most contemporary legal, political and economic systems.

The Declaration proclaims the determination of the peoples and nations of Earth to work together to replace exploitative values, worldviews and political, economic and legal systems with those that respect and defend the rights and harmonious co-existence of all beings. Working together to implement the values, rights and obligations in the Declaration will enable all people to pursue human wellbeing in a manner that enhances and maintains the integrity, balance and health of Mother Earth instead of undermining it.



# Universal Declaration of The Rights of Mother Earth

April, 2010

## Preamble

We, the peoples and nations of Earth:

considering that we are all part of Mother Earth, an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with a common destiny;

gratefully acknowledging that Mother Earth is the source of life, nourishment and learning and provides everything we need to live well;

recognizing that the capitalist system and all forms of depredation, exploitation, abuse and contamination have caused great destruction, degradation and disruption of Mother Earth, putting life as we know it today at risk through phenomena such as climate change;

convinced that in an interdependent living community it is not possible to recognize the rights of only human beings without causing an imbalance within Mother Earth;

affirming that to guarantee human rights it is necessary to recognize and defend the rights of Mother Earth and all beings in her and that there are existing cultures, practices and laws that do so;

conscious of the urgency of taking decisive, collective action to transform structures and systems that cause climate change and other threats to Mother Earth;

proclaim this Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, and call on the General Assembly of the United Nation to adopt it, as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations of the world, and to the end that every individual and institution takes responsibility for promoting through teaching, education, and consciousness raising, respect for the rights recognized in this Declaration and ensure through prompt and progressive measures and mechanisms, national and international, their universal and effective recognition and observance among all peoples and States in the world.

## Article 1. Mother Earth

(1) Mother Earth is a living being.

(2) Mother Earth is a unique, indivisible, self-regulating community of interrelated beings that sustains, contains and reproduces all beings.

(3) Each being is defined by its relationships as an integral part of Mother Earth.

(4) The inherent rights of Mother Earth are inalienable in that they arise from the same source as existence.

(5) Mother Earth and all beings are entitled to all the inherent rights recognized in this Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as may be made between organic and inorganic beings, species, origin, use to human beings, or any other status.

(6) Just as human beings have human rights, all other beings also have rights which are specific to their species or kind and appropriate for their role and function within the communities within which they exist.

(7) The rights of each being are limited by the rights of other beings and any conflict between their rights must be resolved in a way that maintains the integrity, balance and health of Mother Earth.

## **Article 2. Inherent Rights of Mother Earth**

(1) Mother Earth and all beings of which she is composed have the following inherent rights:

- (a) the right to life and to exist;
- (b) the right to be respected;
- (c) the right to continue their vital cycles and processes free from human disruptions;
- (d) the right to maintain its identity and integrity as a distinct, self-regulating and interrelated being;
- (e) the right to water as a source of life;
- (f) the right to clean air;
- (g) the right to integral health;
- (h) the right to be free from contamination, pollution and toxic or radioactive waste;
- (i) the right to not have its genetic structure modified or disrupted in a manner that threatens its integrity or vital and healthy functioning;
- (j) the right to full and prompt restoration for the violation of the rights recognized in this Declaration caused by human activities;

(2) Each being has the right to a place and to play its role in Mother Earth for her harmonious functioning.

(3) Every being has the right to wellbeing and to live free from torture or cruel treatment by human beings.

## **Article 3. Obligations of human beings to Mother Earth**

(1) Every human being is responsible for respecting and living in harmony with Mother Earth.

(2) Human beings, all States, and all public and private institutions must:

- (a) act in accordance with the rights and obligations recognized in this Declaration;
- (b) recognize and promote the full implementation and enforcement of the rights and obligations recognized in this Declaration;
- (c) promote and participate in learning, analysis, interpretation and communication about how to live in harmony with Mother Earth in accordance with this Declaration;
- (d) ensure that the pursuit of human wellbeing contributes to the wellbeing of Mother Earth, now and in the future;
- (e) establish and apply effective norms and laws for the defence, protection and conservation of the rights of Mother Earth;
- (f) respect, protect, conserve and where necessary, restore the integrity, of the vital ecological cycles, processes and balances of Mother Earth;

- (g) guarantee that the damages caused by human violations of the inherent rights recognized in this Declaration are rectified and that those responsible are held accountable for restoring the integrity and health of Mother Earth;
- (h) empower human beings and institutions to defend the rights of Mother Earth and of all beings;
- (i) establish precautionary and restrictive measures to prevent human activities from causing species extinction, the destruction of ecosystems or the disruption of ecological cycles;
- (j) guarantee peace and eliminate nuclear, chemical and biological weapons;
- (k) promote and support practices of respect for Mother Earth and all beings, in accordance with their own cultures, traditions and customs;
- (l) promote economic systems that are in harmony with Mother Earth and in accordance with the rights recognized in this Declaration.

#### **Article 4. Definitions**

- (1) The term “being” includes ecosystems, natural communities, species and all other natural entities which exist as part of Mother Earth.
- (2) Nothing in this Declaration restricts the recognition of other inherent rights of all beings or specified beings.





# A New Paradigm for Nature – Turning our Values into Law

By Shannon Biggs and Mari Margil - excerpted from a longer article in the forthcoming book, *The Rights of Nature: The Case for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth*

It takes thousands of years for individual drops of rain to maneuver through secret passages and quietly accumulate into underground aquifers. Purified and enriched over the millennia by mineral deposits deep in the earth, groundwater is the sacred lifeblood of local watersheds upon which all life — including human communities — depend. Yet it takes no time at all to destroy this delicate balance, in fact all it takes is a simple piece of paper.

In 2001, USA Springs Corporation applied to the state for a permit to extract over 400,000 gallons of water a day from tiny rural Nottingham New Hampshire's local aquifer to bottle and sell overseas. Upon discovering that our own laws forbid communities from saying “no” to the dirty, the destructive and the unwanted, residents lobbied, petitioned, testified at hearings, protested, rallied, organized their neighbors and filed lawsuits. They did everything “right” by traditional, conventional environmental activism.

When they asked their state environmental agency to take effective action and protect the aquifer, they discovered that the agency was in fact responsible for *issuing permits to the corporation to take it*.

## Is the system broken or working perfectly?

The question that the people of Nottingham were forced to ask was: *Why do our laws enable corporations to override community concerns and site destructive projects in our midst?*

Based on the assumption that environmental legislation was in earnest set up to protect nature, much of our environmental activism has logically been spent trying to “fix” what appears broken; seeking to improve the types of laws and regulations that Nottingham ran into.

But what if the system was never designed to put nature first?

Although it's rarely said out loud, it is often the industry to be regulated that creates the laws we ask our legislators to enforce. And when it becomes too expensive to comply with the regulations, corporations are often exempted from them, or they are simply rewritten. *By design* our environmental laws place commerce above nature, and in so doing they legalize certain amounts of harm to ecosystems.

This isn't to say we haven't protected anything while toiling within this system of law. Whatever limits to damage have been achieved have come from dedicated vigilance by the hands of countless thousands. But we must also recognize what has been lost. By almost every measure, the environment today is in worse shape than when the major U.S. environmental laws were adopted nearly 40 years ago and replicated worldwide.

## The Nature of Property: Is Nature a Slave?

We codify our values in law, and for time immemorial we have treated nature in law, as well as in culture, as a “thing” without emotion or intelligence, without any connection to or having anything in common with us. The Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and similar state laws legalize environmental harms—including the damming of rivers and the blowing off of mountaintops—by regulating how much pollution or destruction of nature can occur.

All of our environmental laws are anchored in the concept of *nature as property*. But history shows that with enough will, unjust laws that deny rights can change. Slaves and women were once considered property, but through massive shifts in law and culture they moved from being “right-less” to being rights-bearing.

During slavery in the United States, the economy of both the North and South were based on slavery. Slaves were the property of the slave master and a series of “slave codes” were put in place to *regulate* the treatment of slaves. Many advocates of slavery argued that slaves themselves did not “need” legal rights in order to be sufficiently protected. It is easy from today’s vantage point to see that this regulatory framework did not and could never protect the slaves or end slavery. If we believe that rights are inherent, then nature’s rights already exist, and any law that denies those fundamental rights is illegitimate.

## **Recognizing rights of nature and building a movement**

Under existing environmental laws, a person needs to prove “standing” in order to go to court to protect nature. This means demonstrating personal harm from logging, pollution, or water extraction, etc. Damages are then awarded to that person, not to the ecosystem that’s been destroyed. The people of Nottingham and thousands of other communities find that they cannot defend the rights of the ecosystems where they live, because *there are no rights to defend*.

The Abolitionists, like every other people’s movement for rights, found that when faced with an unacceptable structure of law — that they necessarily had to challenge it and replace it.

Just as the lion hunts the antelope as part of the natural cycle of life, recognizing rights of nature does not put an end to fishing or other human activities. These laws do not stop property ownership or development; rather they stop the kind of development that interferes with the existence and vitality of ecosystems. And a movement is swiftly emerging:

**2006:** Tamaqua Borough Pennsylvania, with the assistance of our partners, CELDF, became the first U.S. local government to recognize legally enforceable Rights of Nature. Over a dozen more communities in Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Maine, and Virginia have now adopted similar ordinances. With communities in California, New Mexico in process.

**2008:** Ecuador became the first country in the world to recognize Rights of Nature in its constitution, after generations of watching its fragile ecosystems destroyed by corporate mining, drilling and other practices.

**2010:** the World People’s Summit on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth convened in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where GX participated on the official panel on rights of nature. Some 35,000 people attended, and led by indigenous communities of Latin America, proposed the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth, supported by the government of Bolivia.

**September 2010:** an international gathering including GX was held in Pamate, Ecuador, to develop a strategy for building an international movement on Rights of Nature. The outcome was the formation of the *Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature*.

## **Changing Culture and Law**

In 1973, Professor Christopher Stone penned his famous article, “Should Trees Have Standing?” saying, “The fact is, that each time there is a movement to confer rights onto some new ‘entity’ the proposal is bound to sound odd or frightening or laughable. This is partly because until the right-less thing receives its rights, we cannot see it as anything but a thing for the use of ‘us’ – us being, of course, those of us who hold rights.”

How different would our world look if the Amazon could sue oil companies for damages, or if those responsible for the oil spill could be forced to make the Gulf of Mexico “whole”? Abolishing slavery meant abolishing a way of life, and most said it *could not* and *must never* be done. That is the argument we hear now with Nature’s rights. But *it can* and *we must*.

# The Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature

By Natalia Greene and Bill Twist

On the first days of September 2010, conscious individuals and organizations, with the background of having worked to promote the recognition and guarantee of Rights for Nature, met in Patate, Ecuador, in Hacienda Manteles, at the foot of the Tungurahua Volcano and gave rise to the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature.

Recognizing that exploitation, abuse, and contamination have caused the destruction, degradation and disruption of Mother Earth, putting all life at risk through phenomena such as climate change; the Global Alliance adverts a multidimensional crisis and collapse of an unsustainable system based on accumulation and disrespect for nature.

The Global Alliance, convinced that we are an interdependent living community, and recognizing that ancient native communities have always defended Mother Earth's rights because those rights are innate to their cosmivision<sup>1</sup>, recognize that nature is not an object or commodity, but a subject of inalienable rights to exist, maintain and integrally regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes.

It's objective is to encourage the recognition and effective implementation of the Rights of Nature through the creation of a world network of individuals and organizations that through active cooperation, collective action and legal tools, based on Rights of Nature as an idea whose time has come, can change the wrong direction towards which humanity is taking our Planet.

In 2008, Ecuador became the first country in the world to include this recognition in its National Constitution. In the United States, more than 100 communities have included this recognition into their local ordinances. In April, 2010, Bolivia hosted the first Peoples Conference on *Climate Change* and the *Rights* of Mother Earth in Cochabamba. The Global Alliance applauds these accomplishments and encourages the UN adoption of the Universal Declaration of Mother Earth Rights, as a product of the Cochabamba Peoples Conference, as well as its endorsement by UN members and world organizations.

It is extremely important to promote the education and advocacy of Rights for Nature, however the Alliance is conscious that a real change is needed and hence this concept needs to be taken into law through the creation of legal frameworks that recognize Nature as a subject of rights.

The Global Alliance, aims at becoming a platform to share the experience and expertise of its Founding Members, of organizations such as the *Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund [CELDF]* in the United States which helps community groups and municipalities write and adopt laws that assert community rights, including the rights of nature; Fundación Pachamama and Pachamama Alliance that promoted the incorporation of Rights for Nature into the Ecuadorian Constitution or EnAct International whose Director, Cormac Cullinan wrote the groundbreaking book *Wild Law* which played a significant role in informing and inspiring a growing international movement to recognize rights for Nature. Together with more inspiring organizations, and individuals, and highly respected members of the Advisory Council such as Vandana Shiva, the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature seeks to inform and educate about the transformational potential of really considering Nature a subject of rights, a someone that is protected and cared for, and not an object, a something, that can be exploited and destroyed. Just imagine the impact on humanity when slaves were finally considered subjects of rights to understand the potential of really liberating nature and living in harmony with Mother Earth.

---

1 Cosmovision: world view, philosophy of life

By driving Rights for Nature into law and creating global, national and local jurisdiction and cases that guarantee these Rights, will serve as a starting point to reproduce this concept virally through the world, invading systems of thought and juridical systems. The world could be a different place if crimes against Nature could be dealt internationally in an International Rights of Nature Court, if humans understood that they we are part of nature and whatever we do to the planet we do to each other.

The Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature calls upon all organizations and people of the Earth to join in a Minka<sup>2</sup> Pachamama<sup>3</sup>, a 4 year global project to bring forth the universal adoption and implementation of the Rights of Nature as an idea whose time has come.

Mother Earth and we, her children, are in extreme peril; we must unite and ACT NOW!



---

2 Minka: (Kichwa) collective community work for the betterment of all

3 Pachamama: (Kichwa) Mother Earth, only broader, i.e. Mother Cosmos



## Author Biographies

**Maude Barlow** is the National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians and chairs the board of Washington-based Food and Water Watch. Maude is the recipient of the 2005 Right Livelihood Award (known as the “Alternative Nobel”), the Citation of Lifetime Achievement at the 2008 Canadian Environment Awards, and the 2009 Earth Day Canada Outstanding Environmental Achievement Award. In 2008/2009, she served as Senior Advisor on Water to the 63rd President of the United Nations General Assembly. She is also the best selling author or co-author of 16 books, including the international best seller *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and The Coming Battle for the Right to Water*.

**Shannon Biggs** directs the Community Rights Program at Global Exchange, assisting citizens to organize and draft new laws to subordinate corporate interests to community priorities, and to recognize nature’s rights. She is the author of the book *Building the Green Economy: Success Stories from the Grassroots*. Previously, she was a senior staffer at the International Forum on Globalization, and a lecturer of International Relations at San Francisco State University. She holds a Masters Degree from the London School of Economics (LSE): Economics/Empire.

**Cormac Cullinan** is the senior director and practising attorney of the South African environmental law firm, Cullinan Associates Inc as well as a director of EnAct International, an environmental governance consultancy. He is also the author of the book *Wild Law: A Manifesto for EarthJustice*.

**Eduardo Galeano** is a Uruguayan writer and journalist and best known for *Memoria del Fuego* (Memories of Fire) and *Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina* (The Open Veins of Latin America).

**Natalia Greene** is an Ecuadorian environmental and climate change activist and currently works as the Political Program Coordinator for Pachamama Alliance in Ecuador. She was actively involved in the recent Constitution process in Ecuador, including promotion of the ‘Rights of Nature’ clause as well as the ongoing role of civil society and indigenous people in the process. Natalia has advanced degrees in political science and makes her home in Quito, Ecuador.

**Mari Margil** is the Associate Director of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund where she conducts campaign and organizational strategy, media and public outreach, and leads the organization’s fundraising efforts. She is a co-author of the recently published *The Public Health or the Bottom Line*.

**Atossa Soltani** is the founder and executive director of Amazon Watch, an organization she founded in 1991 to defend the rights, territories, culture, and way of life of many indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin. Recently she brought leaders from the U’wa people of the Andean Cloudforests of Colombia to the United States for a speaking tour. She has had the honor of working with the U’wa for nearly 14 years.

**Bill Twist** is cofounder of the Pachamama Alliance, which works with indigenous Amazonian groups on issues such as land rights and sustainable development. Roughly translated, Pachamama means “our own Mother Earth.” The Pachamama Alliance seeks to protect both the culture and the land of indigenous people. He also chairs the steering committee for the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature.

*All photos are courtesy of [www.sxc.hu](http://www.sxc.hu) users. Cover: John Julian Hansen, page 1: Jesse B, page 3: Fred Edwards, page 5: luis alexandre, page 16: Robbie Ribeiro, page 20: Revati Upadhya. Photos have been cropped or otherwise modified from their original composition and colour.*

## Get Involved!

To learn more about the Rights of Nature, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, or to get involved, contact the Council of Canadians, Fundación Pachamama, or Global Exchange.

*If you are specifically interested in the push for recognition of the Rights of Mother Earth at the UN:*

### **Council of Canadians**

700-170 Laurier Avenue West  
Ottawa, ON, K1P 5V5 Canada  
Tel: (613) 233-2773 or 1-800-387-7177  
Fax: (613) 233-6776  
Email: [inquiries@canadians.org](mailto:inquiries@canadians.org)  
[www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org)

*If you are specifically interested in the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature:*

### **Fundación Pachamama**

Gonzalo Serrano # 345 y Av. 6 de Diciembre  
Quito, Ecuador  
Tels: (593-2) 333.2245 / (593-2) 333.1348  
Fax: (593-2) 224.6069  
Email: [fundacionpachamama@pachamama.org.ec](mailto:fundacionpachamama@pachamama.org.ec)  
[pachamama.org.ec](http://pachamama.org.ec)

*If you are specifically interested in community-based organizing for rights of nature:*

### **Global Exchange**

2017 Mission Street, 2nd Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94110  
Tel: 415.255.7296  
Fax: 415.255.7498  
Email: [shannon@globalexchange.org](mailto:shannon@globalexchange.org)  
[www.globalexchange.org](http://www.globalexchange.org)

**“We, the peoples and nations of Earth: considering that we are all part of Mother Earth, an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with a common destiny...”**

- from the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth

