

Reconsidering the Earth Charter: Request by Yonge Street Monthly Meeting for Canadian Yearly Meeting to Withdraw its Endorsement

As requested in Minute 27, 2004, Yonge Street Meeting reviewed the principles of the Earth Charter. The careful review of the Earth Charter led us to discern significant disparities between established Quaker testimonies and the principles stated in the Earth Charter.

The most striking divergence relates to the Peace Testimony, but additional instances became evident in our review. This divergence between Friends' testimonies and the contents of the Earth Charter were alluded to in Minute 27, which acknowledged the Earth Charter was not perfect.

However, as a consequence of Minute 27, Canadian Yearly Meeting was listed as an endorsing organisation on the Earth Charter website. The Earth Charter Initiative website states that endorsing groups are expressing "commitment to work for the implementation of the values and principles of the Earth Charter and a readiness to co-operate with others in this endeavor." CYM's inclusion on this list is not qualified by any reference to those aspects of the Earth Charter which Friends recognised to be inconsistent with Friends' established testimonies.

Yonge Street Meeting concluded that endorsement of the Earth Charter is not appropriate for an organisation with established testimonies which differ substantively from those of the Earth Charter.

We noted inconsistencies with Friends' historic Peace Testimony of the following principles of the Earth Charter related to military activity:

PRINCIPLE 6 (E): Avoid military activities damaging to the environment.

PRINCIPLE 16 (C): Demilitarise national security systems to the level of non-provocative defense posture, and convert military resources to peaceful purposes, including ecological restoration.

PRINCIPLE 16 (D): Eliminate nuclear, biological and toxic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction

We question whether Friends intended to:

- support the preparation of war within the context of some undefined "non-provocative defense posture," or
- support military activities not damaging to the environment, or
- eliminate only the weapons mentioned in Principle 16 (d), (which, we recall, was the excuse for the war in Iraq)

It seems that Friends unknowingly displaced our Peace Testimony with these Earth Charter principles, and did so as a matter of public record, by listing Canadian Yearly Meeting as endorsing the Earth Charter.

One of our concerns is whether future conscientious objectors are placed in jeopardy because of this apparent change in the Religious Society of Friends' position on war.

Although there are other parts of the Earth Charter to which we object, we felt it sufficiently important to draw Friends' attention to these disparities related to our very clear understanding of the Peace Testimony.

We request CYM to:

- reconsider Minute 27
- rescind the public endorsement of the Earth Charter
- request the removal of the Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) from the Earth Charter Initiative website list of endorsing organisations. 🍏

Submitted on behalf of Yonge Street Monthly Meeting by Virginia Dawson, Clerk