

Earth Charter Symposium Focuses on Responsibility

By JIM DREISBACH and SHIRLEY WHITE

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Some 500 participants representing various organizations, government agencies, environmental groups and the SGI-USA met at the Florida Nature and Culture Center today to discuss how to sustain life on the Earth. The Earth Charter, a document drafted by people concerned with the future of the world, was the focus of the gathering that drew people from as far away as Jacksonville.

“We’re all connected, so we must take care of each other,” said Bobbie C. Billie, spiritual and clan leader of the Independent Seminole Nation of Florida. In his address, he expressed the need for all the participants to value our Earth.

Keynote speaker Dr. Maximo Kalaw, executive director of the Earth Council Institute, struck a chord when he identified the most important issue humans face now is how to maintain our sacred relationships as we move from our heritage to the future.

“What separates the Earth Charter from so many other legal documents that pass through the United Nations is its popular support,” said Dr. Kalaw. “It is the people’s document. Through the voice of the people, it will have power in the United Nations. Further, its principles must be included in corporate policies, community welfare, church movements and taught to youth.... The process has to be an act of love — as your chorus sang, ‘heart to heart’ — or it will not succeed.”

The Florida Ikeda Chorus had invited other local religious organizations to join them that morning for the opening song, “Heart to Heart,” led by Paul Eisenhart, director of the Florida Philharmonic Chorus. As Mr. Kalaw mentioned, the chorus reflected the spirit of the day. “It was a project that goes beyond individual philosophies,” said Mr. Eisenhart of the performance. “It was a learning experience that allowed each chorus member to embrace their own philosophy and their own identity.”

Martin Rogol, president of Earth Charter USA, also addressed the audience, stressing that people cannot rely on government to solve the world’s environmental problems. “The Earth Charter has to be a grassroots movement,” he said.

The community aspect of applying the Earth Charter principles was also brought home in a panel discussion by six local leaders. Representing diverse interests from universities, community action groups and environmental groups, the panel sought to identify local solutions to the very real dilemma between the continued growth of the South Florida population and the dwindling Everglades ecosystems.

Another 1,000 people joined later in the afternoon for a Jazz Up The Earth music and dance festival, which included children’s activities related to the Earth Charter.

“We had a great time,” said William Nutovits of Delray Beach, who, along with wife Suzanna and their two children, was invited as a guest for the afternoon. Each member of the family found something to enjoy: Suzanna went to the teachers and community action workshops, the kids planted flowers in the new Boys and Girls Group’s butterfly garden and William browsed through the environmental literature tables in the gymnasium, before enjoying the music with his family.

“I want to learn more about what I can do, how I can get involved,” said Suzanna.

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