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**A PROPOSAL FOR A UNIVERSAL DECLARATION
OF THE RIGHTS OF ALL LIVING BEINGS**

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In 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” an historical document that firmly anchored human rights in international law and provided a powerful legal and ethical basis for the worldwide struggle to maintain these rights. Since then, this struggle has led to the downfall of most of the world's totalitarian regimes and currently serves as a threat to those few that still remain.

Today, at the beginning of the new century, it is clear that the increasing destruction of the biosphere poses a threat no less grave to human existence. Environmental action groups have emerged all over the world, but they do not have an international legal foundation similar to that provided by the Declaration of Human Rights.

The attached draft is a proposal for such a declaration. As with any declaration of this nature, many compromises have been made that are not necessarily to the liking of more extreme groups, such as vegetarians or those who object to animal experimentation. Such compromises, however, are essential for a declaration that seeks broad international support. In this respect, I take great encouragement from the fact that on March 14, 2003, the personal secretary of the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Geyche

Tethong, informed me that, thanks to Dr. Renuka Singh, “the article written in the spirit of reverence to all life has been briefly brought to the attention of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and He is pleased... His Holiness is encouraged by activities such as this being carried out by you and others.” And Jane Goodall, in a letter dated January 2, 2004, wrote: “If only there was a chance that nations would sign into such an idea., for it would of course give us a just world – a world that would enable us to live in harmony not only with each other, but with nature and the rest of the animal kingdom.”

Comments and criticism are most welcome.

**UNIVERSAL DECLARATION
OF THE RIGHTS OF ALL LIVING BEINGS**

Draft Proposal to the General Assembly of the United Nations

PREAMBLE

Whereas human beings have been endowed with the ability to study and understand their surroundings, to predict the consequences of their actions and to discriminate between right and wrong;

Whereas human beings have developed capabilities unmatched by any other living creatures on Earth, have learned to control the forces of nature and have changed the environment beyond recognition;

Whereas human beings have reduced the impact of natural selection on humanity and have replaced this selection with religious, legal and ethical value systems that grant rights to the weak, the sick, the disabled, the deformed and the elderly; and are committed to intervene in the lives of human beings from birth to old age, to protect them from all natural disasters, to prevent suffering, to cure diseases and to prolong life;

Whereas the above intervention has enabled the human species to break the confines of nature, to multiply more than any other living species and to spread out across the globe, consuming increasing amounts of living space, food and resources, without any end in sight;

Whereas the citizens of the developed nations are becoming addicted to immediate forms of gratification, to comfortable lives and to competition between themselves in all aspects of life, thus exerting growing pressure

on the already strained ability of Earth to support and sustain the human species together with its fellow species;

Whereas these human actions over the last several generations have led to a destructive and unprecedented vicious circle that has eradicated entire species, genera and families of living creatures, destroyed habitats, depleted resources and polluted the soils, the oceans and the atmosphere to the point of posing an imminent danger to the existence of many species, including humanity itself;

Whereas human beings have begun to realize that they constitute only a minor part of the huge fabric of mutual relations among myriad living species that are immeasurably dependent upon one another in diverse and complex ways not yet fully understood and investigated and that together constitute the Earth's biosphere; that life on Earth has been made possible by virtue of the diversity of heredity laws, developmental processes, behavioral patterns, communication modes, and family and social relations that characterize each species and that have been shaped over the course of countless generations, thus providing ancient and amazingly ingenious solutions to the challenges of existence;

Whereas human beings now acknowledge their exclusive responsibility for the accelerating destruction of the planet Earth, realize that this destruction contributes to today's growing number of wars, epidemics, droughts and other climatic catastrophes, and resolve, based on their exceptional status among all other living species, to attempt to rectify the

consequences of their actions and to save themselves and other species from destruction;

Now, Therefore,

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

proclaims

THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF ALL LIVING BEINGS as a common standard to which all peoples and nations should strive in their relations with all other living creatures so that the human species can continue to exist and develop with dignity and in comfort along with all other living species.

Article 1

1. Every species of living creatures, including all its subspecies, varieties and populations, constitutes an integral part of the biosphere and is essential to the existence of all other species.
2. The Earth's atmosphere, rivers, lakes and oceans, rain forests and all other sites with unique flora, fauna and ecological conditions belong to the entire biosphere and are the responsibility of the entire human species, without distinction of nationality or political affiliation, before this and all future generations.

3. Any pollution anywhere in the world, be it of the air, the soil, the ground water or the rivers and streams, and any harm done to these resources shall be regarded as an injury to the natural resources of the entire world and an outrage against the common assets of the biosphere and the entire human species.

Article 2

1. All living creatures in nature have an equal right to live and to control their lives as dictated by the natural conditions that have prevailed since time immemorial in their natural habitat and in accordance with their instinctive or rational inclinations .
2. All species and families of creatures existing in nature have an equal right to existence and to ontogenetic and phylogenetic development according to their natural environmental conditions. Every species constitutes a scientific, aesthetic and cultural treasure that all peoples and all nations throughout all generations have the right to enjoy and study while preserving the rights of the species set out in this Declaration.
3. Human beings have the right based on their ethical principles to assume responsibility for everything regarding the rights of their individuals. In any case where a human individual's rights to life, liberty and personal security as granted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are threatened, the authority of

these rights will take precedence over the laws of natural selection.

4. As a result of humanity's unilateral violation of the laws of natural selection, the human species takes upon itself, unilaterally and deliberately, to create ecological balances to counteract the dangers to the biosphere posed by overriding the laws of natural selection in the process of human development. Human beings shall thus become an integral part of the ecological balance, conforming to the laws of nature as a species, while its individuals are not liable to the laws of natural selection.

Article 3

1. No one shall do anything against the well-being, freedom, welfare or dignity of any living creature, whether said creature lives in a natural or a domestic setting, unless so obligated in accordance with Article 2.3 above.
2. No one shall inflict suffering on any creature living in nature or in captivity and capable of feeling physical or emotional pain for purposes of commerce, entertainment, military activities, sport, religious ritual or any other purpose not related to vital needs.

3. No one shall inflict suffering on any creature living in nature or in captivity and capable of feeling physical or emotional pain for purposes of scientific or medical experiments that could be carried out on other systems or on creatures whose ability to feel pain is less developed.
4. No one shall abandon any animal that was born or raised in captivity or that was harmed as a result of human actions and that therefore cannot take care of itself.

Article 4

1. No one shall harm the ability of any creature living in nature to develop and reproduce according to the laws of nature.
2. No one shall do anything to endanger the existence of any natural species except in cases where a particular parasite poses a serious and substantial threat to the human species.
3. No one shall harm the natural habitat of any species in order to exploit resources, increase tourism, build or expand residential areas or dispose of waste.
4. No one shall disrupt the natural genetic variety of any living species, nor reduce the population of creatures living in nature and/or disturb the relationship between different population groups.

5. No one shall disturb the social structure of creatures living in societies.

Article 5

1. No one shall do anything to harm the biodiversity of a natural habitat.
2. No one shall violate the existing ecological balance in a natural habitat by introducing foreign species to that habitat.
3. No one shall interfere with the relationships among creatures living together in nature.

Article 6

1. No one shall create, through artificial selection, hybridization, genetic engineering or any other cultivation method, a species of animals with anatomical, physiological, chemical or behavioral attributes that will cause pain and suffering for that particular animal.
2. No one shall create a species with inborn aggressive tendencies.
3. No one, under any circumstances, shall release into nature a living species or variety that was created artificially.

Article 7

No nation or tribe has rights of possession over any species, whether living or fossilized, endemic or pandemic, common or rare, that exists within its area of jurisdiction. Such a nation or tribe should be considered as the trustee of said species, having the right to income from tourism resulting from the species, as well as the obligation to preserve the rights of said species in accordance with this Declaration. All such species are the property of the entire human species, in this and all subsequent generations, in accordance with all the articles of this Declaration.

Article 8

1. All societies, religions and legal systems in all nations should strive to apply the laws of ethics, accepted today among human beings and subject to the restrictions outlined in Article 2 above, to all other living creatures.
2. All peoples and nations should undertake immediate and vigorous measures to decrease the reproduction rate of the human species in order to arrest the damage to the biosphere as a result of the human population explosion. The developing nations should be helped in reducing and checking their birth rate. Religious groups should recognize that competition to reproduce among human communities, primarily fanned until now by the major religions, is leading the human species toward the danger of world destruction even in this generation.

3. All peoples and nations should do their utmost to rehabilitate habitats that have been destroyed, to take vigorous measures in protecting all species in danger of extinction, and to reintroduce to the wild species and varieties that have been uprooted or have become extinct, to whatever extent possible and according to the principle of last out first in.
4. International law should establish a new category of crimes equivalent to “crimes against humanity,” to be known as “crimes against Earth,” that will include specicide and destruction of habitats as malicious crimes aforethought against all peoples and nations, crimes that even today are claiming a heavy toll in human life and the lives of other species. The claim of ignorance should no longer provide immunity from punishment, and the perpetrators of such crimes should be prosecuted in international courts. International teams must begin inspecting all parties, including governments, business, and large corporations, whose short-term interests motivate them to commit such crimes, either secretly or openly.
5. The international economy should concede that today's prevailing objective of “economic growth” seriously conflicts with the well being of the biosphere and its human inhabitants. The time has come to acknowledge the danger of competition within the species and of the tendency toward unlimited escalation, to recognize the dangers in untamed consumerism and in enslaving people to

artificial needs that do not reflect the good of the individual but rather are dictated and nourished by industry and power-seeking groups. Human competition should be channeled away from its current routes, motivated by possessive and power-seeking needs, toward intellectual, spiritual, scientific, and recreational channels in order to reduce the dangers posed by increased competition for territory, natural resources, control, wealth and status.

6. Educational systems should furnish all children of the world with the scientific knowledge that the well-being, health and prosperity of the human species is closely and critically tied to the well-being, health and prosperity of all the species living on the planet Earth. The citizens of all the world's nations should be encouraged to become intimately familiar with the natural environment of their homes, their countries and of the world as a whole, to understand it and to value its beauty, its ingenuity and its infinite diversity, for it is the shared legacy of all humanity and the entire family of Earth.