

Response to Comments by J.A.L. Robertson relating to the Submission
by the United Church of Canada (UCC) to the Seaborn Panel

Submitted by: Mary Lou Harley

In “Nuclear Energy-An Ethical Choice,” there is the implication that Peter Timmerman was the consultant for the ethical framework of the United Church submission to the Seaborn Panel. While Prof. Timmerman’s voluntary participation as a representative of the Canadian Coalition on Ecology, Ethics and Religion was most welcome at meetings of the UCC drafting group in 1995 and 1996, he did not play a role in the determination of the ethical principles to be applied or the way in which they were to be applied to the nuclear issues, nor did he play any role in the writing of the submission.

The submission was written by the UCC drafting group within the framework of ethical principles established by the UCC in 1992, it was reviewed and revised following responses to the drafts of the report from a variety of UCC members, and the submission as a whole was endorsed in principle by the Steering Committee of the UCC Program Unit on Peace, Environment and Rural Life. Dr. Carl Ridd, then retired UCC professor of religious studies, lead the exploration of the theological-ethical world view which is presented in Sections 1 and 2 of the submission. The more concrete expression of the ethical principles had already been articulated in 1992 in the 34th General Council of the United Church of Canada document, “One Earth Community Ethical Principles for Environment and Development.” Acknowledging that an ethical framework evolves with time and application, twelve principles describe the inter-relatedness of the entire ecological system, including human beings, and the responsibility of human communities for the consequences of their actions:

1. Human societies must bear responsibility toward the Earth in its wholeness.
2. To be both people-oriented and ecologically sound, all development strategies must be founded on a just international economic order, with priority for the world’s poor.
3. Lifestyles of high material consumption must yield to the provision of greater sufficiency for all.
4. Environmental destruction must stop and humanity must understand itself collectively responsible both for the destruction and for the repair thereof.
5. The rights of future generations must be protected.
6. The carrying capacity of the Earth must be respected and protected.
7. The bio-diversity of the Earth must be respected and protected.
8. Militarism must yield to non-violent approaches to conflict resolution.
9. Decision-making for just and ecologically-sound development must ensure the participation of individuals and groups, especially those most affected by the project.
10. Both opportunities for learning and access to knowledge must be assured in order to facilitate sustainable development.
11. Development decisions must emphasize prevention of ecological damage.
12. Procedures and mechanisms must be established ensuring a transnational approach to environmental issues and disputes. [UCC, 1992, p.3]

The drafting group agreed that each of the twelve principles pointed to ethical responses to all aspects of nuclear issues. The principles were rephrased to give a consistency in the presentation:

1. What we do must reflect a responsibility to the Earth in its wholeness.
2. What we do must be founded on a just international economic order.
3. What we do must promote change of lifestyle from high material consumption.
4. What we do must promote humanity's understanding of its collective responsibility for environmental damage and repair and that environmental damage must stop.
5. What we do must protect the rights of future generations.
6. What we do must not threaten the sustaining capacity of the Earth.
7. What we do must respect and protect the biodiversity of the Earth.
8. What we do must not contribute to violent approaches to conflict resolution.
9. What we do must ensure 'meaningful participation' of individuals and groups in the decision-making processes.
10. What we do must assure opportunities for learning and access to knowledge.
11. What we do must be based on adequate environmental, social and cultural impact assessment.
12. What we do must hold authorities responsible for their actions and ensure a transnational approach to prevent environmental damage.

The format of Section 3 of the submission to the Seaborn Panel presented the restatement of each principle followed by a brief discussion of some of the nuclear issues in the context of that ethical principle.