

THE INTERNATIONAL EARTH DAY

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Summary

This contribution gives an account of the concept of the “International Earth Day”, its evolution and its observance. While the observance of this one-day annual event is much to be welcomed, attention is drawn to some reservations which, it is argued, need to be addressed to make it both more effective and helpful in the process of achieving global environmental sustainability and sustainable development.

1. The “International Earth Day”

1.1. What Is The “International Earth Day” and What Is Its Purpose?

The International Earth Day is one day in the year dedicated to raising awareness, through contemplation and appropriate activities and events worldwide, of humanity’s primeval umbilical bond with Mother Earth and of her bountiful benediction of resources and life-support systems without which life on earth cannot exist.

Ideally the International Earth Day, celebrated annually worldwide, ought to be the day of the Vernal Equinox when the Sun crosses the Celestial Equator — the first day of Spring in the Northern Hemisphere (Autumn in the Southern Hemisphere) when day (light) and night (darkness) are of equal length. For this day is and has been recognized as Nature’s day all over the world and celebrated as such. Indeed, even in the ancient

Chinese, Egyptian, Indian, Mayan, Persian and Stonehenge cultures the day of the March Spring Equinox had been celebrated with ceremonies and festivities as a kind of “thanksgiving” to nature (and/or to nature’s God or Goddess equivalent) for mercifully providing all of life’s needs and for life itself; and to powerfully remind humans of their strong and inseparable bond with Mother Earth — a bond which the English poet John Donne refers to as “Earth’s surly bond” and which is implicit in the following by the eminent Indian poet, *Rabindra Nath Tagore*:

*Ages pass, still Thou pourest,
And still there is room to fill.*

At Stonehenge (England), where celebration of the Vernal Equinox has been a pagan ritual for thousands of years, the monuments are aligned to the direction of sunrise on equinox and are carefully arranged to measure the very moment the Vernal Equinox occurs. It is also interesting to note that the Great Sphinx on the Giza plateau in Egypt looks due east along the direction of the Sun at equinox. In China and India the Vernal Equinox is associated with renewal, rebirth and cleaning. In India it has religious significance too. Indeed, in practically every culture in Northern Hemisphere the Vernal Equinox is associated with rebirth and renewal and celebrated because it signals the return of weather conducive to the growing of agricultural food crops.

The following excerpt from “The Real Earth Day” by John McConnell, founder of Earth Day, succinctly conveys the symbolism of celebrating the International Earth Day on the day of the Vernal Equinox:

“The equilibrium and balance of the equinox encourages and inspires independence and cooperation. The simultaneous global event deepens our sense of unity. It fosters a sense of rights and responsibilities in the protection and care of Earth. From Earth Day has come a growing consensus that every individual and institution should act as Earth Trustees, seeking what can be done in ecology, economics and ethics to benefit people and planet. This will help obtain a healthy, peaceful future and speed the day when bells will ring all over the world as we celebrate Earth Day, the Great Day of Earth.”

In the same vein, the following from Margaret Mead’s 1977 Earth Day Statement is also instructive as it is moving:

“The Vernal Equinox calls for all mankind to recognize and respect Earth’s beautiful systems of balance, between the presence of animals on land, the fish in the sea, birds in the air, mankind, water, air, and land. Most importantly there must always be awareness of the actions by people that can disturb this precious balance.”

Over the last 200 years or so, and especially since the industrial revolution, man’s awareness, appreciation and acknowledgement of the bond mentioned above has gradually been dissipated mainly by his increasing reliance on science and technology to exploit nature. So much so in fact that there appears to be a serious and growing disconnection between man and nature that is largely and arguably to blame for the mounting environmental predicament facing humanity today. In the pervasive and prevailing culture of science, technology and *laissez-faire* economics, to genuinely

respect the Earth as “mother” rather than treat her merely as a natural “facility” to be exploited to the full and often mindlessly for economic development, is regarded with disdain or a kind of overt or covert sentimentality that modern science, technology and economics cannot tolerate, or at best find embarrassing (also see Section 4.2 of *Importance of Teaching Environmental Education at an Early Age* and Section 2.1 of *Need for Environmental Research*). Yet, it is hard to see how even a modest degree of global environmental sustainability could ever be achieved without meaningfully restoring that mother (earth)-child (human) bond.

The purpose of the International Earth Day is (or should be) to help the process of restoring the aforementioned bond between “Mother” Earth and the humankind through contemplation and appropriate activities and events worldwide to ensure that:

“The world of tomorrow is not foreordained to be either good or bad....rather it will be what we make it. In these 77 theses I have tried to present the essential ideas needed to achieve a historic global change from mindless exploitation, with increasing danger of worldwide catastrophe, to the peaceful nurture of our home, Planet Earth.”

(Foreword to “77 Theses on the Care of the Earth” by John McConnell)

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www.earthsite.org [This official web site gives comprehensive information on the International Earth Day including “The real Earth Day” by John McConnell; Margaret Mead’s 1977 Earth Day Statement; “77 Theses on the care of the Earth”, the “Earth Magna Charta”; and “Earth Trustees”].

Biographical Sketch

Ms. Krassimira Kazashka-Hristozova received the Masters degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy, Sofia, Bulgaria in 2001, and the European Masters degree in Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development from the same university in 2002. Following a short spell at the Executive Environment Agency, Sofia, currently Ms. Kazashka-Hristozova is working as a Senior Expert at the Ministry of Environment and Water, Sofia. Areas of her professional interest include Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC), Environmental Protection, and Environmental Education. She has several publications in these and related areas.

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