

# The Nuremberg Memorandum for Integrating Spiritual Dimensions into Education for Sustainable Development.

*Adopted by the participants of the 13<sup>th</sup> international, interdisciplinary and interreligious Nuremberg Forum Conference, 2 Oct 2024*  
<http://nuremberg-forum.org>

Being aware that the present global environmental, economic and social crises are so dramatic that in-depth transformations of individual and collective mind-sets merit deeper exploration,

Considering that overcoming the mind-behavior gap is the central current challenge of any effort to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD),

Convinced that in this situation, within the framework of human rights and the SDGs, all cultural sources available that could facilitate the necessary transformations and stimulate corresponding motivations should be appreciated,

we advocate **the integration of spiritual dimensions, sources, methods and practices into ESD.**

## A. Clarifications

### *A1. How do we understand 'Education for Sustainable Development'?*

While acknowledging the complexity of and different views on the concept of 'Education for Sustainable Development' (ESD), it is understood here as education that encourages and supports persons to acquire the knowledge, skills, values, and ability to reach the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>1</sup> This means that ESD stimulates a holistic and integral view on sustainable development and furthers a drastic change in our worldviews. In short, ESD facilitates the transformation from the 'egosystem' to the 'ecosystem'. This is where spirituality comes in: as crucial support for personal change and development, and as connection between the personal, societal, and systematic levels of transformation that are required to achieve the SDGs.

### *A2. What do we mean by 'spiritual dimensions'?*

---

<sup>1</sup> In line with UNESCO's description of ESD, as provided on <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education> and <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/need-know?hub=72522>

We understand the concept of spirituality as a wide and open concept that embraces intra-religious spirituality, inter-religious spirituality and non-religious, secular spirituality. We see its core in the common quest for the purpose in life and for a good life for all, which has its meaning and right in itself but also has political, economic, and social implications. It is about seeking an understanding of what it is to be human along the basic relationships to oneself, to others, to nature and – if believed in – to God or transcendent realities. In this understanding, spirituality is not just a private issue, but has a public, a political dimension as our fundamental assumptions about life shape and are shaped by the culture, religion and society which we live in.

In pluralistic societies, people tend to have a certain “fear of the idea of the good life” (Michael Sandel). They are inclined to think that beyond the framework of human rights and democratic principles the ideas of humanity and what makes a good life are mainly heterogeneous and a source of conflicts. This often also goes for schools. However, the idea of spirituality indicates that, on the one hand, it may be worthwhile to explore a possible “overlapping consensus” (John Rawls) – in the sense of a common core outlined above. On the other hand, it may also be beneficial to listen to each other’s differing perspectives and experiences and to be open to learn and receive inspiration from one another.

Spirituality in our understanding is a holistic concept, which is one reason for its attractiveness and its educational potential. Spirituality implies a cognitive aspect (e.g. thinking about humanity and the meaning of life as well as about the ambivalent history of Western civilization in the light of religious belief), an emotional aspect (e.g. experiences of being touched by encounters with nature or by the injustices of globalization effects) and a pragmatic aspect (e.g. practices such as rituals, exercises, meditation or mindfulness techniques, contemplation, but also political prayer sessions, protest marches and demonstrations).

### *A3. Why do we think spiritual dimensions are important for ESD?*

We agree with those scientific, philosophical, psychological, sociological and theological analyses that demonstrate the necessity to address a deeper or meta-level underlying the ecological crises, namely the basic anthropological views and the corresponding routines and habits of affluent industrialized societies. Some authors have explicitly presented this as the insight that the ecological crisis has a “spiritual dimension”.

The typically modern (western) way of defining a good life within the dynamics of increase (acceleration, growth, perfection) has been critically confronted with the differing conception of a good life in indigenous cultures or in certain religious and spiritual communities. Such analyses can be supported by happiness research, which shows that ‘more and more’, ‘faster and faster’, ‘richer and richer’ does not necessarily make people happier. By contrast, some spiritual traditions – from

various religious and cultural backgrounds – convey the experience that a simple, modest, slowed-down life that is mindful and close to nature can be more fulfilling. Promoting such experiences and insights among young people seems more promising for ESD than incessant moral demands (you should consume less, produce less waste, use your car less, etc.) and more promising than to focus exclusively on conveying more scientific knowledge (as important as this is).

Also, spiritual perspectives and practices can motivate people to get politically involved – as has been proved in past and present. For many activists and politicians, their spiritual beliefs and practices are resources for their engagement. Concepts such as “Deep Ecology” or “Spiritual Ecology” try to bring spiritual perspectives together with scientific research and political action. And religious communities as well as theologians and ethicists from various religions have made valuable contributions to a better understanding of the global challenges and have actively engaged in addressing them.

However, there have been and still are problematic forms of spirituality that exclusively focus on the inner well-being of the individual or the own in-group and thus lead to disengagement from sustainability-related matters and from promoting the common good. Therefore, in our view, the integration of spiritual dimensions into ESD requires a differentiated, critical and self-critical inquiry into the topic.

## **B. Suggestions**

*B1. The exploration of spiritual dimensions should be integrated into concepts of ESD on both the analytical and the interventional level.*

The analyses offered to learners of all ages should integrate deep and fundamental questions of anthropological, existential and worldview nature that also promote a critical assessment of the modern way of living in affluent consumption-oriented societies. Possible solutions to the eco-crises as offered and discussed in pedagogical interventions should include the exploration of spiritual dimensions and elements that enhance holistic and inclusive forms education. They should thus promote people’s self-empowerment, collective practices as well as social and political engagement.

*B2. Spiritual dimensions should be introduced into ESD as complementing, converging and critically interacting with scientific knowledge.*

For instance, acquiring scientific knowledge about the value of forests and an experiential, meditative encounter with a forest as God’s beautiful creation should complement each other. At the same time, the expectation that the ecological crises will be solved by scientific knowledge and progress alone, will have to be critically questioned.

*B3. Spiritual dimensions of ESD should be integrated in all school subjects, although they can find special consideration in school subjects like Religious Education (RE), Ethics, or Worldview Education.*

ESD needs to be more substantially anchored in the school curricula, in teacher education and training as well as in school textbooks and teaching materials. In all these areas the spiritual dimension of ESD outlined above should be taken into account. Interdisciplinary collaboration between the school subjects seems especially promising, in particular between RE (or similar religion-related subjects) and other subjects.

*B4. ESD should be more substantially integrated into concepts and practice of Religious Education (or similar religion-related subjects) at schools.*

This task implies endeavors at the academic level, at the level of religious communities and at the level of school practice. Theoretical concepts that have already been developed should be exchanged and discussed internationally, interdisciplinary, interreligiously, transreligiously, and with teachers as the experts of school practice. In particular, high-quality and open educational resources are needed to enhance ESD in the context of RE.

*B5. All endeavors to interlink ESD and spirituality should take account of the rich diversities of spiritualities in the plural of regional cultures, religions, and worldviews.*

In this way, the plural local, regional, national or cultural contexts of sustainability challenges as well as spiritual traditions, languages and practices should be explored and brought into communication.

*B6. Empirical research and inquiry-based learning about the effects and outcomes of integrating diverse spiritual perspectives, elements and practices into ESD settings as well as integrating ESD elements into RE (or similar religion-related subjects) should be conducted and promoted.*

Such empirical research and inquiry-based learning is necessary to test existing concepts, develop new approaches and thus to find out about the best ways of integrating spiritual dimensions into ESD and ESD elements into RE (or similar religion-related subjects). Beyond, as a basis for educational endeavors, more empirical research is needed on the factual role of spirituality for people's or communities' engagement in sustainable development.

**Attachment****Action points and possible main actors.**

| Action Points   | Actors  | Reference to Memorandum Text |
|---|---|------------------------------|
| Incorporate Spiritual Dimensions into ESD Frameworks                                  | Governments, Educational Institutions, Religious / Spiritual Communities  | B1, B2                       |
| Facilitate Interdisciplinary Collaboration for Holistic Sustainability Education      | Governments, Educational Institutions, Researchers, Religious / Spiritual Communities / Interreligious Agents and Associations                    | B3                           |
| Develop and Implement New Curricula and Pedagogical Approaches                        | Governments, Curriculum Developers, Educational Institutions, Religious / Spiritual Communities / Interreligious Agents and Associations          | B1, B3                       |
| Promote Experiential Learning that Integrates Spiritual Practices                     | Educational Institutions, Teachers, Governments, Religious / Spiritual Communities / Interreligious Agents and Associations                       | B2                           |
| Encourage Political and Civic Engagement through Spiritual Perspectives               | Governments, Civil Society, Religious / Spiritual Communities / Interreligious Agents and Associations, Teachers                                  | B3                           |
| Fund and Promote Research on Spirituality's Role in Sustainability                    | Researchers, Governments, Academic Institutions, Religious / Spiritual Communities / Interreligious Agents and Associations, Funding Institutions | B5                           |
| Create and Distribute High-Quality Open Educational Resources on Spirituality and ESD | Governments, Educational Resource Developers, Schools, Religious / Spiritual Communities / Interreligious Agents and Associations, Teachers       | B4, B5                       |
| Launch Public Awareness Campaigns on Spiritual Ecology                                | Governments, Media, Civil Society, Religious / Spiritual Communities / Interreligious Agents and Associations, Researchers                        | B1, B2                       |