

'All of us urgently need to band together to pass a robust and just Earth to future generations,' says expert

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An [article](#) in a special issue on The Planetary Future published in *Environmental Policy and Law* considers the Planetary Trust as an

essential framework underlying today's kaleidoscopic world, reviews important developments in implementing the Trust, and focuses on important steps to take now to ensure a just, robust Earth system for present and future generations.

Bharat H. Desai, Ph.D., Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for International Legal Studies, and Editor-in-Chief of EPL notes, "The gathering storms and the growing scientific evidence underscore that the planetary-level environmental crisis is smoldering. Can we reverse this planetary crisis? What course correction does it require? What lies in store for our planetary future with rapidly depleting time?"

"We invited global thought leaders to think aloud and ahead on the planetary future and contribute to our journal. The lead article by Edith Weiss Brown and other articles in this special issue on The Planetary Future sow the seeds for an appropriate churning among the global academic circles and the decision-makers, especially in preparation for the 2024 Summit of the Future."

Edith Brown Weiss, JD, Ph.D., University Professor Emerita, Georgetown University, and Francis Cabell Brown Professor of International Law Emerita, Georgetown Law, Washington DC, U.S., is one of the thought leaders invited to contribute to the journal. She says, "We are at an historic moment for our future. We can band together and pass the Earth to future generations in good condition so that they can use and enjoy its benefits, or we can focus only on the present and pass them a desecrated planet and a vastly different Earth system."

"Information technology has enabled what I have termed a kaleidoscopic world, with rapid change, new and challenging problems, many diverse actors, and fluctuating patterns of interaction among the actors. This complicates efforts to conserve our planet."

In 1984, Professor Brown Weiss proposed that the human species holds the natural and cultural resources of the planet in [trust](#) for all generations of the human species. This Planetary Trust obligates each generation to preserve the diversity of the resource base and to pass the planet to future generations in no worse condition than it receives it. Thus, the present generation serves both as a trustee for future generations and as a beneficiary of the Trust.

According to Dr. Brown Weiss, significant developments in the last two decades offer hope for increased consideration of future generations, for intergenerational equity, and for the foundation of the Planetary Trust.

"Fifty years after the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, we have learned much and taken significant actions internationally and locally. While much more needs to be done, history suggests we could succeed. States, [international organizations](#), civil society, and other groups and networks have begun to think about the future. But time is running out," she cautions.

"Many of the important developments in incorporating the future since then have taken place in judicial litigation, institutional arrangements within or among countries, national constitutional provisions, national legislation in a specific sector such as mining, international initiatives, and high-level reports and other documents. Nongovernmental organizations, religious bodies, and the private sector have contributed significantly. They point the way to enlisting everyone to conserve our shared inheritance.

"As we look ahead to the next century, we must urgently engage States and all actors to consider the future in all policies and decisions. As a first step, we need to recognize collectively that a de facto Planetary Trust exists and that we must take specific steps to implement it. Doing so is a global and local public good," says Dr. Brown Weiss.

Dr. Brown Weiss' contribution to this special issue, "Marshalling the Planetary Trust," recommends that the UN Summit of the Future adopt six critical commitments:

1. Systematic consideration of the future and reaffirmation of the principle of intergenerational equity
2. Representation to future generations
3. Monitoring, assessment and collection of lessons learned
4. Scientific and technological research and development
5. Institutional innovations
6. Education and raising of public consciousness

Her specific recommendations for marshaling the Planetary Trust are as follows:

- We need to resist the incentives to short-term thinking. This is today's most significant challenge. We must all recognize the urgency of dealing with the long-term future.
- We need to address poverty today. Everyone has a right to benefit from the Planetary Trust.
- We need to develop ways to coordinate actions and cooperate, despite the difficulties posed by today's anarchic, kaleidoscopic world.
- We need to combat disinformation, a critical threat to making the Planetary Trust a reality.

Dr. Brown Weiss concludes, "The UN Summit of the Future could be a turning point in sending a critical signal internationally and locally that we must change our perspective and integrate the future into our decisions and practices. The Summit brings all countries together at a high level to provide a broad consensus on the issues and to resolve to address them. It offers an opportunity to reset thinking about the future, to confirm intergenerational equity, and to set in motion a cascade of

measures to consider the future in all that we do."

More information: Edith Brown Weiss, *Marshalling the Planetary Trust*, *Environmental Policy and Law* (2024). [DOI: 10.3233/EPL-239021](https://doi.org/10.3233/EPL-239021)

Bharat H. Desai, *The Planetary Future: Part – I*, *Environmental Policy and Law* (2024). [DOI: 10.3233/EPL-239032](https://doi.org/10.3233/EPL-239032)

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