

Edgar Mora,
Minister of Public Education
Costa Rica

His Excellency Mr. Minister,

I had the honor of knowing the I Am the Response program developed by your Ministry and the Costa Rica's Gaia Foundation at the last Earth Charter congress, which was attended by 60 delegates, experts in education for sustainability from around the world.

Both I and the others present in the Gaia presentation were very impressed to see how a truly innovative educational program is being held in terms of form and method. We felt that the program was right to be centered on the extended concept of the person, to include lifestyle, and essence or "being".

In the study that I have carried out worldwide to develop a model of the way in which native peoples conceive of good living, I came to the conclusion that the native American people give a high priority to "being", so the proposal of Gaia seemed rooted in American Indian thought. At the same time, by emphasizing the teaching of conscious, healthy and sustainable lifestyles, I found it very rooted in Costa Rica's green proposals.

To promote the Peace Agreement for Welfare of Mother Earth and the Presidential Mother Earth Executive Decree, "I am the answer" provides what is lacking in the Paris agreement: the concept that the planet is a living unit and the personal commitment to care of her as of a mother. In addition, it does so from a unique agreement that was achieved with the participation of all the indigenous peoples of Costa Rica and that favors them all, thanks to the Peace Path for Mother Earth program (Senderos de Paz Madre Tierra) and the compensation of the ecological footprint in their territories.

By promoting the values of the UNESCO endorsed Earth Charter and the Declaration of Principles for the Conscious Evolution of Mother Earth, it honors at the same time the legacy of the United Nations and the ancestral indigenous tradition. In addition, this Declaration, inspired by ancestral wisdom, caused a great cultural impact having been endorsed by all public universities in Costa Rica, by the international organization Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, having been presented at the United Nations as an example of education in the jurisprudence of the Earth, and being in the process of being endorsed by the Government of Costa Rica.

By using yoga and meditation as tools of transformative education, I Am the Answer fits the most novel in education, since it is increasingly evident that we must stop being so focused on the content and focus more and more on the development of consciousness and personhood. In addition, this favored the signing of the Presidential Executive Decree that declared yoga and meditation of public interest "with the intention of generating wellness destinations and the creation of conscious, healthy and sustainable lifestyles", in harmony with the declarations of the United Nations and UNESCO in relation to yoga.

By promoting the financing of the project through the Harmony with Nature Corporate Social Responsibility program, which leads companies to carbon neutrality, it favors the fulfillment

of the commitments of the Paris agreement and educates employees and their families in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Finally, financing the educational program through offsetting the carbon footprint of tourists visiting Costa Rica with the Wellness Tourism for Mother Earth Program, tourists are also educated. It will also help position Costa Rica as an eco-tourism destination.

For all these reasons I believe that the integral vision of the GAIA foundation programs, chief amongst which "I am the Answer" and "Senderos de Paz" should be nominated for the UNESCO-JAPAN Prize in Education for Sustainable Development.

I congratulate Gaia Foundation on their management of these programs and invite you to consider the nomination. In this way it will be possible to obtain international support for scaling up of these programs at the national level and replication of this project in other countries.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr. Dorine van Norren

Independent researcher

Development as Service: a Happiness, Ubuntu and Buen Vivir interdisciplinary view of the Sustainable Development Goals. PhD. Tilburg University Netherlands. 2017.

This letter does not reflect the opinion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs nor the Ministry of Education of the Netherlands.

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Supplement

Gaia programs meet the three main criteria of the UNESCO-Japan ESD prize:

A) Transformation:

I am the Answer is transformative education in that *"it empowers learners to transform themselves and the society they live in ... taking action against climate change, changing one's patterns, developing social entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods, or supporting those struggling against poverty"* as well as other programs engaging with various stakeholders promoting informal learning.

B) Integration:

I am the Answer addresses the three dimensions of sustainable development (society, economy, environment) in an integrated way and helps learners understand the interdependence between them and act accordingly. Senderos de Paz stimulates exchange between native Americans and the wider public (national and international) on CO2 reduction and nature restoration.

C) Innovation:

I am the Answer demonstrates an innovative approach to ESD in the themes it covers, in the methodology it employs, in the way the learning environment is designed and other Gaia programs reaching out to sectors beyond education (tourism, business, politics and the wider public) as well as unifying and engaging the original inhabitants of Costa Rica.

In addition to these three criteria, I Am the Answer fulfills four of the five priorities of the UNESCO-Japan ESD prize:

- with the signing of the decrees an advanced policy has been established,
- with the employed method a transformative education is produced
- at the same time, empowering the youth,
- and accelerating sustainable solutions at the local level.

This letter is supported and co-signed by:

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