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On behalf of the Steering Committee of the Earth Trusteeship Initiative a warm welcome. I am excited and grateful that you have accepted our invitation to join today's launch of the Hague Principles – a historical event in a historical building.

In 2000 we have launched the Earth Charter here. The Earth Charter was the world's first legal document exclusively drafted by civil society, not by states, and expressing the principles, rights and responsibilities that we as humans must be guided by if we want to continue living safely in our home, planet Earth.

The Earth Charter was also the inspiration behind the Hague Principles. The idea for the Hague Principles and their launch today at the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights came from many sources, people and organisations. But let me particularly acknowledge the initiative here in the Netherlands that started with a Symposium on Earth trusteeship in June 2017 and the Earth trusteeship Gathering a year later. In between, a number of people from a range of organisations (in the areas of human rights, rights of nature, human responsibilities and earth trusteeship) developed and agreed on the document that is now in front of you. Initially, we called the document a "Proclamation of Urgency" and this certainly describes our motivation: nothing could be more urgent in today's world of disarray and disorientation, than a call to order. Our political institutions (states, UN etc.) need to be reminded what they are basically for, i.e. providing for justice and peace.

What on Earth are we doing? For 70 years now we have human rights, yet more people are deprived of their most basic needs (material security, freedom of movement, freedom of expression etc.) than ever before. Treating all human beings as equal and in dignity remains an unfulfilled dream. And for 50 or so years, states produce policies and laws to protect the natural environment, yet these have not in any way stopped run-away climate change, biodiversity loss or growth madness. They have not changed practices and power structures that could bring us down as a species. We are destroying Earth, our home, arguably because we have no firm sense of responsibility for her and for our common destiny. We urgently need a universal declaration (in whatever form) of responsibilities for human rights and Earth trusteeship.

The core message of the Hague Principles is that humans are members of the community of life, the 'Earth community', that defines what responsibilities we as members have. Human rights are a prerequisite for any form of social organisation and totally indispensable. In fact, they require trusteeship responsibilities of each of us and of the sovereign state. But human rights are not as fundamental as human responsibilities.

All cultures other than the dominating Western culture have responsibilities at their core. In a globalized world, cultural and legal pluralism is critical. Only then human rights can flourish. But this also means that a global legal system needs to be based on responsibilities from which any rights must follow. Interestingly, human rights scholars such as Samuel Moyn (Yale

University) remind us that the entire human rights discourse since its origins in the enlightenment was always also about duties and responsibilities. Notably, parallel to the drafting process of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a movement of intellectuals called instead for a “Declaration of Duties and Rights”. One result of call was that the UDHR included article 29 (no.1): “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.” Basically, the UDHR was a product of people in North America. By contrast, people in Latin America created “The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man.”

Logically, rights are useless without legal responsibilities to protect them. To this end, states have a fundamental trusteeship responsibility towards their citizens and all people.

The Hague Principles call for this trusteeship role of the state. In this way, they build upon the many declarations of human responsibilities that have been drafted since the 1948 American Declaration. The Hague Principles, however, also acknowledge existing declarations on human responsibilities for Nature and Earth. Bringing social and environmental movements together, they postulate trusteeship responsibilities for both, human rights and the Earth. In the Anthropocene, Earth trusteeship exercised by people individually and collectively is the key. Without it, we would be saying that Earth doesn’t matter and that human survival doesn’t matter either. That simple.

Today’s launch of the Hague Principles is also the launch of the Earth Trusteeship Initiative. It is not enough to adopt a text and hope for the best. Everybody here in the room and the many individuals and organisations that have already endorsed the Hague Principles need to see themselves as Earth trustees. This is my personal plea to you. Act as a trustee for the Earth. This can mean many things – practical and personal action as much as visionary thinking and political advocacy. What exactly this involves and what next steps we should take, we will explore at our meeting in the afternoon, following this Forum.

Our morning here is dedicated to ideas about and around the Hague Principles themselves. We as organisers have been very fortunate to attract outstanding experts and activists as speakers. They represent a spectrum of different expertise in human rights and environmental responsibilities. But they all have in common their commitment to trusteeship that we all - individually and collectively through our political institutions – must develop to protect human rights and our common home, the Earth.

Before I introduce the speakers individually, let me again thank you for being here and thereby making this event relevant and important. In fact, I believe that this launch event may one day be called a historical event: The start for transforming the way how we as human beings and planetary citizens govern ourselves. Thank you.