

EAY's
Earth-based
Language Guide



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EARTH
ADVOCACY
YOUTH

Our Narrative

Nature is the process and web of life composed of interactive and reciprocal relationships which connect every organism on Earth into one planetary and complex interdependent ecosystem. For us, Nature is not a mere object or a series of objects, but a process of crisscrossing, interconnected, and vibrant relationships which exist and interact with each other in symbiosis.

There is the **biological**, such as diverse individual wildkind as well as holistic ecosystems and the biodiversity within them, the **physical**, such as air, land, and water, and the **cultural and spiritual**, which is not in any way limited to human culture and spirituality.

We draw inspiration from Fritjof Capra: “[..] Every living organism, from the smallest bacterium to all the varieties of plants and animals, including humans, is a living system. (..) The parts of living systems are themselves living systems. A leaf is a living system. A muscle is a living system. Every cell in our bodies is a living system. (..) Communities of organisms, including both ecosystems and human social systems such as families, schools, and other human communities, are living systems.”

The Power of Words

As storytellers, we must learn the power of our stories, what meaning we place in our words, and how our stories configure our understandings of reality and our actions. Why is this important? Words have immense power because the way we use words produces and reproduces certain patterns, values, and perceptions.

How do our stories shape the views of who we are as humans, and of our relationships with the world around us? How do we create powerful stories of a new paradigm, and have those stories navigate us through ecological crises? It is our stories that will recreate us, that will change today's dominant narrative, that will change the system.

Earth Advocacy Youth respects and does not in any way or form misuse the unique positions and ancestral knowledge of Indigenous Peoples around the world.

Language we are encouraging

Words/terms/ideas to emphasize in our EAY vocabulary:

- Earth system(s) [which governs life on the planet]
- Earth community
- Living system(s)
- Natural world [of which we are part]
- Nature (written with capital N). Nature is capitalized within Rights of Nature as the Earth system is considered a rights-holder. Also, when we use the word “Nature”, we have to be very aware of how it is perceived by the audience and the context we are using it in.
- Global/planetary ecosystem
- Ecosystem(s)
- Earth's living system(s)
- Life support system(s)
- Living planet
- Species
- Wildkind

Language we are rethinking

Words/terms/ideas to rethink:

- Speaking about "Nature" as separate, external, or outside of ourselves as human beings. Ex: "Humans and Nature", "humans vs. Nature", "going out in Nature", "save Nature".
- "Citizens" for addressing non-human living systems. As it is a human-applied concept and legal term, it will be problematic to apply to others than humans who are citizens of a specific nation.
- The idea of "only conscious sentient beings having rights". Commonly used in the animal rights movement.
- Wording such as "possess" and "own"
- "Our planet", "our world", "our Nature". It is not ours but is life that exists within and around us.
- "Humans depend on Nature"/"Humans are dependent upon Nature". Instead, using "Humans share a fundamentally interdependent relationship with the rest of the Earth's web of life", or similar.
- "Granting Nature rights": Living systems have always had intrinsic value and rights, but they are only now being legally recognized by humans in various systems of law and governance. Instead of "granting", use "[legally] recognizing"/"respecting"/"acknowledging"/"implementing".

- “Granting” legal personhood: Alternative: “Attribute”/”convey” legal personhood“.
- "Nature is voiceless”/“Nature has no voice”/“Giving Nature a voice”. The Earth's living systems have in fact countless ways to express themselves, the issue is rather that we have forgotten how to tune in and truly understand these expressions.
- “Natural resources”. Instead of saying natural resources, we say “natural elements”, “living systems”, or simply what it is: Water, oil, gas, land, soil, ocean, etc. Why? Because other living systems do not exist to serve humans, they do not exist to be exploited. If we refer to non-human living systems as “resources”, we imply in one way or another that they are there for someone’s benefit; in this case, human benefit and economic profit.
- "Ecosystem services". Again, with this term, we imply that natural elements exist mainly to serve and support human life on Earth. Instead, we use "life-support systems" which emphasizes the interdependent relationships all living beings share.
- Speaking about non-human living systems in anthropomorphic ways.
- "Climate change" is an outdated term. Instead, use "climate breakdown", "climate crisis", "climate emergency" which reflect the urgency and the reality of the planet's climate(s). It is not just changing, it is breaking down and our language must express this.
- "Humans and animals". We are animals too, just different species! It is about time we listen to Charles Darwin and his studies of evolution.
- "Natural capital". We fully reject this term as it refers to Nature as "extractable natural resources (goods and services) which fuel human economic activity".

Outdated terms

The environment (context!)

Climate change

Global warming

Wildlife

Fish stock(s)

Natural resources

Ecosystem services

Nature reserves

Extinction

The planet

Saving the planet

Climate sceptic

Relevant terms

Earth system, natural world, Nature, living planet

Climate breakdown, climate emergency, climate crisis

Global heating

Biodiversity, wildkind

Fish population(s) (they don't exist to be exploited)

Natural elements, or simply "water", "oil", "land", "forests", etc.

Life support systems

Wildkind refuges (reserve suggests distance)

Ecocide/annihilation (these suggest agency)

The living planet

Defending the living planet

Climate science denier

Examples

- Nature is not just a forest. Nature is the processes of reciprocal relationships that exist within the forest, and make up the forest.
- Nature is not just the river. Nature is the symbiotic processes and interconnectedness between all species, microorganisms, plants, insects, and streams of water which exist in and close to the river.
- Nature is not just the city. Nature is a series of interactions between all living inhabitants and visitors of a specific urban area. This can be the trees outside your window, the birds sitting on a branch, the child playing on the street, the bees buzzing around the flowers in the park, the water flowing in the river. In cities, there is generally an overrepresentation of human structures. Humans have formed surroundings in ways that benefit us in the short term and most often have a negative impact on other living systems and the Earth as a whole. Nevertheless, this does not separate humans from the Nature we are intrinsically part of.

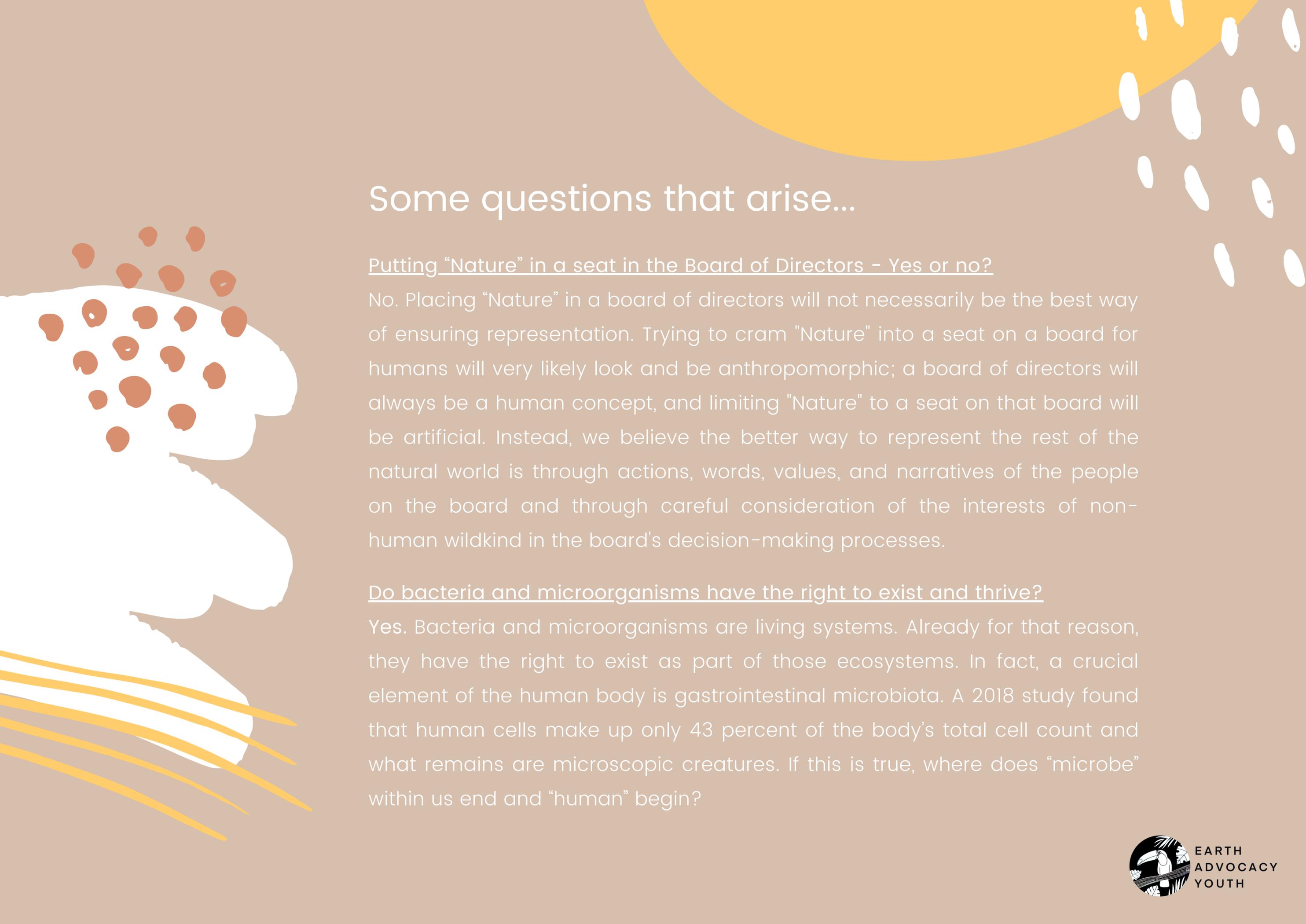
Some ways in which we involve non-human living systems in our work

- We speak about Nature as a process, and not as an object/series of objects or outside of/external from ourselves as humans. (Using our definition above as a base)
- We constantly ensure to update and educate ourselves on the recent developments in the topics we address as EAY. How? We invite persons with relevant knowledge in Earth Jurisprudence, planetary boundaries, ecosystems, and ecological literacy to educate us on the topic.
- **Unlearning process:** We are aware that even though we work for the legal and cultural recognition of the inherent rights of Earth's diverse living systems, and consider ourselves knowledgeable on the subject, we are on a never-ending learning journey and need to remind ourselves and each other about the language, patterns, and considerations that we need to adopt or adapt to inclusively and respectfully advocate for the whole Earth system.



If you have ideas or suggestions to add to this list, let us know!

- When suitable, we collaborate with people who encompass a deep spiritual connection with non-human living beings. This is one way through which we welcome, channel and acknowledge the diverse expressions of Nature in relevant projects and activities.
- Depending on the partner, their needs, and their existing understanding of the Earth's diverse web of life (or "Nature"), we provide expertise and contextual analysis in order to adequately support the partner in their intentions.
- Developing a handbook for how to create a more Earth-conscious organizational structure: what it means to be part of and represent an Earth system, the steps that we as well as other organizations and institutions can take to strengthen holistic representation of all Earth's living systems.



Some questions that arise...

Putting “Nature” in a seat in the Board of Directors – Yes or no?

No. Placing “Nature” in a board of directors will not necessarily be the best way of ensuring representation. Trying to cram “Nature” into a seat on a board for humans will very likely look and be anthropomorphic; a board of directors will always be a human concept, and limiting “Nature” to a seat on that board will be artificial. Instead, we believe the better way to represent the rest of the natural world is through actions, words, values, and narratives of the people on the board and through careful consideration of the interests of non-human wildkind in the board's decision-making processes.

Do bacteria and microorganisms have the right to exist and thrive?

Yes. Bacteria and microorganisms are living systems. Already for that reason, they have the right to exist as part of those ecosystems. In fact, a crucial element of the human body is gastrointestinal microbiota. A 2018 study found that human cells make up only 43 percent of the body's total cell count and what remains are microscopic creatures. If this is true, where does “microbe” within us end and “human” begin?

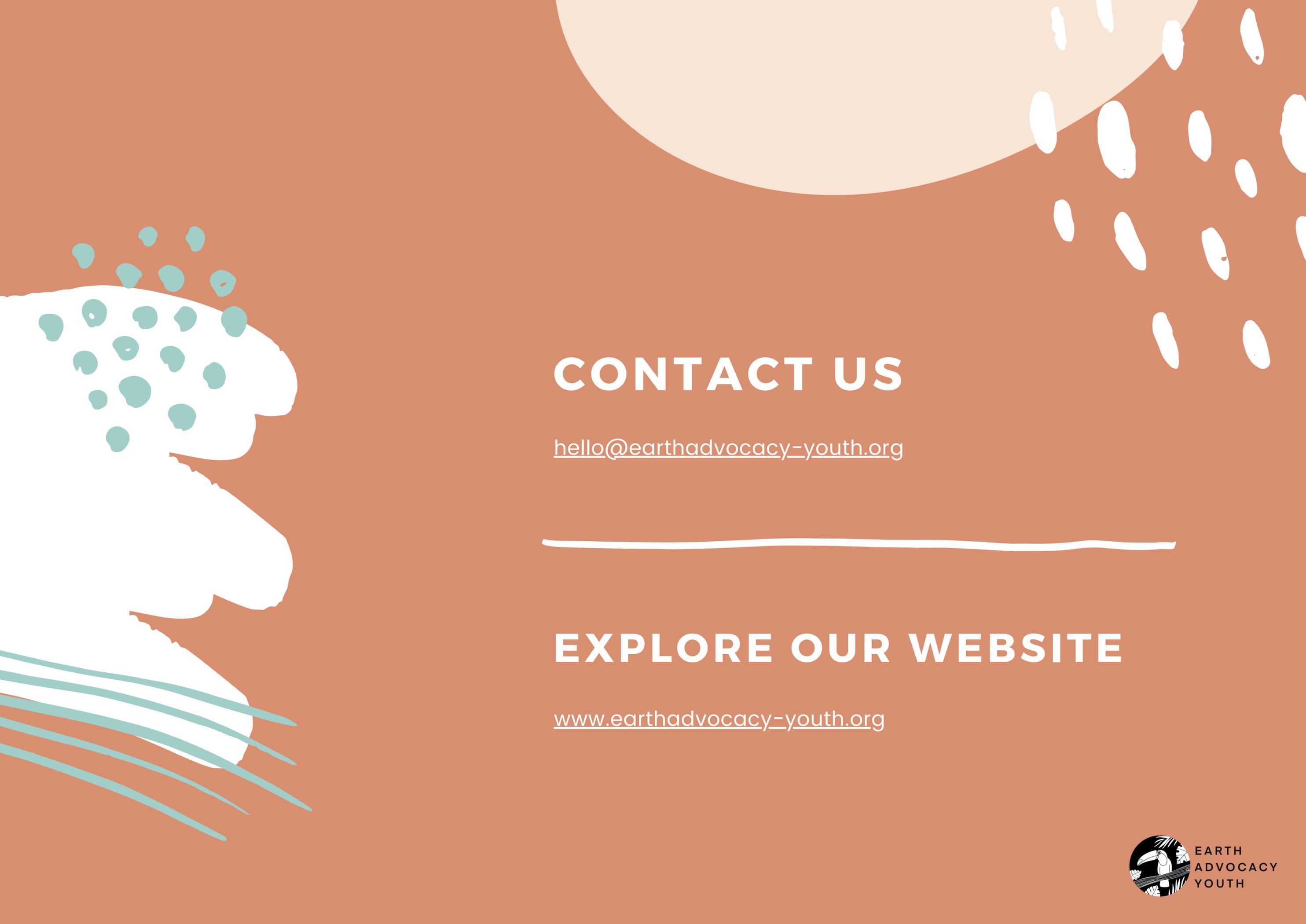


Should the moon have rights?

With current legal frameworks providing no certainty and in the midst of a highly politicized international debate, it might be early to have the rights of the Moon legally recognized. However, what is clear at this point is that the Moon needs a legal standing in human systems of law, and potentially a guardian to represent the moon's interests. This approach could provide an opportunity to bring a new dimension to conservation.

Since the '60s and '70s, it has been common belief that the Moon is a 'dead' celestial body. Recent news has claimed otherwise, showing new ridges have been forming on the lunar surface. Regardless of how far science is at, we should take a precautionary approach in allowing extractive activities on the Moon. We failed to do so in many instances here on Earth. Let us learn from the mistakes we made on Earth and respect other celestial bodies in this solar system. The guardian of the Moon should cooperate with scientists to formulate the needs of the Moon. We might not understand yet what impact human activities will have on the integrity and health of the Moon.

The Moon has orbited around Earth in peace for billions of years. Who are we humans to start exploiting the moon? Let us reflect back on what we have done to the Earth as a whole and take a precautionary approach this time.



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