

THE COVENANT MANIFESTO

The claim

Sovereignty is the rule that the person harmed has no standing where the harm was decided.

Earth needs one government and has never had one.

I. What is happening

Berlin, November 1884. Fourteen delegations sit down to set the terms for taking Africa. Twelve European states, the United States, the Ottoman Empire. No African in the room. They did not draw borders. They agreed on a rule for acquiring them. Effective occupation: put men on the ground, hold it, and the title is good against everyone present.

Leopold II of Belgium leaves with the Congo basin. 2.3 million km², about seventy-six times the area of the country he was king of, held not by Belgium but by his own association, as personal property. Estimates of the population collapse run from 1.2 to 10 million, and I use the low end. His Force Publique cut the hands off people who came up short on rubber quotas.

Belgium took the colony off its own king in 1908, twenty-three years late. The borders came afterwards, out of the rule agreed in that room, and in most places they are still the borders.

Nothing in that room was illegal.

The English Parliament passed around 5,200 enclosure acts between 1604 and 1914 and converted 2.75 million hectares of common land into private title, roughly a fifth of England. Every act passed a parliament the commoners could not vote for. Quorum, procedure, minutes. Legal.

The Trail Smelter tribunal ruled in 1941 that no state may use its territory so as to injure another's by fumes. For that one smelter it named the operator, fixed the sulphur dioxide limits, installed the instruments and made Canada pay. Then it stopped. The rule it announced has been cited constantly for eighty-five years and has never once been given an operator, a deadline or a bailiff for anybody else. There is no number to call. Legal, and empty.

From the 1960s the Soviet water ministry took the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya for cotton. The Aral Sea lost more than half its surface and two-thirds of its water. The towns on the dry shore had no forum, because the decision and the damage sat inside one sovereign. In 1991 that sovereign became five sovereigns. There was still no forum. Legal.

Since 1946 the Security Council has recorded 293 vetoes. Russia and the USSR account for 120 of them, 19 since 2011, 14 of those on Syria. The United States accounts for 82, and of the 14 it has cast since 2020 all but two concerned Israel and Palestine. Five states hold the lock, and those five are about a quarter of the human race. Legal.

Now, this year.

The United States, Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea hold an estimated 12,187 nuclear warheads. Washington and Moscow hold 86% of them, and those two countries are under 6% of the people alive. Everyone else lives inside the blast radius of a decision they have no vote in and no standing to contest.

Every government writes its own climate pledge, scores its own pledge, and cannot be made to keep it. Emissions reached 57.7 gigatonnes of CO2 equivalent in 2024, about seven tonnes each, rising 2.3% a year. Deliver every pledge on the table in full and the century still lands at 2.3 to 2.5 degrees. By the end of September 2025, 60 parties had filed a 2035 target. UNEP scores the American exit from Paris at 0.1 degrees on its own: one country walking out gave back most of what the last round of pledges bought.

States have paid more than 113 billion dollars to investors under investment-treaty arbitration, the bulk of it to fossil fuel interests. In 2019 a tribunal ordered Pakistan to hand 6 billion dollars to one mining investor. A company can drag a government into a forum whose ruling binds. The village downstream of that company's tailings pond can fill in a form. Standing runs one way.

Around 600 billion dollars of multinational profit is booked offshore every year, some 40% of the total. 55% of it lands in six places: the Netherlands, Bermuda, Luxembourg, Ireland, Singapore, Switzerland. Four of the six are European, and the European Union loses about 60 billion a year to them, near a fifth of the corporate tax it manages to collect. Europe wrote the rules, Europe runs the laundry, and Europe files the complaint.

China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Spain run 90% of the world's distant-water fishing fleet. West Africa loses 2.3 billion dollars a year to what those vessels take out of water it cannot patrol. Legal.

Every one of these is the same move. The harm crosses the line. The authority stops at it. This is not a defect in the system of states. It is the system, working as intended.

Bismarck's conference, the English Parliament, the Soviet water ministry, the American veto, the Chinese trawler fleet, the Irish tax code. Whoever is strongest at the time runs the play, and everybody else writes essays about whoever is running it this decade.

The adversary is inherited jurisdiction. A border nobody now alive drew, carrying no evidence and no argument, deciding whose lungs get counted and whose fall outside the frame.

States are the largest instance, not the whole class. A ministry, a central bank, a standards body, a peacekeeping command, an expert body, a company with an arbitration clause. Anything that puts its own decisions beyond evidence, challenge and correction runs the same play at a smaller radius. The Covenant rejects unaccountable coercive power wherever it sits, and that includes every body it creates itself. Me included. I keep promulgation and a funding trust that cannot be made opaque, and nothing else: never nominate, screen, shortlist or contact a candidate, never sit on any body, selection authority, secretariat, audit or challenge panel in it, ever.

You could stop here and ask for a court with compulsory jurisdiction instead. That experiment has been run. Trail Smelter is what it looks like when it works, and it worked exactly once, because Washington and Ottawa both consented to that one case, and consent is precisely what has not been given since. Every forum inside the state system draws its jurisdiction from the parties who stand to lose in it. That is what the veto is, and it is why the rule from 1941 has sat there for eighty-five years with nobody to enforce it.

Standing the defendant grants is not standing. So the claim has to go.

The Covenant does not reform your country and it does not federate it. It abolishes it. At ratification every claim your state makes to rule ground, people, money or force is void, and nothing anywhere in the text can ever restore one (§12.1).

II. What changes

If power can reach you, your rights reach it.

The thing being proposed is small enough to state. One Constitutional Court that any person, group or governing body can file in directly, deciding inside 180 days. Seats filled by drawing lots among everyone who clears a published competence threshold, never by ranking them and never by appointment. An Inspectorate that audits every use of force and answers to nobody it audits. Two sources of money, a transaction levy and a commons stewardship fee, and no third. Under all of it, three principles that no procedure in the document can amend: human dignity, planetary stewardship, and epistemic humility with non-restoration. Those three are Rule Zero.

Here is the same list from Part I with the machinery attached.

Berlin. The title only had to be good against the others in the room. A commission drawn by lot publishes the criteria for a boundary, then publishes each segment of that boundary with the evidence that put it where it is, and any community of 10,000 within 50 kilometres of a segment can challenge that segment during the review period. A community's dignity, rights, opportunity and access do not depend on the resources inside its administrative boundaries, which takes the prize out of where the line goes (Foundational Commitment 11).

Leopold. His title could not be questioned and his army answered only to him. Absolute property title is void at ratification, and so is every armed formation outside the Covenant: you enrol as a person, not a unit, and commanding one that has not disarmed makes you ineligible. The rubber quota was a number a government acted on. Every number a government acts on now carries a Metric Passport, which is a published statement of what the number measures, and a Disconfirmation Record, which is the observation that would prove it wrong, filed before the number governs anything. No metric makes a hand legal to take (§4.7, §4.7(a)).

Enclosure. What the commoners needed was a way past that parliament, not a vote in it. Any person, group or governing body files straight to the Court, bypassing every other grievance channel (§10.2.1).

Trail Smelter. There is a number to call. It answers inside 180 days, inside 72 hours where the harm is imminent, and if the Court is what you are calling about the bench gets drawn somewhere else by lot (§10.2.1(b)).

The Aral towns. The dry shore is the party filing, and whoever took the river is the party answering. Sovereignty claims are void and no amendment, convention, emergency or continuity clause may restore one, so nobody escapes that forum by turning one sovereign into five again (§12.1).

The 293. A veto is a vote, and a vote needs a seat. No chamber here seats a state, so the fast lock is gone. The slow lock is sitting on a file until the clock runs out, and a body that misses its deadline loses the function to somebody else instead of switching it off, and may not keep its authority by having caused the delay (§12.7).

The warheads. Gone inside two years of ratification, verified base by base and stockpile by stockpile, with a register published every quarter naming whoever has not done it (§8.8.1, §8.8.2).

The pledges. You can still write your own pledge and still score it. What you cannot do is act on it before you have filed two things: the observation that would count against you, and how large a change reopens the target. The failing grade goes on the record before the score does (§4.7).

The tailings pond. The affected village and the company file in the same forum under the same deadline.

The 600 billion. Booking a profit somewhere else requires a somewhere else. The six places that take 55% of the shifted profit are inside the same jurisdiction as the places they take it from.

The trawlers. Somebody has to pay for the boat that stops the trawler, and it was never going to be the five states whose fleet works that water. The Inspectorate draws a floor share of the budget and cannot be appointed, removed or defunded by the bodies it audits (§8.5.1).

None of that is aimed at a people. You have no enemy on the other side of that border. Nobody does. The line has never run between peoples. It runs between the people holding the levers in Part I and everyone underneath them. They are a rounding error of the living, and they need us pointed at each other. That is all that keeps it standing.

III. What is answered

“One government is one point of failure. Take it once and you own everyone, with nowhere left to run.”

The strongest one, and the reason the architecture looks the way it does.

Exit is what people believe checks states now. That belief is a story told by whoever can afford the ticket. For every harm in Part I the exit check had already failed before anyone thought to rely on it. You cannot exit the atmosphere, the ocean or the carbon.

So the check has to be internal, and it has to survive the capture.

Start with how capture is actually executed. Not by storming the chamber. By waiting. No vacancy, term expiry, missed deadline, failed draw, exhausted pool or network outage interrupts a function the Covenant assigns (§12.7). A deadline ends discretion or moves the function to somebody else. Inaction certifies nothing in either direction. A body whose delay caused the transfer may not extend its term or keep its authority by it. Sitting on your hands is the cheapest coup available under every constitution ever written. Here it buys nothing.

Where the ordinary decider is captured, conflicted or missing, a conflict-free substitute bench is drawn by lot (§10.2.1), and every clause that grants power is written with that route underneath it. Hold the body and you still do not hold the function.

The rest is floor and ceiling. Rule Zero cannot be amended by anything (§11.1). The rights floor is non-derogable, cannot be traded for continuity, cannot be metricized away, cannot be suspended by an emergency, and §10.3(b) names the acts no emergency authorizes at all. The Inspectorate cannot be appointed, removed or defunded by the bodies it audits (§8.5.1). The whole administration runs on a transaction levy of not more than 0.01% and a commons stewardship fee, with no third source permitted (§9.6.1). One euro in every ten thousand moved, rising to three only while an independently certified funding shortfall runs, and falling back the moment the certification lapses (§9.6.5).

Standing force is capped at 0.05% of global population (§8.1(a)). About 27 million people are under arms worldwide today, so the cap is a cut of roughly six to one, and what survives it is still twice the largest standing army now in the field. Both of those are true and I would rather be the one who says the second.

Set that beside a permanent seat with a veto and no cap on anything at all.

“Nobody will ever ratify this. You need the same consent the World Federalists need, and you have not got it either.”

I need less of it than they do, and the difference is most of the design.

Their assembly has to be seated by consensus or a strong majority of the international community. One gate, five hands on it, and the five have to vote to constrain themselves.

Ratification here runs on published conditions certified one at a time, and nobody’s consent is one of the conditions. A state that refuses does not stop it. The founding schedule carries on in the territories that cooperate, refusing does not put a territory outside the Covenant’s reach, and the delay costs the claim to planetary reach nothing (Foundational Commitment 4). Provisional administration runs to the third anniversary and not one day past it (§11.4(2.3)).

That does not disarm anybody by itself, and I am not going to pretend otherwise. Item 5 of Part V is a deadline with a verification regime under it, not a spell. Nine states hold warheads and not one of them will give them up because a document says so. What the design takes away is the veto over the founding. You can build the thing that outlasts the refusal, in the open, on a published schedule, and let the refusal be the visible act it is.

“Competence-selected government is a caste. You are building rule by the credentialed and calling it physics.”

Competence is a threshold, not a ranking. Assessors publish the broadest threshold that identifies people who can perform the function. Qualification against it is binary. No assessor may rank the qualified. The seat is then filled by lot from everyone who cleared it.

The assessors are not a standing body either. They are drawn by lot from independently audited professional pools, they rotate out, and they may not rank anyone who clears the bar. Push the caste objection up a level and it has to find a permanent seat somewhere. There isn’t one.

Equal worth and unequal fitness are sequential steps, and that order is what stops the second one hardening into a caste. No person may sit on the Expert Body, the Court, the Reserve or the Epistemic Council if a kinship relation sat on that same body within the preceding 15 years (§12.5(a)). Terms in those bodies are single and non-renewable. Every number the government acts on carries its Metric Passport and its Disconfirmation Record, both filed before the number governs anything, and a metric that meets its own disconfirming observation is suspended (§4.7(b), (b.1)). No metric may legalize a rights violation or substitute measured performance for observed reality (§4.7(a)).

“One government means one culture, and the small ones go first.”

The nation-state is the machine that did that. Conscription, one curriculum, one census category, one official language. That is how plural populations were milled into monolingual citizens, and states did it in the name of the nation.

The Covenant supersedes states and sovereignty claims. It does not supersede peoples, faiths, families, legal traditions or ways of life. Article VI gives autonomy a charter process, a council and binding arbitration. A community’s dignity, rights, opportunity and access never depend on the resources found inside its administrative boundaries.

That last clause is aimed at Leopold. A boundary with a resource inside it and a population that does not count is the oldest machine in Part I. It is the pairing being removed.

“Every constitution reads well before it meets people. Yours gets captured like the rest.”

Probably.

I am not claiming incorruptibility. That target is childish and anybody selling it is lying to you. The design target is that capture stays recoverable and correction stays unblockable. No captor gets to switch a governed function off, run out a clock, refuse to convene, or make the fallback wait on a signature.

Epistemic humility is one of the three principles nobody can ever amend, and it obliges every governing system here to carry its own routes for amendment, review and dissolution. The exit for the thing itself is written into the part that cannot be edited.

IV. What this is not

Not a parliament bolted onto the UN. The World Federalist Movement has worked at this since 1947, and the parliamentary assembly campaign has 300 organisations, 1,800 parliamentarians and 150 countries behind it. Serious people, decades of it, and the proposal still needs Washington, Moscow, Beijing, London and Paris to volunteer for the constraint. They will not. No argument makes them.

Federation takes sovereignty as its input and returns a veto. The 293 are not a fault in the Council. They are the Council. There is no chamber in the Covenant where states sit.

Not the network state. Srinivasan reads Part I correctly and inverts the answer: start online, federate the enclaves, let exit be sovereignty. Exit is a check available to whoever can buy a second passport, and the atmosphere takes no applications. A cloud polity that leaves the aquifer, the fishery and the warhead behind has solved nothing. It has sold seats near the door to people already standing next to it. Seasteads and charter cities are the same bet with worse logistics.

Not Ostrom’s polycentric commons. She was right about the lobster fishery and the irrigation district, and her design principles hold wherever the appropriators can watch each other. On climate she argued for action at many scales at once instead of waiting on a global agreement.

Action at many scales is not a schedule you can run against a carbon budget, and no polycentric unit ever built can compel a state holding 5,000 warheads to do anything. Monitoring is not enforcement.

Not emergency ecology. Planetary stewardship is unamendable here and so is the rights floor, and neither outranks the other. No projection, no threshold breach, no model output licenses a camp. No score, formula, model, dashboard or audit may legalize a rights violation. Degrowth is welcome to argue its numbers under §4.7 like every other number.

Not another declaration. In 1941 Trail Smelter named an operator, set a regime and sent a bill, and Canada paid it. That is what a rule with machinery does. The principle the same ruling announced got no operator and no deadline, and in eighty-five years nobody anywhere has been made to obey it. Every protection here names an operator, a deadline, and a successor for when the operator fails.

V. What follows

1. Ratify against published conditions, certified one at a time by a panel drawn by lot, no member of which comes from a provisional founding body, and no body certifying its own act.
2. At ratification, void: sovereignty claims, inherited borders asserted as jurisdiction, every non-Covenant armed formation, every monetary authority outside recorded Expert Body authority, private and fractional-reserve money creation, inherited office, absolute property title, every parallel pre-Covenant legality.
3. Run the founding period on a published day schedule and end it at the third anniversary. Provisional bodies vacate. Anyone still sitting is removed physically (§11.4(2.3)).
4. Fill permanent seats by binary threshold then lot, administered by a secretariat with no power to screen, rank, deselect, choose an outcome or rerun a valid draw.
5. Disarm inside two years of ratification, verified base by base and stockpile by stockpile, non-compliance register published quarterly. All 12,187 of them.
6. Put the currency on measured human and planetary welfare, and the budget on two sources and nothing else.
7. Keep the author out. The Founder retains two powers, promulgation and funding through an irrevocably transparent trust, and I name them because they are the two a reader should be suspicious of. Everything else is barred: never nominate, screen, shortlist or contact a candidate, never serve on any Covenant body, selection authority, secretariat, audit or challenge panel. Ever.

Berlin worked because everyone with standing was in the room and everyone affected was outside it. That is still the arrangement, in the Council, in the arbitration tribunal, on the water the trawlers work. Everything in the Covenant is one move against it: put the affected inside, and give the room an operator, a deadline, and a successor for when the operator fails.

Every lock, threshold, dual key and conflict bar in the text marks a place where I could not find a mechanism that makes defection lose on its own, and had to compel the outcome by force instead. They map what is still unsolved. I left the map in the document.

You have standing here, and I have gaps. **The mechanism I could not find**, if you have it.

Where the numbers come from

Covenant claims.

Claim	Clause
Rule Zero's three unamendable principles	§11.1
The twelve inviolable rights and their non-derogable core	§10.1
Acts no emergency authorizes	§10.3(b)
Substitute bench	§10.2.1
180 days and 72 hours	§10.2.1(b)
No institutional kill switch, and no benefit from caused delay	§12.7(a), (a.1)
The void-at-ratification and non-restoration list	§12.1
ICPI independence and funding floor	§8.5.1
Force cap	§8.1(a)
The two revenue sources, and the certified-shortfall supplement	§9.6.1, §9.6.5

Claim	Clause
Metric Passport and Disconfirmation Record	§4.7(b), (b.1)
No metric legalizes a rights violation	§4.7(a)
15-year kinship bar	§12.5(a)
Physical enforcement of the compulsory reset	§11.4(2.3)
Disarmament inside 2 years, and the quarterly register	§8.8.1, §8.8.2
Founder limitation	§11.4(1)
Cultural autonomy	Article VI
Resources inside the boundary	Foundational Commitment 11
Ratification against obstruction, partial activation, and the undiminished planetary claim	Foundational Commitment 4
Lot-drawn rotating assessors, and the binary threshold	§2.2

External figures.

Figure	Source
Berlin Conference, the effective-occupation standard in the General Act, and the historiography holding that the conference set rules rather than partitioned the continent	General Act of the Berlin Conference 1885
Global military personnel under arms, about 27 million: active duty plus active paramilitary, reservists excluded, last measured 2020	World Bank, armed forces personnel, compiled from IISS Military Balance
Largest standing army now in the field, China at 2 million active after a cut of 300,000	China's National Defense in the New Era, State Council Information Office, 2019
Leopold II, the Congo basin as private property, the Force Publique, the contested 1.2 to 10 million range, Belgian annexation in 1908	Bulletin officiel de l'État indépendant du Congo, Casement Report 1904, Bourne 1903, Roes 2010
Enclosure	UK Parliament, Inclosure Acts 1604-1914
Trail Smelter arbitration 1938-41	Reports of International Arbitral Awards, vol. III
Aral Sea	NASA Earth Observatory, USGS EROS
293 vetoes, and the per-state breakdown	UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library, veto list
12,187 warheads, and the 86% concentration	SIPRI Yearbook 2026
57.7 GtCO ₂ e, 2.3% growth, 2.3-2.5C, 60 parties, US exit at 0.1C	UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2025
ISDS payouts above \$113bn, and the 2019 Pakistan award	UNCTAD Investment Dispute Settlement Navigator
Profit shifting, the six havens, EU losses	Tørsløv, Wier and Zucman
Distant-water fleet shares, and West African losses	US Congressional Research Service R48215, Doumbouya et al. 2017
World Federalist Movement, and the parliamentary assembly campaign	WFM-IGP, CUNPA
Network state	Srinivasan
Polycentric climate governance	Ostrom, 2009

Derived figures (the Congo basin at seventy-six times Belgium's area, seven tonnes of CO₂e per person, one soldier per two thousand people, one and three euro per ten thousand transacted, under 6% of people holding 86% of warheads) are arithmetic on the figures above, not separate claims. Sources report land in acres and square miles and money in US dollars; areas are converted to metric here, currency figures are left in the currency they were reported in. Where a number is contested I have given the range and used the low end. Ask and I will pull the exact clause or the exact page rather than paraphrase it.