



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

**CONSCIOUSNESS AND CLIMATE CHANGE:
EMPOWERING PEOPLE FOR A WORLD IN TRANSITION**

Statement for the
COP 23 – Twenty-third Session of the Conference of the Parties
United Nations Climate Change Conference
6-17 November 2017, Bonn, Germany

How, as a matter of urgency, do we empower people at all levels of society to respond positively and whole-heartedly to climate change?

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University is an NGO with consultative status with the United Nations. We believe that spiritual awareness - the recognition and awareness of our innate spiritual values - has a unique role to play in enabling people to find and develop the inner strength that is needed for this time of transition. Spirituality can do what information or legislation alone cannot do: shift consciousness, build confidence and nurture co-operation.

Real, lasting change of any kind starts with the individual - with a change of awareness. It is through seeing ourselves and our relationship with the Earth from a broader, higher perspective that we can find the inner strength to make the attitude and lifestyle changes that nature is now demanding of us - as individuals, businesses and governments.

Consciousness: Our inner climate affects the outer climate

The crises the world is facing - political, social, financial, personal and environmental - are all symptoms of a crisis of human, spiritual values. If we are unable to live by our values, our self respect and self-trust is lost, and with that go our peace of mind, happiness and good relations with others. To fill an ever-increasing emptiness human beings today try and satisfy themselves through consuming and acquiring more and more - leading to competition, greed, dishonesty and violence. We create divisions, barriers and prejudices, in order to safeguard what we believe is or should be 'ours'. In doing this, we suppress our humanity - our natural instinct to connect, empathise and share with others.

Spiritual awareness means, essentially, to understand the self as a spiritual being, independent of our nationality, belief or status, each one with their own dignity and worth. This understanding brings us back to a deep feeling of brotherhood and belonging, a genuine caring for the common good. It is this that will enable us to change not reluctantly or by force but out of self-respect and love. It is this

that will give us the confidence and strength to think and act in accordance with what we believe to be true and valuable.

If, as we believe, the state of today's world is a consequence of the individual and collective consciousness of human beings, then the solution to our current situation also lies there.

Our awareness defines our attitude. Our attitude colours our vision. Our vision dictates our actions. Our actions create our world.

Everything starts with our awareness - our state of consciousness.

Confidence: We feel good and create trust, as we align with our conscience and values

Many people today do not want to know about the need for change, let alone act upon it. They are struggling to keep going as it is. They do not feel strong enough to take the risks involved in adapting to climate change and other global challenges. Others know what they need to do but lack the confidence and willpower to change their habits and face the uncertainties that come with innovation. Politicians and government officials are no less challenged. They continue, in the face of criticism and coercion, to do their best to secure agreements that are acceptable - and achievable - at the negotiating table as well as at home. But is this enough? How can they do more in their position? What is needed is a different way of engaging with each other at all levels. This will happen when we address the underlying consciousness behind our attitudes, decisions and actions. The quality of the conversations will then improve - and the agenda for positive, co-ordinated action amongst all stakeholders can start to accelerate.

Examples of hope and inspiration are popping up in small, committed communities, cities, sectors and partnerships, especially amongst young people, faith communities, indigenous communities and women. What unites and empowers these people is their shared values and the desire to care for others and the Earth. Developing an 'eco-friendly' lifestyle is not a matter of duty or fashion but a bold, ethical honouring of something we hold to be good and true and precious - 'deep sustainability' in practice. As these groups, partnerships and individuals develop confidence and demonstrate the real, human benefits of behavioural change, they become examples to inspire and encourage others. It has always been a minority of passionate and committed individuals who have brought about the great changes in human history.

Co-operation: Recognising that there is no 'them', only 'us'

As we as individuals develop inner power, our power to co-operate with others also increases. At COP22 in Marrakech there were strong calls for more local engagement. Independent of the high level conferences and negotiations, civil society needs to work together across nations, generations, boundaries, faiths (and no faiths), organisations and personal interests. Encouraging initiatives can already be seen around the world - the transition movement, increased community ownership, co-operatives, for example. We are learning to work together in a way that values the relationship as well

as the task or transaction, to put energy into sustaining partnerships and friendships as a vital aspect of bringing about true, lasting co-operation.

In the same way, in looking at the possibilities for each country, the Nationally Determined Contributions also need to take into consideration the world as a whole. Natural law tells us that all life is sacred - all life has equal worth. We are all connected and all in some way responsible for each other's wellbeing, as well as our own. Earth is the home of all of us - all living beings - not just some. Whatever our current circumstances, no one can say, 'I'm OK, it's their problem - let them deal with it'. When we deny people of other nations - or future generations - the right to water, food, shelter or their own culture, we are denying them a basic human right - but we are also denying our own humanity.

Brahma Kumaris' contribution to empowering people for transition

As a spiritual organisation, our main focus is to help develop and nurture the spiritual capacity of individuals of all ethnicities, faiths, cultures and ages in over 100 countries. We seek to enable people to experience greater well-being and self respect through a shift in consciousness from purely physical to spiritual - so that they are better able tap into their own inner resources of innate values and strengths.

One particular aspect of our work is to bring the underlying spiritual nature of the environmental crisis to the awareness of governments, civil society and those within our own organisation. In doing so, we aim to bring greater clarity in decisions for the common good and an understanding of how to empower people to adapt and flourish in response to climate change through a deeper awareness of their core values and inner strengths. The *Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative* is based on five simple principles:

- **Simplicity:** Are there ways I can simplify my lifestyle to reduce my carbon footprint?
- **Compassion:** Can I choose to buy compassionately, according to my conscience?
- **Economy:** Can I use and re-use what I have economically?
- **Lifelong Learning:** Can I open my mind to keep learning - for a lifetime?
- **Generosity:** Am I able to share generously what I have received?

In addition to collaborating with others through dialogue, partnerships, UN and other conferences and local initiatives, we are also actively involved in research and development of renewable energies.

Solar Energy Innovation

Brahma Kumaris has been one of the key developers and promoters of renewable energies in India since the mid 90's, working closely with our sister organisation, the World Renewal Spiritual Trust (WRST), a registered charity. In 2011 WRST was recognised as a 'Scientific and Industrial Research Organization' by the Ministry of Science and Technology. An 'Awareness & Training Centre' was set up by Brahma Kumaris and WRST in 2014, with financial support from the UN's Development

Program (UNDP), Global Environment Facility and the Indian Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE). Brahma Kumaris & WRST developed and installed six large concentrating solar systems, which generate steam for cooking and various process applications. In addition, they have set up and operate around 350 photovoltaic battery systems all over India, with a total peak capacity of more than 1.4 MW.

In April 2017 **India One**, a 1 MW solar thermal power plant situated near the Brahma Kumaris Spiritual Headquarters in Abu Road, Rajasthan, India, was launched. Using 770 newly developed 60m² parabolic dishes with an innovative thermal storage for continuous operation, the plant generates enough heat and power for a campus of 25,000 people.

Implemented by WRST, the project received partial funding from the MNRE and the German Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) through the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ).

We can all contribute, we can all change

How do we want to be in 20 years? A desert with no living creatures? Or a prosperous, engaged, unified network of nations and communities? If the latter, what do we need to do in order to get there? What will our homes, our work, our diet be like? Climate change is requiring all of us to change, not just some. The behavioural change needed is a challenge but it will bring with it huge benefits to us as individuals and to humanity as a whole, if we can learn to live together with self-respect, respect for others and respect for our home, the Earth.

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU), with its spiritual headquarters in Mt. Abu, India, comprises a worldwide network of centers in 110 countries and is an international non-governmental organization of the United Nations accredited with General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC);

Associate Status with the Department of Public Information (DPI);

Consultative Status with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF);

Observer Status to the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Observer Organization to UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC);

Flagship Member of Education for Rural People (ERP), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

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