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Statement submitted by Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Pause for Peace: a strategy to elevate our thinking to bring the future we want

As a global community we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). We will also have reached a five-year milestone towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To this end, 2020 is a pivotal year that offers an opportunity to acknowledge our many successes, as well as a time to reflect on our next steps.

In this statement, we will be exploring ways of moving forward to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls everywhere. In doing so, it is crucial for us to elevate our thinking and develop practices to sustain a higher state of consciousness. This will help us refine our strategies, established in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which is necessary so that we can create and implement solutions to answer the global call for a significant leap forward.

Advancements since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

There have been improvements in several areas of women's social conditions such as: access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education; inclusion in new careers that were mostly pursued by men; rights to get time for breastfeeding; maternity leave; and access to credit and entrepreneurship. Maternal mortality has been reduced, and in several countries, women have access to information and methods of contraception, which has reduced the number of children per woman.

In terms of political participation, there is an increase in inclusion of women. Rwanda is a prime example, where 61.3 per cent of the seats in the lower house are occupied by women. As we note the improvements, we do see the need to keep the momentum, as there is still a need for further increases.

There is growing evidence that women's leadership in political and decision-making processes improves these systems. Women generally demonstrate political leadership by working independently of their political affiliation in parliamentary groups, defending issues related to gender equality, a stand against gender violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, human well-being, and holistic responses to climate change and electoral reforms, even in the most reluctant political environments.

The global climate since 1995

Some of our significant challenges since 1995 include climate change and its impact on local communities, the rise in terrorism, mass migration due to war, and increasing fascism in government, all of which has had a direct impact on the safety and well-being of women. Women and children are the most vulnerable and bear the brunt of the consequences of these unstable conditions. It places a greater need to stay focused on women empowerment, gender equality, and the need for safety for women.

The world has changed since 1995, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution with its challenges has also offered significant opportunities. Social media has helped mobilize support globally and put pressure for immediate action and change. Significant examples include: #metoo, which demonstrated the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace; #heforshe, which is an invitation for people of all genders to stand in solidarity with women to

create a bold, visible, and united force for gender equality; #100women, which highlighted women's stories that were overlooked by national mainstream media; and #Uyinenene, which put pressure on the South African President to put into place more stringent laws for the protection of women. These campaigns, which started locally, took a global discourse, because they addressed issues that affect women in all regions. We now have the ability to offer a collective voice for cross-cutting issues that were previously undermined and silenced, and are witnessing the power of women's leadership from the grassroots up.

The need to elevate our thinking

The transition from where we are and where we need to be cannot be incremental, but needs to be exponential to meet growing needs. How can we tap into our combined wisdom in a way that helps us find the answers to the global call for a significant leap forward? How can we move from strategy to policy to implementation more efficiently, so that we bring relief and hope to the most vulnerable communities? If we are to find new answers, then there is a need to change our level of thinking.

Unless we raise our consciousness and elevate our thinking to hold a more holistic perception, we end up seeking solutions that are shadowed by past experiences.

Tapping into our innate self

There is a power naturally residing within each of us that is at the core of our being – a spiritual and creative energy. When we tap into that energy, we are able to access clarity of mind, which helps us navigate through the chaos of negative emotion and see pathways for sustainable solutions. Often, negative emotions are acquired responses, stemming from fear, anger, insecurities, greed, increasing dependency on materialism, and shame or guilt, which distort our vision.

When faced with difficult situations of patriarchy, violence, or abusive power it requires a particular strength to face these situations with dignity without compromising ourselves. That strength does not mean suppressing one's emotions, but rather caring for the inner self and allowing space for our full potential to be expressed.

It is all too easy to resort to righteous indignation of anger. However, anger is reactive and not real power. Using anger limits the perception we hold, and although it outwardly appears to make inroads to change, it always evokes defensive behavior and therefore cannot lead to sustainable change. When we cultivate the ability to tap into our innate power, we can replace anger with peace, which is an energy of strength. Peace is an innate power that builds resilience, tenacity, and clarity of thought.

There are times when in order to elevate our thinking we need to draw from a higher source. We have all had moments in our lives when we were moved to draw inspiration or power from a source outside of ourselves that gave us the needed courage and support. This higher source is a benevolent pure energy that is accessible to all. Tapping into this higher source changes our state of mind, so that it diminishes the fears and boundaries of difference and we are able to tap into a greater wisdom. This will give birth to strategies where it will bring forth fresh, dynamic, and progressive approaches.

How do we access that innate power?

Elevating our thinking requires personal practices of solitude and deeper reflection on spiritual truths. It begins when we recognize that beneath the layer of gender lies our deeper identity as soul or consciousness. The essence of soul is pure stillness, peace, and love. When we bring our awareness to that inner identity, it cleanses the mind from the noise of emotion and brings us to think from a peaceful and elevated state of mind. To do this, we have to integrate within the course of our actions the practice of taking a moment to pause for peace. As we turn within, we tap into the experience of a purer state of consciousness. When we pause, it reminds us to access a deeper truth in that moment. When we pause, it gives us an opportunity to connect with the source so that our thinking can be influenced by a greater wisdom and love. When we pause, our thinking is freed from the conditioning we acquired as a response to pain, anger, and fear.

When we come from this higher state of being, it broadens our perspective and allows our innate wisdom to surface creatively. In this state of inner peace, calm, and strength, we see more possibilities and ways to move forward. Secondly, when we pause for peace, we become more present to each other. This means we are able to truly hear each other and so it naturally brings us back to the unity of a higher purpose. The barrier of separation dissolves, and this activates our ability to be more compassionate.

As we take that leap forward, our strategies and solutions must embody an attitude of benevolence. Sustainable solutions cannot be found by focusing on empowerment of women separately. Both men's and women's deepest values must be drawn from to find a lasting way forward. As women, we are nurturers and have often played the significant role of inspiring transformational change in men as daughters, sisters, wives, mothers and grandmothers. We need to deeply trust this Shakti, a Hindi term for our dynamic feminine power, to more effectively become the change agents for the world we want to live in.

In the last five years, emerging young leaders who have had considerable influence are those who remained steadfast for a cause. Two examples of such leadership is Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg, both young women who speak their truth with a purity of intent that is rooted in inner conviction. Their call is a call to the conscience of leaders with positional power, and has touched a value-based cord across the globe.

Pause for peace

Based on the Brahma Kumaris experience of the practice of pausing for peace in the course of our activities, the Brahma Kumaris World Spirituality University's delegation at the sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women will be submitting a parallel event experimenting with this as a tool. It offers a simple practice of pausing the noise in the mind and taking a few moments to turn inward and reconnect with that state of inner peace. This is a practice that can easily be integrated into everyday living. Its simplicity reflects the accessibility we all have to a higher power within ourselves.

Pause for peace outlines a trajectory of change; when we pause mentally, our feelings change internally, which influences our attitude and perceptions. Pausing for peace puts us at the confluence of the past and future to consider the quality of our actions. We see and know the past; however, we choose to be present in the moment. This allows us to access our higher state of consciousness, which then imbues our attitudes with the qualities of peace, compassion, and courage, resulting in a change in our vision that lights the way forward for our future – the future we want.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that using the strength of peace to elevate our thinking enhances our capacity to be more insightful and to respond innovatively, courageously, and compassionately. In this way, we bring forth the strength of our unified authentic voice and conviction to propel us towards making the necessary leap into the coming era. The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, drafted all those years ago, and the present 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can come together as a living flourishing and tangible reality.
