

Living in Harmony

Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative



UN Biodiversity Conference COP14 in Sharm-El-Sheik, Egypt

From 17th - 29th November, the 14th Biodiversity UN Conference COP14 is taking place in Sharm-El- Sheik, Egypt.

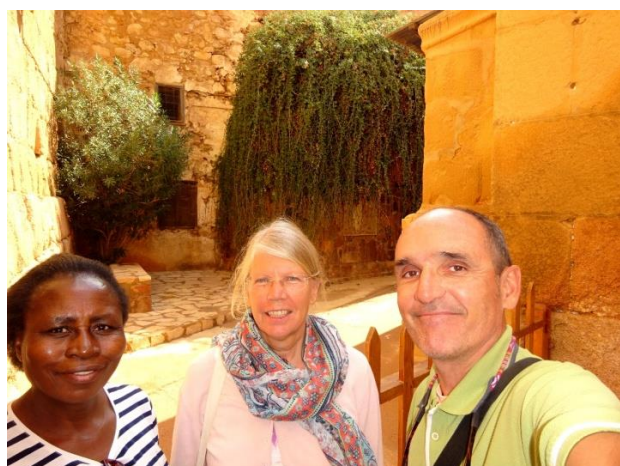
Governments, organizations and civil society meet under the theme of "Investing in Biodiversity for People and Planet". The small coastal city Sharm-El-Sheik at the tip of Sinai desert is fully decorated with road banners announcing the conference.



Sharm el Sheik is located between the Sinai desert and the Red Sea. Just 180km away is the Mount Sinai where Moses received the 10 commandments and the famous St. Catherine Monastery with the even more famous "Burning Bush". Golo, Sonja and Dorcas took the chance and drove through the desert to visit this ancient place. The drive was an experience by itself through the ragged mountains and sand dunes.



The St Catherine monastery, founded in the 5th century, is one of the oldest in Christianity and apparently received protection directly from the prophet Mohammed. There is even an original declaration to this effect. Inside the monastery one can see the "Original burning Bush". The whole place left a deep impression upon us.



His Excellency, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, President of Egypt opened the conference which is being attended by about 3000 delegates. The organizer, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Governments of Egypt and China, have launched "The Sharm-El-Sheikh to Beijing Action Agenda for Nature and People".



Brahma Kumaris (BK) has been accredited to the Convention on Biological Diversity since 2012 and actively participated in the biannual Conference since then. The delegation to COP14 consist of:

- Dorcas Alusala, a graduated biologist from Nairobi, Kenya,
- Chen from China, active in bio-diversity and environmental issues
- Golo from Germany/India, advisor to BK on renewable energy
- James Mair, Professor Emeritus, Centre for Marine Biodiversity and Biotechnology, Edinburgh, Scotland and
- Sonja from Denmark, Co-Ordinator for BK initiatives in environment and biodiversity.



Sonja, Chen, Dorcas, James, Golo

Juan Milling from Canada will join in a few days.



We have been preparing for this conference for the last 2 years. On the opening day, 17th November, we happily launched our new leaflet and exhibition "Care and Compassion for Planet Earth".



The BK team participated at a side event organized by WWF "Engaging Hearts and Minds – launch of the new Living Planet Report".

Towards the end of the event, WWF asked the audience to identify the key message to get politicians to make things move.

People are quite sad and shared their concern about the loss of our biosphere. Our relationship to nature has progressively deteriorated and we have to move it back into the center of global attention.

WWF has therefore started the "Why nature matters" campaign. We are the first generation to understand our role in the destruction of the natural habitat and the last one to be able to stop it. WWF summarized their aim as follows:

- To engage 1 billion people
- Make nature matter
- Inspire the world to act by 2020



The BK group met with Virginia and Cyril, our new partners from Wild Heritage. We are partnering with them for our official side events in the conference on 20 and 21st Nov.



Tuesday 20th Nov.

Meeting the Executive Secretary

Dorcas, Sonja and Golo met with John Scott, head of CDB department for Traditional Knowledge and discussed how the faith-based community can be more engaged in CBD's work.

Afterwards we met Christiana Palmer, the Executive Secretary of the Convention for Biodiversity. We described the activities of BK and engaged with her in a fruitful discussion upon the role for faith-based communities to safeguard nature. She appreciated the work of BK and told us that she often speaks herself on the relationship between our inner and outer world. Christiana would like to engage the faith-based community more under the umbrella of "Living in Harmony" for the next conference in Beijing 2020.

Then Sonja conducted a guided meditation, Christiana liked it a lot as the weeks of organizing the conference had been quite stressful. She proposed that BKs should come to CBD head office in Montreal and provide meditation for the staff.



Dorcas, Sonja, Executive Secretary Christiana Palmer, Golo

Side Event: From Awareness to Action – A new mindset for Biodiversity

Our official side event with the Convention attracted a full room with more than 50 people present. The main question put to the panel was: How to make biodiversity a priority for everyone? The panelists explored how a shift in awareness, values and lifestyle can create the needed momentum towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets ([link](#)).

Golo began his presentation by introducing the BK organization, their solar energy projects and environmental campaigns. BKs promote solar energy on a large scale. They are also actively engaged in tree plantation programs and yogic farming. 10 years ago, the Aichi biodiversity targets for the protection of the environment were put into place by this UN conference but the trends of all the evidence are still negative. The loss of crucial ecosystems is continuing. Therefore, Golo was calling for a new paradigm – to include our inner world and the state of our mind- into finding a fresh approach to change the trends. When we change on the inside, only then can we heal the planet.



Virginia Young, James, Golo, Sonja, Chen

Sonja Ohlsson spoke about the values and spiritual awareness needed to conserve biodiversity. One of the main values is co-operation so that we can jointly work together to reach our targets. She asked the audience: How can we measure better our progress in taking personal responsibility?

James presented aspects of the marine environment highlighting ocean acidification and marine plastic pollution. He described collaborative projects that prioritized actions, for example, conservation of biogenic reefs.



Virginia Young, Director Australian Rainforest Conservation Society shared the two major threats for life on earth: the biodiversity crisis and the climate crisis. She said biodiversity is the foundation of life on earth and that failure to protect biodiversity will make climate change worse.



Afterwards the audience asked many questions - how to scale up lifestyle changes and how we can engage better with big businesses and get them involved in conservation.

Wednesday 21st Nov.

Juan joined the team today and the BK Green team is now complete. We have been very busy at our exhibition stand, so his presence and help is appreciated.

We started the day meeting the Catholic Youth Network from Africa. We discussed how faith-based communities can strengthen their presence in the UN's Environment Program and began planning of a side event at the coming up General assembly of UNEP in March in Nairobi.



Our second **Side Event “Co-operation, Care and Compassion for Biodiversity”** took place at the CEPA fair – Communication, Education and Public Awareness department. The Side Event was moderated by Sonja and the panelists:

- Cyril Kormos , Director of World Heritage
- Dorcas
- Golo and
- James

shared their expertise on lifestyle change, Values Education and the importance of primary forest.

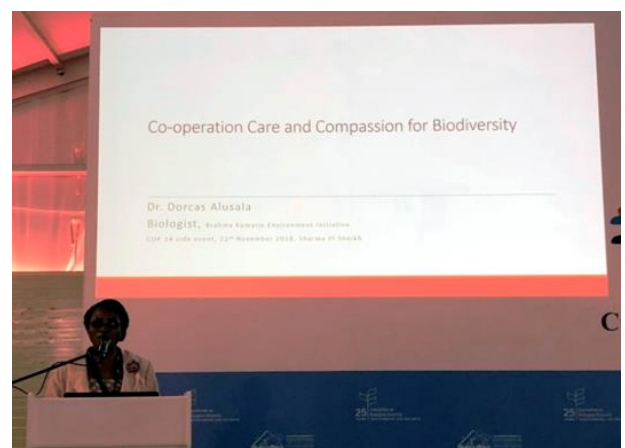


Golo opened the discussion by highlighting how the inner world is connected to the outer world. By having care and compassion for the self, we automatically develop care and compassion for nature and all forms of life.

James talked about citizens’ science; how to explain and engage people in biodiversity. He also integrates spiritual aspects in his courses.

Dorcas highlighted the important personal values connected to biodiversity. She stated that positive thoughts are a resource that we can draw upon. Dorcas also encouraged the faith-based community to engage more in the work for safe-guarding biodiversity.

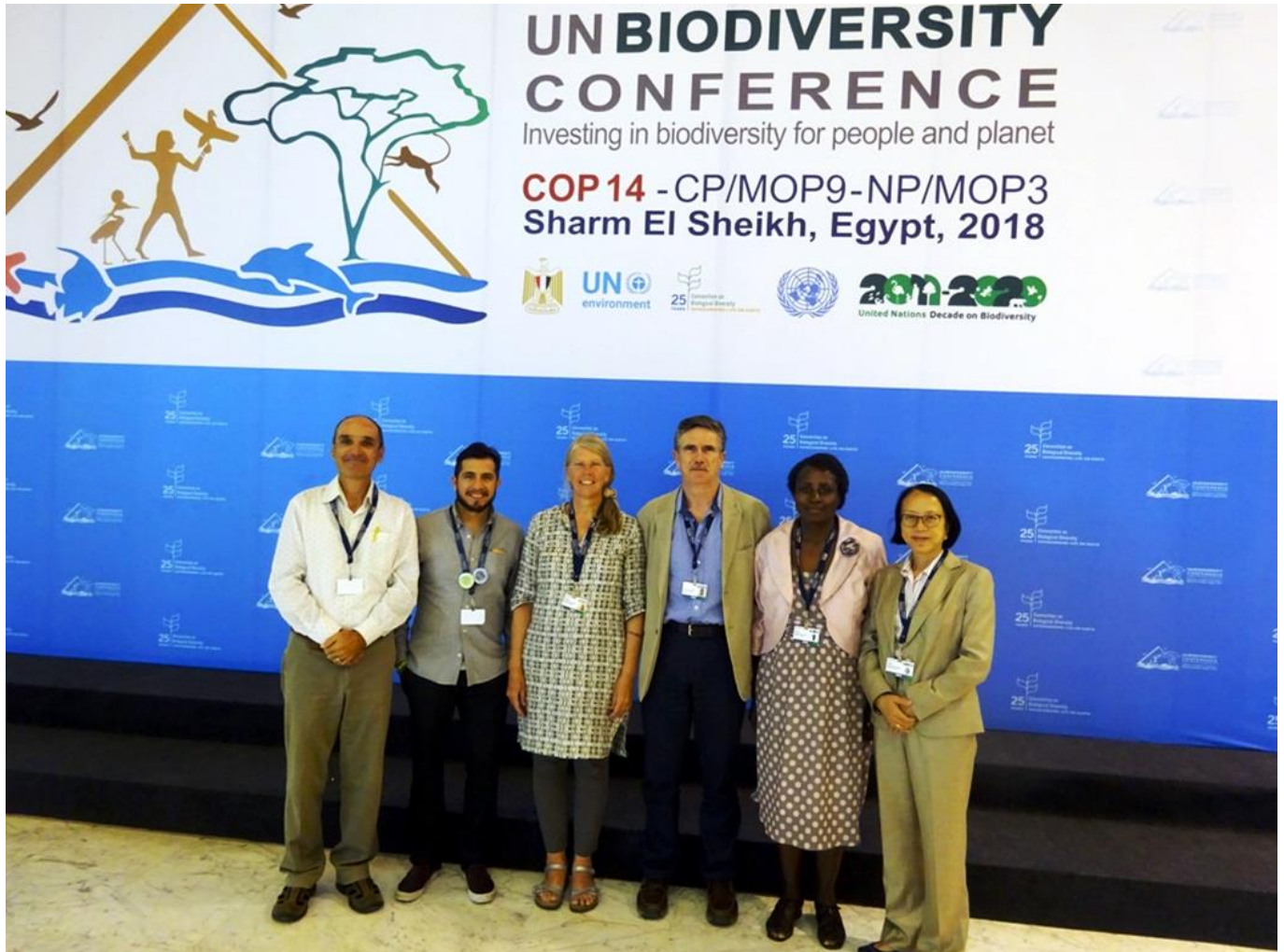
Finally, Cyril Kormos, presented the importance of primary forest. He talked about ancestor trees both having symbolic meaning in all religions, but also playing a crucial role in the forests.



Sonja moderated the Event and asked the panelists to share their practical examples of how a positive inner change has been beneficial for the eco system. Sonja ended the program with a guided meditation.

From the news: For those who are interested to read more background upon the UN Biodiversity conference, please follow this link for a very interesting article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/17/habitat-loss-biodiversity-wildlife-climate-change>.



The team *Golo, Juan, Sonja, James, Dorcas and Chen* say thanks to all readers for engaging with this topic and report. The second part of the conference starts tomorrow, Sonja and Golo are leaving on the 22nd November. As a farewell, the Green team went to the Lighthouse beach to enjoy the beautiful coral reef and scenery. The second report will come next week, including the Nature Summit that starts tomorrow.

www.eco.brahmakumaris.org

www.cop14-egypt.com

