



## **BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY**

### **Awakening Biodiversity Consciousness II**

Statement for the

### **COP 12 - Twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity**

6 - 17 October 2014, Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea

*“The arrogance of humanity is that somehow we imagine we can get by without biodiversity or that it is somehow peripheral: the truth is we need it more than ever...”* (Achim Steiner, United Nations Under Secretary General and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Program)

The first Strategic Goal of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) is to address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss. The Brahma Kumaris office at the United Nations has also long advocated that changing policy alone will not fix the human/ ecological imbalance in our world.

The Brahma Kumaris understanding of the world is that there are three core components to biodiversity, and they are interlaced: sentient beings, living forms, and non-living structures. These are interdependent and absolutely integrated elements of the whole. We know through the stories and archeology of our global history that in the past there was harmony between these three: Humanity once lived sustainably and happily, in a state of balance. However war, industrialization and technology have altered this balance, and we now live in a very different world. Although it is futile to demonize our recent past, it is helpful to understand how this change occurred if we are to understand how to facilitate change in the present.

#### **Importance of biodiversity**

Biodiversity considers all the organisms that interact with each other within a given sphere or environment. A vast number of organisms interact with each other and their environments in complex ways. Biodiversity keeps the planet habitable and ecosystems functional. Each form of life works together with the surrounding environment to help recycle waste, maintain the ecosystem, and provide services which others—including humans—use and benefit from.

In our own neighborhoods, we see that children who live in natural environments, who are exposed to natural bacteria, have more robust immune systems than those who live in more artificial urban environments. Not only is the threat to biodiversity causing global health problems, evidenced by the rise in immune based disorders, especially among the young, but it is directly undermining the work that the United Nations Major Groups has made towards realizing our MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). The signs are obvious and the science is compelling, that our actions, choices and behavior are continuing to result in a world that is environmentally strained and exhausted. Numerous biosystems, critical for our collective health and wellbeing are collapsing.

## **Human Environment Disconnect**

At the core of our global politics and economy is the attitude that we - human beings – sit at the very centre of existence, and all other things and beings are peripheral to us. We see nature as something ‘out there’ that we can dip into or out of, at our pleasure. We forget that we are also nature: bio-diverse, multi-complex organisms that absolutely rely on the diverse nature of our own bodies, and the biodiversity of the ecosystems we live amongst.

Just as nature is not ‘somewhere we go’, biodiversity is not in the world “out there”. It is an environment we inhabit. Whether we are in the city, country, urban spaces, high rises or the mountains, our human bodies are made up of the bio-diverse elements that give rise to what we call nature; earth, air, fire, water, carbon, oxygen, hydrogen.

We believe a lack of awareness of this truth is the imbalance that is putting biodiversity at risk. There is a serious disconnect between humanity and the environment. The root cause of this is a deep spiritual discontinuity between people and the natural world. One reason for this is because of where we live. For many of us residing in industrialized States, our lives are often devoid of spontaneous and daily contact with what we call ‘nature’: direct contact with the sun and earth, rivers and oceans, and the opportunity to witness the birth, growth, change and death of sentient and non-sentient forms.

Because of this, we often forget that we are interconnected with nature, and consider ourselves to be completely separate beings who can reason or buy our way out of the most serious of problems, because of the strength of our intelligence. Keeping that in mind, it is worth considering the nature that is sustaining us directly – one of our best examples – the human body.

## **The ecology of homeostasis**

In physiology, when the physical body is under threat, every part of the body compensates to maintain an inner equilibrium, called ‘homeostasis’. This means that, while bacteria may be dying and the system becoming more acidic due to a reduction in the body’s biodiversity, cell membranes adjust, and autonomic systems like breathing, digestion and heart rate adapt. Everything readjusts to keep the system appearing well, even though there are signs that the system is in a state of supreme delicacy and beginning to break down. Separate signs such as increasing heart-rate, sweating, increasing respiration, pallor, poor digestion – these all indicate the body is in a state of danger. These physical markers indicate urgency.

In the same way, there are clear markers of a loss of biodiversity that indicate we are in a global state of urgency; changes in bird migration, wild flowers and drastic species loss.

Both systems – the ecology of the body and the ecology of the habitat, start moving from complex to simple: bio-diverse, to bio-reductive. If there is no purposeful intervention then we begin to see further changes. Once the complex symbiotic balance of organs and systems within the entire organism cease to strengthen and support each other, the less critical system begins to break down.

In the human body, peripheral circulation, digestion and mental acuity reduce, in order to maintain the central functions of the heart, basic brain, and liver. In our ecology, smaller species of birds, frogs, bees and butterflies die or change indicating our global vulnerability.

If the underlying cause in either system – the physical body (metabolic acidosis) or the living earth (ecological acidosis) is not addressed as a matter of urgency, the vital functions will continue to cease and the entire body – or our natural world - will suffer.

So here we are: at the critical point in our world. The grace, power, complexity and richness of our earth and the people within it, are being reduced and simplified. The beauty is dying. And we can fix it.

### **Biodiversity and the Living Being**

Each of us is a living consciousness housed within the remarkable physical environment of the body. Sentiency is obvious with many species as we witness birds, fish and mammals wake up in the morning, bathe, groom, nest and feed their young. We understand the intricacy of their social worlds as we watch them gather in species appropriate formation – schools of fish, swarms of birds, herds of cattle.

What makes us “living” is that we, and other life forms are sentient, conscious, and aware. Each of us is a point of living light energy. At the foundation of all bio-diverse systems, is the conscious energy that nourishes those systems. Physically, everything and everyone is, made of the same stuff: carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen and oxygen, that combine to form earth, air, and water. However, whether we name it light, spirit, soul, consciousness or intention, it is this point of living energy that gives life to the systems that we live in. It is what gives light and purpose to our own bio-diverse living system – the human body. It is this that we call ‘life’.

Harnessing the inherent qualities within this living light energy can help facilitate change. Fortunately humans are behaviorally, highly modifiable organisms, and capable of deep transformation. In fact, humans modify their behavior constantly. If we change our reference points for discussion on biodiversity to kindness, equanimity, happiness, fearlessness and generosity, rather than economic growth, financial growth and sustaining artificial lifestyles, people and governments will easily find their way through to a solution. Both the problem and the solution sit together - with us. To address the problems of biodiversity, we need to focus more on achieving behavioral change through deepening our awareness and reconnecting with the natural world around us.

### **Resistance to change**

Each of us is governed by our own idea of ‘normal’, one that is justified and supported by our beliefs, values, traditions, institutional arrangements and power relationships. It is the foundation of these that guides our decisions and actions, enabling us to justify them. The Brahma Kumaris believe we must collectively bring universal values into mainstream discussions on behavioral change. Rather than values being a passive approach, the decisive inculcation of universal values is one of the best ways to inspire and activate change.

As we try to address global problems with fiscal priorities and silo interests, there is obvious resistance to change within international politics.

We are already agents of change and are – in fact – bringing change as we live day to day, but it seems we are resistant to the kind of change that will benefit the world at large, but may ask us to make adjustments to our lifestyles. Resistance to this change is just like the body attempting to maintain homeostasis when it is in a time critical state. And just as in the body, it will result – and is resulting – in the collapse of the entire system, including the

human component. We believe that further considering what motivates human behavior can result in the deeper directional change required and, in light of this, help each other to wake up to attitudes that are kinder, more powerful, holistic and forward thinking.

This paper is not to re-write a Utopian myth of the past. We know that the world now is a globalized one, with a seemingly constant demand for resources, technology and growth. But, have you ever heard of a shopkeeper who sold goods but never restocked his store? Some facts are commonly understood now. There is enough food to feed everyone, but not the way we are currently feeding them. There are enough resources to support the world, but not the way we are currently using them. The one thing that our global situation demands is not more, but different. The problems are not fiscal and environmental. They are political, social and spiritual. They are human.

Social sciences have proven that people are the primary cause of reduced biodiversity. Faith based organizations have called for a change in attitude towards one of stewardship. Governments have the power to create such policy, and civil society has the strength to hold governments accountable. Our individual and collective behavior, and our choices, are the primary causes of the serious disconnect between people and the earth. Encouraging though, is that the solution lies in the same place – with our individual and collective attitudes, behaviors and choices.

As living sentient spiritual beings our bodies are home to us, and these temples to the soul are bio-diverse super-organisms. And although our bodies are seemingly single human forms, they are in fact comprised of multiple species. Much more than just *Homo sapiens*, we are bio-diverse meta-cellular amalgamations of many organisms. The distinction is that humans are different in the degree of self-determination we carry, and the power to make decisions that we have. This is why we are jointly responsible to address and amend the underlying causes of biodiversity loss. And we can do it.

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### **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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