

Living in Harmony

Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative



COP19 Report of Wednesday 20th to Friday 22nd November 2013

Wednesday 20th and Thursday 21st November

The atmosphere was sizzling with activity everywhere in Warsaw, both in the National Stadium where COP19 was taking place, and at various events over the city. There were many police-escorted cars with ministers going through the city and the traffic was slow. We decided to take the local tram, which was the first time in decades for some of our delegates.



In the BK delegation, some went to the one-day business forum at the Intercontinental Hotel, some went to COP for meetings, others to a press conference etc. The whole delegation then convened on the famous red beanbags for lunch!

Press Conference

The Indian Minister for Environment and Forest, Smt. Jayanthi Natarajan gave a press conference on India's position in COP19. Sister Jayanti and Golo Pilz were invited by the Indian Ambassador in Poland, Mrs. Monika Kapil to attend, even though this press conference was for press only. They were accompanied by Aneta Loj and Sonja Ohlsson. The Indian



minister was making strong statements that the new agreement has to take poverty reduction into account, and that the poorer countries have a right to develop. Common but differentiated responsibility for the



climate change cannot be phased out into equal responsibility.

After the press conference, the Indian Ambassador in Poland introduced Sister Jayanti and Golo Pilz to the minister. The corridor was full of reporters with questions, but the minister gave good time to Sister Jayanti and Golo to share about India One Solar Power Plant and about the Brahma Kumaris.

Global Justice, Equity and Sustainability – Side Event of the Brahma Kumaris with Partners

More than 110 people gathered for the side event “Global Justice, Equity and Sustainability”, co-organized by the Brahma Kumaris on the 20th of November, 2013, together with two other organisations, The International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations (ISMUN), and Global Alert For Defence Of Youth And The Less Privileged (GADYL). As both ISMUN and GADYL have strong connections to Africa, the hall was full of an audience with interest in both interfaith and the dilemmas of the developing countries in Africa.



It was a very lively and interactive session. To start with, the panelists related various aspects of climate change in view of human rights, international justice, renewable energy and spirituality, which was then followed by many interesting questions from the audience.

Missing human rights mechanism in the climate change context was one of the issues highlighted by Mr. Budi Tjahjono from Franciscans International, Indonesia, who made an appeal to appoint an UN expert in that area, thus creating a focus and approach to the problem of the rights to self-determination, food, culture etc., for people affected by the extreme climate events. On the panel, there were two representatives of African countries. Prince Goodluck Obi, the president of GADYLP, had an emotional presentation giving examples of the climate change consequences on people’s lives in Africa, especially indicating the most vulnerable - children and women. Mr. Mithika Mwenda, the Secretary General of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance



(PACJA), made firm statements about the climate justice and the need to ensure that pro-poor and people-centred response measures are put into consideration by the governments in Africa. PACJA is an African coalition of civil society organizations, comprising over 300 NGOs, foundations, trusts, community-based organizations, faith-based networks, national coalitions and regional networks from 45 African countries.

Sister Jayanti introduced a different perspective to the climate change challenges. She talked about spirituality being at the heart of everything. She shared the vision of hope for the future, where people enjoy inner peace, live in harmony with others, with nature, and with all forms of life. She indicated that shift of consciousness is required for that. She talked about care-and-share philosophy versus materialism and consumerism. She referred to the universal law of love, inviting everyone to reflect on whether we love ourselves and others the same way. Golo Pilz presented installations and achievements of the Brahma Kumaris in the solar energy field. These practical solutions in combination with the spiritual attitude inspired everyone. Both Sister Jayanti's and Golo's presentations created a lot of interest among the audience and they were asked a number of questions afterwards.

The public was very engaged throughout the whole panel discussion and had many interesting observations and inquiries. It was a good experience of sharing the panel with various NGOs, which provided both a good platform for exploring equity and sustainability in climate change, and also a big audience.

The event finished with a moment of silence and a meditation guided by Sister Jayanti, enabling everyone to have a personal inner experience of virtues and of sharing good wishes for the world.

Innovation Forum

At the Intercontinental Hotel, Sustainable Innovation Forum 2013 arranged by Climate Action and UNEP (United Nations Environment Program) took place. The Executive Director of UNEP gave the opening keynote speech to a full hall of more than 500 business leaders. François Becher, Nonie Reaño and Asha Rekawek from the BK delegation were there to learn more about how different companies approach climate change, and they enjoyed the high quality presentations in this one-day program.

Sister Jayanti was invited to conduct a meditation during the afternoon break. In the program it stated: Delegates are invited to remain in the conference room and recharge their inner energy with guided reflection



by Sister Jayanti Kirpalani. An unexpectedly high number of people stayed, around 50, to try this innovative contribution to the business forum. It was a touching scene to see Sister Jayanti in her white sari, sitting alone on this grand stage with big leather sofas and massive screens bravely guiding the audience (of mostly businessmen in black suits) into a meditation on the power of peace and harmony with the self and the environment.

The Communication Director of Climate Action came up to Sister Jayanti afterwards and said this was one of the most interesting inputs during the day. Many others stopped Sister Jayanti and appreciated the meditation.

Loss of Hope

The negotiations in the COP were getting more and more stuck, and it showed in the loss of hope in many of our friends and contacts that have been established through the years. The collective vocabularies of frustration and disappointment have differed every COP. This time in Warsaw, the expression "loss of hope" has dominated the collective vocabulary.

Sister Jayanti had a private meeting with one of the organizers of the Innovation Forum to give hope and comfort by meditation and spiritual awareness.



Chasing Ice

The day finished with a stunning and dramatic film called Chasing Ice. UNEP and the scientist and photographer, Professor W. Tad Pfeffer, hosted this exclusive screening at the close of the Forum, which had been put on to strengthen the role of the scientists in the debate on climate change. The makers of the film used nature imagery as medium of communication.



Sister Jayanti together with a group of BKs from Poland and abroad visited the screening.

Chasing Ice is an inspiring, beautiful, poignant, and timely film. It warns of, and demonstrates the disappearance of ice masses. Time-lapse cameras were placed in Greenland, Iceland, Alaska, and Montana to observe the phenomena of the shrinking glaciers. Ice that previously took one hundred years to recede was now captured melting the same distance in ten years. Dramatic awe-inspiring and usually unobserved events were being witnessed. Weeks of watching and stillness, nothing appeared to happen, and then a loud crack was heard as huge ice cliffs broke away and disintegrated, crashing into the cold blue. Areas as wide and tall as lower Manhattan were rising up, rolling over, and plunging like many Titanics into the depths. Here one minute, gone the next. The witnessing of these epic events speaks louder and clearer than any lecture. Climate change is on the move - what will humanity choose to do?

Our Oceans



There is a lot to learn about our oceans. The uptake of CO₂ from the atmosphere is increasing the acidity of the Earth's oceans, putting marine life at risk. Detailed notes were taken by Julia Grindon-Welch when she participated in a side event earlier in the week together with Valeriane Bernard. The full report on **Ocean Acidification and Dumping of Wastes at Sea** can be read below, at the end of this report.

The Power of One Person's Example

On Monday 11th, at the start of the UN climate negotiations, Nadarev Yeb Saño, the main lead negotiator from Philippines, commenced a fast to show solidarity with his fellow countrymen suffering from the aftermath of the typhoon in his country. He gave an impassioned plea to the assembled nations, for real, ambitious climate action. In a deeply emotional speech, he announced: "In solidarity with my countrymen who are struggling to find food back



home, I will now commence a voluntary fasting for the climate. This means I will voluntarily refrain from

eating food during this COP, until a meaningful outcome is in sight."

The fasting has spread to many other groups and the following is the pledge from Rev. Ireneusz Lukas, Director of the Polish Ecumenical Council:

I have a pleasure to inform that after the consultation with the President of the Polish Ecumenical Council, Archbishop Jeremiasz, the PEC officially agreed to support the interfaith call to fast in the last days of COP 19 as a sign of solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, especially with our sisters and brothers from Philippines as well as other people affected by extreme weather events all around the world.

Thursday 21st November

The last two days of the COP were coloured by no progress in the negotiations. For the first time in the COP, some environment NGOs handed in their badges and walked out from the UN climate talks. Environment and development groups protested against the slow speed and the lack of ambition at Warsaw negotiations.

Side Event on Ethics

The World Council of Churches arranged a side event at the COP called "Ethical and religious imperatives for a just climate deal". The panelists were Ms. Kennedy, Canadian Council of Churches; Rev. Grape, Church of Sweden and member of European Christian Environmental Network; Fr. D'Souza, Caritas India; Mrs. Dissarama Sabine Attama, Director of CADEV Niger, and a representative of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). Valeriane Bernard participated on behalf of the Brahma Kumaris.

Final Feedback Meeting

The BK delegation met the last evening to share highlights, learnings and ideas for the future. What stood out from the feedback was the general successful progress of the BK's participation and engagement in the COP, plus the appreciation of the fantastic hosting Polish team.



They had cooked a special Polish dinner for the last dinner together.



Special thanks to our co-ordinator Asha and the kitchen team!



Friday 22nd November

Press Conference “Call to Fast for Climate Justice”

CIDSE (Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité) and LWF (Lutheran World Federation) arranged a press conference called “Call to Fast for Climate Justice”. Present were representatives of CIDSE, LWF, WCC (World Council of Churches), Engaged Buddhists, and Sister Jayanti from the Brahma Kumaris.

Nadarev Yeb Saño, the main negotiator for the Philippines, who had commenced the fast (see above in “**The Power of One Person’s Example**”) came to the Press Conference and said how touched he was by the international solidarity of people fasting all over the globe.

The representatives of the different movements shared their view on fasting. Guillermo Kerber from the WCC then invited Sister Jayanti to share on spiritual action for climate and the role of silence and meditation.

Following is the link to the press conference:

http://unfccc4.meta-fusion.com/kongresse/cop19/templ/play.php?id_kongresssession=7073&theme=unfccc

UNFCCC Secretariat Addresses the Faith-Based NGOs

Mr. Daniele Violetti, Chief of Staff UNFCCC, met the faith-based NGOs. Both Ms. Christiana Figueres and Mr. Daniele Violetti have personally expressed the need of a closer involvement of the faith-based organizations in the UNFCCC negotiations process. Daniele Violetti said that UNFCCC needs the religions, as much as we need the business and the civil society, in the negotiations. The faiths will get more space in the future conferences by UNFCCC and the interfaith groups themselves will organize themselves better. Sister Jayanti and many of the BKs participated to make plans for future co-operation.

A Two-Minutes Video by Desert Rose

The South African group Desert Rose who had visited COP19 for interfaith programs, has made a short two-minutes video clip of their visit, including meditations with Sister Jayanti. You can see the clip here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8lCXd7eYEE>

Programs across Poland

Today, members of the delegation are travelling to different cities in Poland to share about the news from the COP and the Brahma Kumaris position on the link between spirituality and the environment.

This is the schedule:

Gdansk:

Golo Pilz - Awareness and Environment, presentation on Solar Energy for students from the Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management (WSHiT), Technical Gastronomy School & Technical University

Francois Becher - How to Discover Your Resources and Manage Them Wisely, Gallery CH Manhattan

Lodz:

Valeriane Bernard - Being Resilient - the Art of Returning to Equilibrium, at Galeria Manhattan

Katowice:

Valeriane Bernard - Living in Harmony, Galeria medytacji



Your reporters and editors say thank you for this time, and hope you have enjoyed the reports. We will make one summary and send it to you soon.



The following is the detailed report on **Ocean Acidification** and **Dumping of Wastes at Sea** as per the notes taken by Julia Grindon-Welch when she participated in a side event earlier in the week together with Valeriane Bernard:

Ocean Acidification - There is an additional argument for reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. The uptake of CO₂ from the atmosphere is causing pH levels in the Earth's oceans to decrease. This is called acidification. An estimated 30–40% of carbon dioxide released by humans into the atmosphere dissolves into oceans, rivers and lakes. Surface ocean pH is estimated to have decreased from approximately 8.25 to 8.14 representing an increase of almost 30% in H⁺ ion concentration in the world's oceans since the industrial revolution.

Increasing acidity is thought to have a range of consequences, including making it more difficult for marine calcifying organisms such as coral to form calcium carbonate (found in shells), thereby making them soft and fragile. When shelled organisms are at risk, the entire food web may also be at risk.

We have to decide what we are going to do to reduce the carbon dioxide levels and slow down the ocean acidification process.

Dumping of Wastes at Sea - The London Convention (on the Dumping of Wastes at Sea, 1972, in force since 1975) is one of the first international conventions for the protection of the marine environment from human

activities and contributes to the international control and prevention of marine pollution by prohibiting the dumping of certain hazardous materials. In addition, a special permit is required prior to dumping of a number of other identified materials and a general permit for other wastes or matter.

In 1996, Parties adopted an additional Protocol to the Convention (known as the London Protocol, 2006) which is meant to eventually replace the 1972 Convention. The London Protocol stresses the “precautionary approach”, which requires that “appropriate preventative measures are taken when there is reason to believe that wastes or other matter introduced into the marine environment are likely to cause harm even when there is no conclusive evidence to prove a causal relation between inputs and their effects”. It also states that "the polluter should, in principle, bear the cost of pollution" and emphasizes that Contracting Parties should ensure that the Protocol should not simply result in pollution being transferred from one part of the environment to another.

There are ways to get rid of CO₂ other than dumping. It can be compressed and transported to a specific place and injected into a porous rock.

Read more at www.environment.brahmakumaris.org