

Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative



Interfaith Climate Change Summit

Report from Brahma Kumaris at the United Nations

21st - 22nd September 2014

Day 1 – Sunday, 21st September

September 21, the Day of the International Day of Peace, was an auspicious day for the start of the Interfaith Climate Change Summit.

As part of a global effort to mobilize action and ambition on climate change, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon organized a Climate Summit on 23 September 2014 in New York. In order to highlight the specific contributions that faith traditions bring to the international climate debate, the World Council of Churches and Religions for Peace organized an Interfaith Summit on Climate Change, held in New York 21-22 September 2014.

After a warm welcome to Sister Jayanti by the BK New York family gathered at Global Harmony House and a short class, Sister Jayanti and a small delegation left to the Union Theological Seminary in uptown New York City, to participate in the Interfaith Climate Change Summit.

A gothic looking seminary with an inner garden courtyard leading to traditional stone carved rooms and polished wooden floors, was the setting for the thirty or so religious leaders. Under the austere gaze of past Deans looking down from their portraits, all were invited to sit in silence together and invoke the Divine. Tables and chairs were set in a square surrounded by large comfortable sofas.

Meanwhile...

Peoples Climate March



Peoples Climate March – 400,000 people march down Avenue of the Americas in New York City

It was extraordinary to be part of one of the biggest ever, social movements in response to climate change... the People's Climate March in New York City. It was AMAZING!!!!

We were asked to gather at 11:00 so we could begin walking at 11:30. I (Tamasin) went to the interfaith section at W57th street and 8th Avenue. We stood there until almost 2pm waiting to begin, because more people just kept turning up! The City expected between 60-100,000 whereas the starting number was 311,000 with more joining all the time. The final number was estimated as nearly 400,000. The photos can't really capture the magnitude of the event at all. The walk went down Central Park West through Time Square and then down 10th avenue to 34th Street. But during the march, even the spectators who weren't 'marching', were participating, demonstrating with signs, t-shirts, slogans. It's just that some people were standing still on the sides, and some people were waling in the march. But everyone was participating. It was remarkable!

One of the most moving experiences was when there was like a 'Mexican wave' of people's voices. I've never heard anything like it heard before. From behind us I could hear people calling, yelling, whistling, whooping, ringing bells from behind. And it slowly

crept up on us until it was upon us. Then it just hit us like a wave. And you couldn't help but join in. Everyone who was there would pick up the sound and carry it forward. Then those in front would pick it up and so on. It was like one organic call of the earth, through all of us... capturing the hearts of almost 400,000 people. The sound wound its way through the march, like one voice. Like the earth calling. A beautiful sound of humanity as a collective, together forming one voice. Just amazing to be here. There was such good will among everyone, especially among the interfaith community. It was a wonderful opportunity for some of the faith groups to get to know each other.

Later that evening, I noticed that New York City had lit the Empire State Building in green in support of the March. Interfaith Summit on Climate Change

Interfaith Climate Change Summit

Sister Jayanti was one of the thirty religious leaders invited, who have shown moral leadership, knowledge, and engagement on issues related to climate change. One of the objectives of this Interfaith Summit was to convey the faith communities' concerns and proposals to the Secretary General's Climate Summit by presenting a signed declaration. While 400,000 people were marching, the voices of billions of people around the world were represented in the following:

The opening session

"We are here first as brothers and sisters representing the human family. As religions and spiritual organizations we represent the great majority of the human family. We are here to speak in love and with hope and we need to mobilize people of faith. Climate Change is one of the most important issues of our time because it combines many crises under one issue. The world is in a critical state. We also must understand that Climate Change is a matter of justice, and that our actions and choices have far-reaching consequences. To change perspective needs a moral power. We must acknowledge what is happening but also offer a message of hope to the millions we represent. We also need to listen to and learn from the indigenous peoples who can remind us how to live in harmony with nature. As Dr. Pachauri, Head of UN IPCC said We know more than enough about this - we now need to act "

- Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, World Council of Churches, (rep. 550 million Christians)

"We know enough that if we do not act we find ourselves in profound contradiction. We must bring our own specific religious resources to this issue. It is a moral challenge of the highest order - we need to iterate what climate sensitive virtues nurture positive action".

- Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary-General for Religions for Peace

Setting the Scene



Union Theological Seminary Refectory / Christiana Figueres with Sister Jayanti.

For this session the religious leaders and other invited guests were led up stone stairs to a large Hogwarts School style (Harry Potter) refectory where long wooden tables were set with a stage at one end, and a buffet lunch at the other. On entering into the room Christiana Figueres and Sister Jayanti greeted each other warmly and spent a few moments together. Christina then enthusiastically addressed the religious leaders; having just participated in the Peoples Climate March, where approximately 400,000 concerned citizens advocated for action and positive change. The following is from a dialogue between Christiana Figueres (Executive Secretary of UNFCCC) and the religious leaders:

Everyone is offering solutions to climate change and there has got to be a spiritual solution also. This is a truly momentous day, a momentous week - we are making history together! Everything taking place in New York is shifting the ground of what is possible.

TODAY this shift MUST happen. Throughout the world in 166 countries there is the largest march in history taking place - demonstrating popular deep and broad support in addressing climate change. There is an economic imperative. There is also a moral imperative.

The sum total of what everyone is bringing to the table over the next three days is encouraging but not enough; from a global perspective we are not doing enough to fulfill our responsibilities. We must and we WILL address climate change. We have to remember this is a process that will take us over the next 15 months to COP in Paris (2015) and we need a legally binding document.

***Help maintain the arc of faith.** There will be many ups and downs, but we cannot let the downs bring us down. We have the responsibility to inject confidence in the process. Ultimately as human beings we know what is right and we have the courage to act on what is right. Help keep the faith.*

***Help maintain the arc of love** in our consciousness, in our thinking, and in solidarity with every human being. It is easy to do that with those who are most vulnerable - but that is not the end of the arc of love. The more difficult part is to embrace everyone, every sector. We cannot afford to demonize or blame anyone - either a country, a sector or industry. For this will diminish the power - either we will have an answer to climate change for everyone or for no-one.*

We have to Include those who are finding it the hardest - open the spiritual space to allow them to come in. We have to bring them along with us and it is a tall order; no child, no industry, no country, no sector should be left behind. Finally, stand up as the responsible human beings that we are to solve this problem and not let it be handed over to our children to solve.

- Christina Figueres, Executive Sec., UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

In the Koran it says: "You must not corrupt the earth once it has been made in its full beauty". Humanity must take care of the earth, and we have to put our hands in others hands to make this cooperation a reality. Love and faith are important - love requires us to see others as they truly are - we are one global family. The sickness is not climate change. The sickness is actually us;

our greed and love of money. We are the pollution. In my lifetime animals have disappeared. We are destroying more species than ever before. We have to realise the impact of what we are doing. And we have to help the leaders to rule with more moral intelligence. People of faith have been sidelined and leaders to do not take council from religions. This is a mistake. Despite that we cannot despair. It is not a quality of religions to despair: hope is our address. This is where we live.

Muslim Response: Sheikh Abdallah Bin Bayyah (Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies)

As was spoken by Mahatma Ghandi "There is enough for everyone's need not everyone's greed". We have to find the most compassionate side of ourselves and cooperate, if we don't act today what will happen tomorrow? The life of every global citizen is at risk. We need to find meaningful ways of how we can work together. How do we live our faith?

Hindu Response: Dr Vinu Aram (Shanti Ashram)

"Repent for the end is near" is a much-quoted phrase from the Bible. To 'repent' actually means to turn around, you are going in the wrong direction. Unless we turn around we are not going to succeed. Our most compelling arguments of science have not turned us around, nor our economic or political arguments, so what will? Two things can turn us around: one is faith and the others is our children.

Also, when parents realize the burden they are leaving for their children, they will do something. Faith is the substance of things not seen, when we face climate change how do we sustain ourselves when we cannot see much evidence of success? With hope. Hope means believing in spite of the evidence and then watching the evidence change.

Christian Response: Rev. Jim Wallis (Sojourners)

Formal signing of the Interfaith Summit Declaration



Sister Jayanti sign's the Interfaith Declaration



Following the dialogue, a formal signing of the declaration took place, as each leader was called to the table to sign, while the press filmed and took photographs.

Since the Peoples March took place simultaneously to the dialogue the religious leaders then took a walk – a “mini march” in solidarity - from the Union Theological Seminary to the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine.

Religions for the Earth: A Multifaith Service



Phoenix Sculptures hang from the ceiling of the Cathedral of St John the Divine

A huge celebration took place at the Cathedral of St John, The Divine, New York City. The cathedral was packed with a colorful 'congregation' from all backgrounds and religious and spiritual affiliations. Costumed creatures giving rocks as symbols to be later used to make commitments welcomed participants. Once settled in their seats over 2,000 people listened to impassioned presentations and commitments from religious leaders, scientists, activist and politicians, indigenous people, and concerned citizens including, Al Gore, Former Vice President of the USA and H.E. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General, of the UN. All spoke of their particular commitment as they placed their rock on an alter-like round table. Above, holding dominion over all were two magnificent phoenix sculptures. These majestic birds symbolically offered the hope of transformation as commitments and prayers were offered up. The whole evening was interlaced with beautiful music, song and grace.

Day 2 – Interfaith Climate Change Summit

Monday 22nd, September

The morning of the second day took place in the Saint Peters Church, Sanctuary a very modern church in the city. Four Panel Discussions took place on this day between selected religious leaders and members of the public who had registered in advance for the events. Sister Jayanti presented in the second panel.



Saint Peters Church, New York City

Panel 1: Ethics, Spirituality and Climate Change

Moderator: H.E. Sheikh Shaban Ramadhan Mubaje (Uganda Muslim Supreme Council)

“A person who knows satisfaction possesses every thing. The central path consists of being satisfied once one has enough food to survive. Greed fear and insecurity do not provide the ground to solve Climate Change. It is a severe challenge but is also a message from the earth to go back to our original selves, to return to an authentic way of life. Go back to original existence. Instead of thinking of short-term solutions we need long-term solutions. We must return to our true selves.

My grandfather, Visha co sikei Nikio Himano founder of Rissho Kosei-Kai said:
We humans need to live understanding everything is interconnected. All the

problems we are facing are because of greed. 80% of the food in front of us is thrown away. So it's simple: don't take what you don't need.'

- Rev Kosho Niwano (Rissho Kosei-Kai) Buddhist Japan

"See the building that God has created: the natural world where air makes the trees dance. Guru Nanak felt that nature was Gods home. The arrogant mix of vices like ego, desire, greed, anger and attachment, make human beings believe they are masters of everything and that everything is to be used as a commodity under their masters. But air is our guru, water is the father and earth the mother. We literally cannot survive without them. The responsibility lies in the hands of human beings."

- Dr Rajwant Singh from EcoSikh.



Panel: Ethics, Spirituality and Climate Change

"Today there is not a single country that has not seen exploitation and corruption. All are God's creatures. We are destroying swarms of species. I received a fruitful world because my ancestors created it for me. This is why I protect the world. We, the people of faith, have to take the lead and look after each other. At the heart of all our paths is the premise not to harm: whether your enemy, your friend, or other life forms. We must restore love in the world."

-Ms. Paddy Meskin, South African Union of Temple Sisterhoods

Panel 2 : Faith Communities, Divestment and Renewable Energy.

Moderator: Re.v Fletcher Harper, Greenfaith.



Sister Jayanti speaks on Renewable Energy

“India has an abundance of the source of light and in spirituality we are aiming to take the energy and love from the Sun of Love, so it makes a lot of sense to physically be able to make use of the abundant energy of the sun. Since the technology is available why not use it and share it. It is good that people’s hearts are moving in the right direction - like the Rockefellers now divesting in mining. Solar Steam cooking now allows us to cook 38000 meals a day. We, the Brahma Kumaris, are also sharing the technology and expertise with other Ashrams in India. Our current flagship project, ‘India One’ Solar Thermal Power Station, is an innovative 1 Mw solar thermal power plant, is currently being constructed at the Shantivan Campus of the Brahma Kumaris spiritual headquarters, in Rajasthan. This project features thermal storage for continuous operation and will generate enough heat and power for the campus of 20,000 people.

As we work in support of the environment, we seek to empower local people by providing jobs and training, we seek to share the knowledge we have gained so that all can have access to renewable energy, but above all we seek to restore the self respect of those around us who in turn will reach out to others. We believe that we will reach a point when this powerful energy of love will catalyze the paradigm shift for the whole of humanity.

Dadi Janki, the spiritual head of the Brahma Kumaris, was asked in a gathering of religious leaders about the will of God. She said; "I tell myself, let there not even be one thought that is against the will of God." Perhaps it is this amount of self-sacrifice at the level of our innermost thoughts that will bring the paradigm shift that is needed. Perhaps this will change our vision to one of equal respect for each and every human being, as well as all other creatures, and so restore the true nature of the self; that of compassion, respect and wisdom.

- Sister Jayanti, Main NGO Representative to the United Nations (Geneva),
 - Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

"Our Father in Heaven, Forgive us our trespasses". I come from a wealthy church, and temptations could have been many, but we decided to become very transparent with our constituency. We felt that the public needed to be enlightened about the way the money was being used, and saved. Since the medieval times the wealth of our church was basically based on productive forests and farmland but today, things have changed. We had to ask ourselves: Are we responsible stewards? These decisions to be democratic and transparent did create conflicts, but it allowed us to move forward. Pressure allows change and is conducive to newness. So we all have to ask ourselves: Where are we putting our money?

The ethics of love has become extinct. So we started asking our selves can we make a positive change? We thought, we are small but have some moral authority, so we started looking into what companies we are supporting. In 2009 we sold all shares related to oil, and are now selling those related to gas. Love has to become a strategy helping the society to turn around. Thinking about Climate Justice is helping us to consider - in new ways - ideas around justice, peace and the integrity of creation. We need to think of public opinion. Creating public opinion is extremely important and we need to connect it to theology, because people now think that religion is to do with the inner world alone. They forget that religion and life go together."

- Archbishop Emeritus Anders Wejryd

A paradigm shift does not happen just like that but needs a choice and also the realization that we need to change: whatever is our awareness it creates our attitude then our vision and then our action and this is the state of the world. We

need to do a turn of direction - We need to face the priority that is fundamentally connected to our spiritual identity. This essential crisis of our day shows us we need to make a shift at this deep inner level.

- Sister Jayanti

The BK delegation: Sisters Jayanti, Julia, Tamasin, Valeriane, Caroline and brother Erik, went to have lunch together at Tamasin's apartment in Tudor City overlooking a park near the United Nations.



Lunch at Tamasin's Apartment

The afternoon sessions took place at the Church Center of the United Nations.

Panel 3: Climate Resilience: Indigenous Peoples and Other Vulnerable Groups

Moderator; H.E. Dr. Kul Chandra Gautam (Former Assistant Secretary General, United Nations). Dr. Gautam and Sister Jayanti greeted each other warmly as friends.

Resilience is the ability to overcome adversity. Indigenous people have been very good at that and I have seen that one comes out much stronger when one overcomes adversity. Our Cosmo vision is the basis of our practice through our spiritual traditions and education. Even the objects given to us have to be used properly and respected. Understanding mother earth is a matter for all people

not only the indigenous or the vulnerable. I have also heard a lot about interconnectedness over the last few days, so we are finally advancing. Our prophecies say that advancement will happen very quickly. We have to drop what is not good for us.

I would love people to understand what interconnectedness really is I can see the effect of the stone when I drop it in the water but the effect goes very far. Certain species of highly sensitive fish hear it on the other side of the lake. Climate Change also has an effect that goes of very far. Now we are destroying to build. We have things upside down. Our priorities have become wrong - we have lost our way. We travel through time in community with the earth and the trees and the animals. We cannot refer to development and sustainability if it is not integrated to politic, spiritual, and social life and with respect and deep appreciation for resources. They are not commodities for us.

- Priestess Beatriz Schulthess (Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council)

I was very touched by the commitments yesterday during the celebration at the Church of Saint John the Divine. I was in tears because I've seen a slow progress in the world climate change. It is a challenge we have to face, us people of the islands. Historically we have had a romantic relationship with the sea. And we see that the current situation is challenging us to live with love with our mother earth. Today even our traditional ways of resilience don't work, because the underground water that was the resource we used during droughts has become salty. The fishes that were our way of survival are gone. We now have to change our lifestyle from a traditional lifestyle to a market lifestyle. This introduced the problem of poverty in the pacific region. What about our right to survive as a people? What will we become if we have to migrate somewhere? We are part of that land. We will become faceless unidentified citizens in some part of the world. Tuvalu has pledged itself to 0 carbon and to only use renewable energy. We have the right to try to save our country, our culture, our traditions and our way of life:

- Rev Tafue Lusama Ekalesia Kelisiano from Tuvalu

Panel 4: Responsibility for Change: Multifaith and Multisectoral Approaches

Moderator: Reverend Suzanne Matala from the 'We Have Faith' campaign in Africa.

There were four panelists: Mr. Tariq from a youth organization came to share the voice of young people of faith. Ms. Eun-hae Kwon from the Lutheran World Federation was a very dynamic young woman from Korea who explained the fasting campaign started during

Warsaw COP 19 . Dr. Din Syamsuddin from Muhammadiyah in Indonesia used the Koran to question our way of life and the modern components of our societies. Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa from the International Network of Engaged Buddhists explained the Buddhist philosophy of detachment and of the importance of being free from greed. The negative effect of greed was now visible form of danger that humanity is collectively facing.

The final session of the Interfaith Summit was a closed session in which the Religious Leaders spoke together of how they would move forward in cooperation and what commitments they could make towards addressing the issue of Climate Change.

What emerged very strongly during this summit is the role of the religions as providers of hope; a moral voice who guide their communities to make choices that address climate change according to their faith and work in cooperation with others to make it practical.

Evening Program at the Meditation Center and Gallery: Climate Change Action: New Thinking Creates New Realities

The poster is for an event titled "Climate Change Action: New Thinking Creates New Realities". It features a blue background with a yellow sun and a circular logo showing two figures holding hands. A portrait of Sister Jayanti is on the left. The text includes the event title, a quote from her about catalyzing action around climate change, and details about the event on Monday, September 22, 2014, at The Meditation Center and Gallery. Logos for Climate Summit 2014, Brahma Kumaris, and Climate Week NYC are at the bottom.

Climate Change Action:
**New Thinking
Creates
New Realities**

This week the heads of the world are thinking about how to **catalyze action around Climate Change**. Real change in any social or environmental system must begin - and be sustained - in the **minds and the hearts of human beings**. What the world urgently needs is a profound shift in the thinking and awareness that has created our current environmental crisis.

Expanding the climate change conversation to include the **inner spiritual dimension** will help to advance the very challenging agenda and improve cooperation and action among the many stakeholders.

Join us for a conversation and meditation with
Sister Jayanti
Director of the Brahma Kumaris (BK) for Europe and the Middle East
Main BK representative to the United Nations in Geneva
Head of the BK delegation to the United Nations Climate Change Conferences (UNFCCC) since 2009

Monday, September 22, 2014
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
(Light refreshments will be served from 6:00 - 6:30 pm)
www.environment.brahmakumaris.org
<http://www.brahmakumaris.org/us/newyork>
Brahma Kumaris at the United Nations

The Meditation Center and Gallery
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CLIMATE SUMMIT 2014 CATALYZING ACTION
BRAHMA KUMARIS supports Climate Summit 2014
CLIMATE WEEK NYC

RSVP- manhattan@us.brahmakumaris.org or bk@un.brahmakumaris.org / 212 688 1335

The meditation Center and Gallery, of the Brahma Kumaris on Fifth Avenue, New York City was filled to overflowing with invited guests from the United Nations, friends from the Call-of-the-Time Dialogues, from the Sindhi Community of New York, and students of the center. As heads of state gathered across town at the UN to think about how to catalyze action around Climate Change, Sister Jayanti spoke of the need to expand the conversation to include the inner dimension. She gave deep spiritual insights on how to change your thinking and how to get the power to make those changes and bring them into practical action. She answered many very thoughtful questions from the floor and this was followed by powerful meditation.

This program was part of 'Climate Week NYC'