

Service Report from South Korea

Korea Brahma Kumaris Association participated in the Asian Civil Society Conference on Climate Change and Ecology(ACCE), which was held in South Korea, April 24-30, 2015, with the theme of "Climate Change, Sustainability and Resilience."

The Korean BK Association was part of the Korean Organizing Committee, which was made up of 13 different local organizations including 7 faith-based organizations(FBOs), 3 environment NGOs, and 3 overseas development NGOs, as well as the INEB(International Network of Engaged Buddhists) and the ICE(Inter-Religious Climate and Ecology) Network. This was the 2nd ICE conference, following the 1st one held in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, in September 2012.

The Korean BK Association invited BK Valeriane Bernard, a member of the international BK Environment Team and a BK representative at the UN office in Geneva, to give a higher profile to the BK participation in the conference. The BK family in Korea has just begun engaging in environmental activities starting with the UN Biodiversity Conference held in Pyeongchang, Korea, in October 2014.

The ACCE was originally planned to be held in October 2014, but was postponed to April of 2015 because more time was needed for preparation and to create common understanding among the participating organizations. This was a boon for the BKs because we were able to use the international BK team's participation in the 2014 UN Biodiversity Conference in Pyeongchang to further promote ourselves as an environmentally active international organization. The inauguration of the Korean organizing committee took place in November 2014 in Seoul.



Inauguration of the Korean Organizing Committee in November 2014

Prior to the main conference, the A-Z Climate Change Workshop was held in Woljeongsang Temple in Pyeongchang, Korea on April 24-25, 2015. The workshop was facilitated by Dr Nigel Crawhall, Commissioner, International Union for Conservation of Nature(IUCN). Korean BK Sisters Meera and Bhavna participated in the workshop, acquiring deeper understanding about the climate change crisis and building closer ties with other participating FBOs and environmental NGOs from Korea as well as from other countries.



BKs participating in the A-Z Climate Change Workshop

The main conference started on April 29 with participants representing generations of leaders and practitioners of Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Brahma Kuamris, Animist, and Shamanic traditions from 26 countries mainly in Asia but also from Europe and Africa. Speakers representing major religions in Korea agreed that human actions have caused the current climate crisis and that religious leaders and practitioners can play a leading role in raising public awareness and taking actions urgently needed to curb climate change. Rev. Myung-Jin In, a Christian Pastor, said in his congratulatory message that the Christian worldview of placing human beings above nature and other living beings and consumerism are at the root of the climate crisis.



The opening ceremony of ICE II Conference on April 29, 2015 at Jogye Buddhist Temple

In his keynote address, Yeb Sano, former Environment Commissioner of the Philippines and now Spiritual Ambassador of Our Voices, emphasized the need to take action now and appealed to the religious and civil society leaders for courage and solidarity to join the planetary awakening to transform the world. He has recently initiated the People's Pilgrimage, a global series of visits to hotspots at risk from climate change worldwide, hubs of climate resistance and resilience, and

communities of faith and spiritual strength. The global People's Pilgrimage will finish with a two-month, 1,500 kilometer journey from Rome to Paris, leading up to COP 12 in December this year. Mr Oh Ki-chul, Chairman of the Korean organizing committee and Secretary General of the Green Asia Network of Korea, explained in his keynote speech how the impact of climate change goes across borders especially causing havoc on residents in developing countries. He proposed a pan-Asian platform called TERRASIA Network to serve as a sustainable response mechanism to climate change aimed at rebuilding lives of residents in Asian communities whose livelihood has been damaged by climate change.



Display table for BK environment activities.



Valeriane meeting with other delegates

Following the keynote speech were panel discussions, covering the impact of climate change on the first day and cases of positive responses on the second day. There were six concurrent workshop sessions in the afternoon on both days. Key messages and actions regarding common interests of the earth and all living beings were shared, and the discussion and workshop sessions addressed issues including desertification and dust in Mongolia, flood & soil erosion in Bangladesh, climate and poverty, food crisis, unsustainable energy systems, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, bio-diversity loss, cultivating capacities for resilience, religious models and community energy, corporate globalization & climate change, and good governance.



BK Valeriane's presentation at Myeongdong Cathedral



Workshop on capacity building for resilience

The second day focused on "Climate Change and Actions." BK Valeriane Bernard gave her presentation in the morning of the second day on Solar Power Generation and Yogic Farming as BK's positive and proactive response to climate change. Sister Valeriane introduced BK activities in the international community including UNFCCC and BK's contribution in the field of climate change and human rights. She emphasized that BK's main focus is in raising awareness about how consciousness affects matter through talks, workshops, seminars, and meditations through our international network in 120 countries around the world. In the afternoon, Sister Valeriane facilitated the workshop on "Cultivating Capacities for Resilience: Spiritual, Ecological and Climate Resilience", in which different ways of building inner resilience and community resilience were discussed. In the end, the main focus of the discussion was about how to achieve and maintain the inner stability and strength that can withstand any and all external disruptions, which brought them to the importance of nurturing the spirituality in their lives through their respective religious or spiritual practices. The group looked at how building inner resilience also allowed to foster more resilient communities. The group looked at all the different values, qualities and behaviours necessary to create resilient communities.



The inter-faith choir singing for peace



Statement at closing

The conference was successful in getting everyone – different faith traditions, civil society organizations and even the government – involved in the discussion. There was a shared understanding that climate change issues can no longer be ignored or pushed away and that something should be done now. For the BKs, it gave us a lot of opportunities to get connected with various civil society and environmental organizations. Those who worked with us through the preparation process now recognize the BKs more as people who do practically what they believe and say. The highlight of the conference was when a choir made up of multi-faith clergies sang a song "To bring peace in the world, let us become the peace ourselves," which won everyone's heart.

A couple of days after the conference, BK Valeriane and Meera attended the ICE core group meeting for feedback on the conference as well as discussion on the future direction for the ICE network. In the feedback, members agreed that the conference was successful with support from major religions and the civil society despite many difficulties including financial ones. After the feedback, lively discussion followed on the identity of ICE - its vision, goals, structure and values as well as specific activities of the ICE in the future. Small groups were created to work on each of the different aspects of the network.

On the day following the main conference, BK Valeriane and the Korean BK family went to visit the heavily armored De-Militarized Zone(DMZ) bordering North Korea. The DMZ is where human and industrial activities have been restricted for more than 60 years since the end of the Korean War in 1953. As a result, the ecosystem in the area has been well preserved. A small group of local residents, publishers of community newspapers and environmental activists escorted the BKs within the DMZ. At the end of the tour, there was a dialogue between the group hosting us and Sr Valeriane. Responding to the questions around the difficulties the residents currently face, Valeriane in response shared explained how the frustration caused by all injustices and inadequate decisions has to be internally solved and worked upon to address better and in a more constructive way the work of caring for the environment. She then explained BK's activities in the field of environment and our simple and non-violent way of living. She also talked about peace and how we can find true peace within ourselves and in connection to God through meditation.



BKs on tour of the DMZ area



Public program at the centre

In the evening BK Valeriane gave a talk on "Resilience – A Skill to Respond to Change" to 35 contact souls at the BK centre in Seoul. Some of the participants came from the ACCE. Valeriane gave some tips on how to be more resilient; ie, to learn to be "here and now" and to free oneself from various forms of attachments. Having a spiritual identity as an eternal soul and experiencing

that spiritual energy would free us from fear of losing the self or death, which will make us very resilient to cope with any sudden changes happening in our lives.

On the weekend, Sister Valeriane had a sneh-milan and a workshop with the BK family. In the sneh-milan, Valeriane talked about the qualities of an angel and everybody shared their own experience of angels or an angelic stage. On the Sunday, in a workshop on "Spirit of care," we explored "what newness we can bring in order to care better for the self; how we can best take Baba's love, and we can make the atmosphere at the centre more caring." These interactive sessions gave the BKs opportunities to learn more about themselves and to express themselves more freely.



Valeriane with the BK family after the workshop

BK Valeriane gave a lot of inspiration to the Korean BKs to have a broader vision of serving the world and nature by sharing her experience as well as being an example in the service field. Many contacts were made with other faith-based organizations and individuals who are taking interest in spirituality. We thank Baba and the Drama for this part in the drama.

BK Environment Team and the family in Korea