

Living in Harmony

Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative



Report from Climate Change Conference COP20 in Lima

Monday 8th Dec - Second week

This second week of COP20 started with the registration of Sister Gayatri, Golo Pilz, Sonja Ohlsson and Angelica Castro. They had a guided tour around the Pentagonito (Ministry of Defense of Peru).

They were able to spend time in the plenary halls, the country pavilions and the exhibition area.

Picture: Sister Gayatri, Julia Grindon-Welch and Angelica Castro.



Workshop – Strengthening inner resilience. Centro de la Mujer “Flora Tristan” Feminist institution founded in 1979.

Valeriane Bernard started the workshop by introducing the concept of resilience: *“What is resilience? It is our inner capacity to respond to a difficult moment”*. The participants were invited to understand its meaning by sharing personal experiences in which they had faced difficult moments in their lives. By recalling such a difficult moment, it is possible to realise what can be learned from it and understand what strengths were shown at that time.



Picture: Valérieane, Moira, Nonie and Juan from Brahma Kumaris presented this workshop. There, they met Betzabeth and Arianna COP20 volunteers, Fernando a spiritual student and Claudia a BK student and volunteer.

The participants agreed that, at those difficult times, they empowered themselves using inner qualities and strengths rather than those from others. They could take help and guidance from silence and from the Divine.

Meeting UNESCO delegate

Mr. John Crowley from the Social and Human Sciences Sector met Valérie Bernard, Angelica Castro and Christophe Richon for a briefing on co-operation possibilities with UNESCO for the Youth General Assembly in November 2015 and for COP21 which would be held in Paris the next year.

Interfaith meeting - Spiritual perspectives on climate change

The Interfaith Liaison Committee offered a space of reflection and spiritual encounter to the spiritual leaders. We gathered on the grass under the olive trees in a circle. About 25 people came and shared ideas around 2 questions about their understanding of Climate Change from the perspective of their faith: What they are



moved by in the face of all the different challenges posed by climate change and how they dealt with it spiritually?

The meeting lasted an hour and was ended by a moment of silence.

Sister Gayatri, Valeriane, Julia and Angelica participated from the Brahma Kumaris.

Art Festival - The future is today. "Almeida de la Interacción" Lima City Centre.

Art can facilitate the change needed in a collective way. This street art festival was the artists' response to climate change. Nonie Reaño from BK Peru conducted half an hour of meditation as part of the program. The group were touched by the meditation: going inside, connecting to the supreme and then serving the elements using the power of the mind.

Youth interfaith meeting

At the end of Monday, the Lutheran World Federation youth delegates at COP20 invited all the other youth delegates to meet. At the restaurant 'Mezze', Angelica Castro and Christophe Richon for the Brahma Kumaris shared with the assembled representatives (Lutherans, Catholics, Christian Mennonite and Protestants, Buddhists and a Muslim youth) their experiences at the COP20. The open and respectful environment facilitated a heart to heart conversation about initiatives and their experiences of each one in their faith.

Tuesday 9th Dec.

Opening of High Level Segment.

At this opening of the High Level Segment, the Brahma Kumaris, as a member of the constituents of RINGO, were invited to be present in the Plenary Hall. The Hall was packed as Julia Grindon-Welch, a BK delegate who listened with interest as Presidents and UN dignitaries addressed the assembly. There was a cultural presentation by the many indigenous peoples of Peru who poured into the room and danced in the aisles. They welcomed the delegates in traditional ways wearing brightly coloured traditional costumes.



Highlights from some of the speeches were:

COP President, Manuel Pulgar-Vidal - Minister of Environment of Peru, welcomed everyone to the "Lima Experience". He said "*Peru is a land of many mystic levels and dreams*" and he hoped that everyone would help to fulfil the dreams of the world by creating a strong outcome for this COP in Peru.

Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC spoke of the Inca civilization's calendar and how now is the time for planting seeds of justice for all, and times to steer the world towards a transformational change. She said "*Never before have we had such an opportunity and never before such urgency to make this transition. History will judge us not only for how many tons of greenhouse gases we were able to reduce but also how we alleviate poverty and create a better future for all - and that future is ours to create*".

The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon; the President of Bolivia, Evo Morales; the President of Naru, Baron Wanga and also the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Enele Sosene Sopoaga addressed the parties and delegates.

For more information, please read **Annex 1**.

Panel – “A world in transition: Solar energy and sustainable yogic agriculture”. Voices for Climate.

The Voices for Climate is a space that shows the diversity of proposals and initiatives regarding Climate Change. There are five emblematic issues such as: forests, mountains and water, oceans, energy and sustainable cities.

For the discussion on energy, Golo Pilz was invited by the Ministry of Environment of Peru to participate. The hall in the middle of the exhibition area was full when Golo



as part of a panel gave a presentation about Renewable Energies in the Brahma Kumaris.

He shared the spiritual foundation of the Brahma Kumaris and emphasized the importance of ethics and values in political and economical processes.

After the presentation, during the questions and answers, the panel was joined by Tamasin Ramsay, who shared ideas and results of research into Yogic Agriculture.

Panel – Growing Collective Consciousness. Voices for Climate.



Dr John D. Liu facilitated this panel which included an indigenous woman of the Amazon forest, an Australian anthropologist, a Peruvian bishop and an American human rights activist. This set a flavour of diversity and opinions that were delightful and expressed eloquently. An indigenous man said that

“humanity needs to awaken its sensitive part, to speak about values and spirituality in order to find solutions which are not only technical but also human solutions”.

When the panel was questioning the link between values and science, Tamasin mentioned how it has been proven that meat industry causes damage to the environment due to methane pollution; *“the practice of a non-violent diet will help to reduce methane emissions in the atmosphere.”.*



In conclusion, all the participants agreed that there is a need of deep transformational change including inner change. It is a personal decision for each one to change their lifestyle and to change it now because there is little time left.

Panel – “Eco-theology and inter-religious dialog to address environmental problems”. UARM: Universidad Antonio Ruiz Montoya

The opening program “Climate Change Perspectives from the south”, organized by this university and the interreligious council of Peru.

Guillermo Kerber, president of the World Council of churches was the moderator. The panellists were Martin Kopp of the LWF, Niguel Crawhal from the Buddhist, sister Gayatri of Brahma Kumaris, Rev. Henric of Catholic churches and the Father Fred McDonald Arch of Ireland.



Sister Gayatri quoted the words of the Apollo 11 crew who talked about the fascination, beauty and fragility of our planet. Sister Gayatri also talked about the importance of inner resilience. *“The common factor in being, becoming and experiencing, is that these lead to will. There is a relationship between my perception and my behaviour and that comes*

from the expression of my heart. Integration is important because we are not alone, we are all connected. Climate change shows us that we are all facing this big challenge. Policies have to be translated in a way that people can understand and are inspired to take concrete actions."

In the middle of the panel, Freddy Ehlers, Secretary of State for Good Living of the Government of Ecuador talked about this new ministry.

Meditation at the Sustainable Innovation Forum.

Climate Action and UNEP organise an event for business and organizations, each year. This year, the event was held in the Westin Hotel and Convention Centre. For



the 3rd year the Brahma Kumaris were invited to lead a 10 minutes meditation for all participants as part of an innovation concept.

Sonja Ohlsson led the meditation for about 200 people. She focused on inner peace being the key to bring harmony to the outer environment.

Panel – “Growing Collective Consciousness from the Voices for the Climate”. Jockey club auditorium.

Last night’s gathering took place in the indigenous tent that had artifacts and handmade handicrafts from traditional Peruvian villages. The sense of humility, creativity, reverence and joy was already set before people even entered the hall! Five low wide chars on the stage, mood lighting over the audience, and a vast screen showed scenes of the natural world while people spoke.

Ecologist and renowned director John Liu, who was a participant at COP20, convened this panel. The conversations were filmed and may appear in a documentary about the global shift among humanity in today’s climate crisis. Invited panellists included Patricia Gualinga from Ecuador, Sam Bickersteth from UK, Magdalena Ruiz from Mexico, Shuar Velasquez from Peru, Tamasin Ramsay from Australia and Tihaoga Ruge from Mexico.

John facilitated the panel of different disciplines, world views and political and social perspectives. His aim: finding the common ground beneath this collective shift in awareness which is happening in people all over the world. Tamasin spoke about the disconnection between the human spirit and the physical world as being the underlying cause of our current climate change problems.

The solution: to understand the deep connection of our lives as sentient beings, within the ecology (‘eco’ meaning ‘home’) of the body. Once this relationship is right: the empowered, virtuous soul is awake and aware within the environment.

Interfaith Ceremony – Basilica San Francis Lima City Centre.

Tuesday evening, after a whole day of inter-religious activities at the UARM, the Inter-religious council of Peru invited the different faiths to give an environmental-spiritual message.

About 200 people from the Peruvian and the international inter-religious communities gathered in front of Basilica. San Francis. Laura Vargas from the interreligious council



shared the work they had done to raise awareness about climate change in the year towards the COP in Lima.

The slogan of the interreligious network was "the life of the planet is in our hands" and they shared with us the proceedings and philosophy of their work.

A group of school children shared a short play on the 4 colors of the world.

Desert Rose sang 3 songs: the "Om Mani Padme Hum", the "Gayatri mantra" and "Ave Maria" and the local band Siembra sang for everyone.

Valeriane Bernard from the Brahma Kumaris and other faith representatives gave a message to the assembly.

Read more at: www.environment.brahmakumaris.org

Annex 1. Opening of High Level Segment – Speeches.

UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, gave a message of urgency *"We must act now. There is still a chance to keep below the 2% temperature rise, but the window is closing. This is not a time for tinkering it is a time for transformation"*.

President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, represented the G77 and China. When he spoke on behalf of Bolivia, he addressed the gathered delegates as brothers and sisters. He said there was a need to base the agreement on the well-being of Mother Earth. He requested the delegates to orientate their decisions, taking into account the great wisdom and knowledge of the indigenous people, to have humility and to listen. He spoke of the principles and values of the Bolivian peoples ancestors, which state: Do not be a thief, do not lie and do not be lazy. He based much of his address on these three values asking the delegates not to manipulate or deceive in order to reach an agreement but take the necessary time to listen to each other, to have humility and not choose selfish interests over the collective interests of the people and mother earth.

President of Naru, Baron Wanga spoke on behalf of small island states by saying: *"There is a distressing human complacency of human suffering. As humans we put images of suffering out of our mind - we forget - that is what humans do. We also put off difficult decisions for another day - because that is what humans do. If now is not the time to make decisions to mitigate the coming catastrophe - then, when is? We need to lead by example and give the most venerable amongst us a fighting chance -- emissions must come down immediately"*.

Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Enele Sosene Sopoaga, gave a poignant address saying. *"I stay awake at night wondering if will we survive or will we disappear under the sea. What would you do if your nation had the immediate prospect of disappearing under the sea? There are others that share this burden of worry; many low-lying small islands are on the front line of this battle of climate change. If we allow the temperature to climb at the current rate, I believe that there will be hell on earth. If we do not do something now we are condemning ourselves and future generations to hell. Does your conscience allow you to do nothing and let this happen? In New York, in September, I was very proud of everyone who marched. It is time to ignore national leaders who do not believe in climate change, companies who only see dollars - they have no conscience - We have to see the children's eyes. We must not become extinct by riding on the back of those who have become extinct (fossil fuels!)."*

There are glimmers of hope - US and China - but it is still a drop in the ocean. Tuvalu believes a new agreement in Paris, must be comprehensive and effective.

I want everyone leaving this room to look into the eyes of children and see if they can imagine what sort of world those eyes will see in 10 years - will it be hell, or a world where the decisions we make today have made a difference."