

# Living in Harmony

Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative



**UN Environment Assembly, Nairobi, Kenya 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

## **Report 2 - 12-13<sup>th</sup> March – 2 days of interfaith advocacy**

### **Faith for Earth side event: Lifestyle Changes based on Values and Ethics – The Role of Faith in promoting Sustainable Consumption and Innovative Technology.**

The side event in the morning of Tuesday 12th March was co-organized between the Brahma Kumaris and CYNESA – Catholic Youth Network for Environment Sustainability for Africa. The panellists from faith-based communities elaborated in detail on innovative solutions for environmental challenges and that sustainable consumption/production is practical, urgent and the right way forward.



The session started with a visit by Inger Andersen, the incoming Executive Director of UNEP. She came to the Faith for Earth Tent to support the growing faith community in UNEP. She greeted us very powerfully:

*You are the faith leaders, you convene people. In the hands of faith and love we can all stand united and stronger. I get inspired and more committed when I meet all of you.*



The session was moderated by **David Munene**, Programs Manager of CYNESA, in a very lively and engaging way. **Rev Dr Canon Rachel Mash**, Environment Co-ordinator, Green Anglicans, Anglican Church of Southern Africa; said her key messages to the faith community was to be accessible, keep networking and to focus on water issues. Our individual change can become collective if we network. **Yusuf Ahmed**, Regional Director-East Africa, Islamic Relief Worldwide, stated that we need faith to make the changes needed in our behaviours. He shared the role of faith leaders in promoting environmental awareness among the communities in Kenya and Somalia. **Allen Ottaro**, Executive Director, Catholic Youth Network for Environment Sustainability for Africa, identified youth as protagonists of environmental sustainability. He said Youth are often said to be the generation of the future, but as our future is at risk, the youth are the generation of NOW.

**Golo J. Pilz**, Energy Adviser Brahma Kumaris participated via video (and thereby reduced his carbon footprint). The audience could see the amazing pictures of Brahma Kumaris solar installations in their headquarters in Rajasthan, India. Golo stated that a change in mindset is required for innovative technology and lifestyle change.



**Sonja Ohlsson**, Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative, showed that moments of reflection and bringing the heart into the equation will help us to break habits and make our lifestyle changes last for a long time.



Finally, **Iyad Abumoghli**, Ph.D., Senior Principal Advisor, Strategic Engagement with Faith-based Organizations, UN Environment, talked about the need of innovation and the 3 ways to be innovative.



**Pratibha Patel**, Assistant Regional Director of the Brahma Kumaris ended the side event with a powerful meditation for the earth.





Left to right: **Iyad Abumoghli**, Ph.D., Principal Advisor, Strategic Engagement with Faith-based Organizations, UN Environment - **Rev Dr Canon Rachel Mash**, Environment Co-ordinator, Green Anglicans, Anglican Church of Southern Africa - **Yusuf Ahmed**, Regional Director-East Africa, Islamic Relief WorldWide - **Sonja Ohlsson**, Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative - **Allen Ottaro**, Executive Director, Catholic Youth Network for Environment Sustainability for Africa - **David Munene**, Programs Manager of CYNESA,

### Faith for Earth co-ordination meeting

Faith for Earth, under the leadership of Mr. Iyad AbuMoghli, has had tremendous success over the past 2 years in convening faith actors into UNEP's work. Today was the first meeting of its kind. About 75 people came and were asked how to best contribute to Faith for Earth. Alexander Jura, Program Director for Major Groups (incl. NGO) came to the meeting expressing his happiness in seeing the faith-based community getting organized. He recognized the long-term input by the Brahma Kumaris.

We enjoyed the dialogues in small groups during the meeting.



Our stand provides a great opportunity to share with participants from the region.

Andrew from Nairobi at the stand.



### Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March

In the morning, the group were engaged in various tasks. The stand was busy as usual. Some attended the special area dedicated to beat plastic and marine litter. We are interested in this topic as our BK Environment Initiative has just launched the **Plastic Free BK Campaign**.





In the afternoon the Faith for Earth Side event took place in the Innovation Expo Hall. The BK had been invited to guide meditation in the panel called Faith-Based Initiatives for Addressing Environmental Challenges.



Left to right: **Dr. Iyad Abumoghli**, the Head of Faith for Earth Initiative, UN Environment - **Sonja Ohlsson**, International Coordinator, Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative; - **Rudolf Makhanu**, Director of Eden's Stewards - **Rabbi Yonatan Neril**, Founder & Executive Director, The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development; - **Dr. Chris Elisara**, Director Creation Care Taskforce, World Evangelical Alliance;- **Mr. Fazlun Khalid**, Director and Founder of Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences;- **Fr. Fletcher Harper**, Executive Director of GreenFaith/Living the Change Initiative.

Some points from the presentations:

- We can't solve climate action without making individual lifestyle changes. It would be like being a racist on a personal level but working on non-racial policies for governments.
- Personal self-restraint is needed
- To tell people to change is not working, and is often counter-productive. Give experiences instead, for example invite somebody for a vegan meal.
- We have to connect individual change to systemic change.
- The greatest renewable energy is spiritual energy
- Creation is cyclical, economic growth is linear.



Sonja was the only woman out of 9 speakers! She introduced her meditation by saying:

I am happy to represent the BK's and our growing interfaith community, but at this moment I am even more happy to represent the 3,5 billion women on this earth. The audience applauded. She encouraged everybody - men and women – to develop mother-like qualities to look after Mother Earth.



Urvashi and Pratibha meeting the Environment Minister from Ghana (to the right)

### Links:

UNEA4

<http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/>

Faith for Earth

<http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/faith-earth-dialogue>

BK Environment

<http://environment.brahmakumaris.org/>

BK Environment Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/bkenvironmentinitiative/>

BK Environment TWITTER

<https://twitter.com/EcoBrahmaKumari>