Building community resilience in the face of environmental injustice
(Sister Usha Jevan – Brahma Kumaris Spirituality)

Sister Usha offered an impactful input at the closing of SAFCEI’s (Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute) policy conference “A new vision for sacred life and living earth” It was held on 5-7 November 2019 in Johannesburg. The purpose of this conference was to create a space where faith leaders from Southern Africa and beyond can deliberate, share practices, and jointly develop policy positions on key issues such as

- Energy and climate justice;
- Consumerism and waste;
- Animal justice;
- planetary boundaries and biodiversity loss;
- food and climate justice
- land and water justice.

In her contribution, Sister Usha said the common denominator or instigator of most of the previous and current environmental problems points to humanity and its mission to use the earth only for its survival. We have lost the sacredness of water, air, the land and food. The problem is that needs are being superseded by greed. We have lost the virtue of generosity and the value of sharing. This loss arises from a sense of disconnectedness from the spirit. Inner fragmentation brings weakness and the integrity of the human spirit is compromised. The ability to know what is good or right is diminished.

However, when one is in harmony with the self, one can live in harmony with others (i.e., all life forms on earth). Sister Usha emphasized that we need to bring back the spirit to the human family. Restoring harmony between the self and the environment resides within our faiths through 3 primary qualities/principles below.

1. The gift of compassion. She said that we can only be compassionate when we don’t infringe on other’s rights. We need not limit compassionate to words but compassion needs to be practiced in action (walking the talk). But the walk is not easy when we have unhealthy habits. She mentioned that a deep spiritual awakening of inner consciousness is necessary to enable people to embrace and uphold moral values in everyday life and beyond.

2. The power of managing our thoughts is at our disposal. Consciousness is integral to the Brahma Kumaris way of life (e.g., living with simplicity, buying compassionately, and being frugal). This way of life contains the core values of spirituality found in our faiths. However, when we compromise our consciousness, we compromise our integrity including the ecological integrity. The way to regain consciousness is to free oneself from greed, selfishness, and the ego through reflective meditation.

3. The power of silence: inner silence offers the ability for contemplation, reflection and contentment. Silence is liberating. It brings balance and tranquillity by releasing individuals from busy-ness, suffering and the trials of life through the guidance, support and impact from the Divine. It can heal
the mind, body, and soul. We can use our collective and positive energies in finding the right decisions and that can make positive changes in our everyday lives.

She also underlined that many hungry, poor and vulnerable communities are deprived of the right to water and clean environs continuously. It is hard to react without confrontation. It is not ideal to fight fire with fire (or react in violence) since this can be self-destructive. However, we need spiritual empowerment to triumph over victimization from environmental injustices. We can work together if we tap into the power of the spirit. That can bring real transformation in the way we engage authorities and how we become the change we would like to see in our communities. We can then make it happen in others. These mechanisms require no finances and they are freely available to us. In conclusion she stressed that we need to wake up the consciousness within our various faiths and live with integrity. This is what makes the contribution of our faiths unique within the domain of environmental justice.