



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

INNER RESILIENCE, GLOBAL COMMONS

Statement for the
COP 27 – Twenty-seventh Session of the Conference of the Parties
United Nations Climate Change Conference
6-18 November 2022, Sharm El-Sheik, Egypt

Introduction

The climate emergency is the gravest threat that humanity has ever faced. It is a crisis both material – in terms of the very essentials and conditions of life; and spiritual – in terms of the anthropocentrism underlying our thoughts, words and actions. This has led to the erosion of spiritual and ethical values and a lack of awareness of the consequences of how we interact with others, nature, the Earth.

The Brahma Kumaris' (BKs) response to the crisis arises from a vision and way of life founded upon certain core principles. They include: an awareness that we are spiritual beings; the principle of *ahimsa* (non-harming); simplicity of lifestyle; and a sense of being part of one family.

Reaching out to others, and to the Earth, from the heart, we approach this global emergency as we approach all things, beginning with the need for a profound shift in awareness. It is also our deeply held conviction that, in the field of action, effective and lasting solutions must be comprehensive, just and sustainable.

In the words of Sister Jayanti Kirpalani, Additional Administrative Head of the Brahma Kumaris and main representative of the organisation to the UN in Geneva: "Nature has been a source of constant giving and has served humanity since the beginning of time. We now have to replace violence and aggression with *ahimsa* and not harm Nature, regarding it as sacred."

Background

International efforts to combat threats to the environment have been underway for at least half a century: In 1972, the Stockholm Conference broke new ground by bringing together leaders to discuss ways to protect the Earth and natural resources.

Since then, there have been successes, notably the 1987 Montreal Protocol to regulate ozone-depleting substances – the only UN treaty to have been ratified by all 198 Member States.

From the 1990s, UN Conventions have sought to limit global heating and desertification, and to protect biodiversity. Through the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) provides a forum for negotiating ways to combat global heating.

Within the UNFCCC, the 2015 Paris Agreement aims to restrict the heating to no more than 2C above pre-industrial levels (preferably 1.5C). Financial and technical support from the developed world for less developed countries is essential, to help them adapt to climate change and to mitigate its effects.

Implementing the Agreement is challenging, particularly since national efforts (Nationally Determined Contributions, NDCs) are not legally enforceable and do not take into consideration the overall needs of the whole planet, but rather the willingness and limitations of each party. Further, as we have seen in 2022, a political crisis in one region can be a major setback, for example re: the use of fossil fuels, with knock-on effects across the globe.

In its Sixth Assessment Report, 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted that extreme weather events – heatwaves, droughts, floods, tropical cyclones – have become more frequent and severe; and that human activities are a cause of global heating. Critically, many changes are irreversible over a long period of time, even if we act rapidly and drastically now; and the window of opportunity is limited.

Civil Society Organisations and the Voice of Youth

In the past four to five years, there has been a growing awareness of the climate emergency among people across the world. Civil society representation at COP meetings is expanding; working collaboratively, the sector is enhancing the impact of its message through social media, action at the community level and pressurising governments. Close collaboration between faith-based organisations has amplified the voices of those whose concerns were previously rarely heard.

As we approach COP27, to be held in Egypt, North Africa, in November 2022, we know that young people – those whose lives will be most impacted by the effects of global heating – often report feelings of climate anxiety and helplessness. We are also mindful that Africa is a youthful continent: 70% of sub-Saharan Africans are under the age of 30.

It is vital to welcome youth to the table, to listen to their concerns and ensure that all viewpoints are taken on board. Here, we may draw on an indigenous wisdom tradition of North America that emphasizes respect for the Earth and careful husbanding of her resources now and for the future: For example, the “Seventh Generation Principle” of the Haudenosaunee people urges that the decisions we make today should provide for the welfare of the whole people both in the present and for seven generations to come. Such an approach could be considered a blueprint for sustainability.

Our Messaging for COP27: Inner Resilience, Global Commons

Every expression of human beings is rooted in the subtle level of awareness. Our vision, words and actions flow from this; it follows that the world we have is the world created by the collective thoughts, words and actions of all. To bring about the major transformation now required, the Brahma Kumaris believe we need to start within ourselves, engaging in deep reflection in stillness and silence to connect with our original state of being and emerge our inner peace, compassion and wisdom. We then move our field of vision outwards to engage with one another with respect, generosity of spirit and equity. We provide support and encouragement to others, helping them do the same.

By transforming ourselves at the deepest level, we are empowered to bring about effective and sustainable change in the material world. Profound inner change brings greater clarity of thought and vision, a capacity for strong, effective decision-making and an openhearted approach to dialogue that supports understanding and connection with others. This is demonstrated by our active cooperation with many individuals and organisations, including interfaith platforms that explore and practise care for Nature and for all.

1. **Inner Resilience:** At the individual level, we find the inner resources to resolve any feelings of powerlessness, and to believe in the justice and commonality of our cause. Our inner resilience is founded on an understanding of who we truly are and of our place among humanity and in the whole system of Nature. This is what we mean by “authenticity.”
2. **Safe Space and Collaboration:** This vision moves us to accept our responsibility towards one another and Nature, understanding that we have a duty of care to act with foresight and consideration for all. We have the reassurance that, when we restore our inner balance and respect for natural boundaries, our place in the wider network of Nature is secure and we contribute to rebuilding balance in Nature so that she, too, is safeguarded.
3. **Trustees of the Global Commons:** The Earth’s resources are our common heritage, held in trust, to be used - rather than exploited - with awareness and gratitude. The more we adopt this approach, the more our generosity of spirit develops, moving from “I” and “mine” towards the concept of a global commons. With this worldview, we act from the position of trustee rather than sole owner, ever mindful of the welfare of present and future generations.
4. **Sustainability:** At its heart, a fair climate transition must be vision-led, unifying and firmly based on principles that allow a move from an extractive to a regenerative economy, moving from exploitation of natural resources for sale, to unlocking the positive contributions of Nature and society and using them sustainably, not exhaustively. Our commitment to these principles is illustrated by our work in India in the fields of sustainable yogic agriculture and solar energy projects, as well as many smaller projects globally.

Our activities in support of sustainability include the following elements:

- *A vegetarian, often vegan, diet*
- *A generally simple and modest lifestyle*
- *The practice of seva (service), which is central to our philosophy*
- *In India, pioneering Sustainable Yogic Agriculture, with measurably beneficial results in terms of crop yield and nutritional value, and social benefits to marginalised farmers and their families*
- *Also in India, promoting the use of solar energy at both micro and macro levels: from solar ovens for households to a 1 MW solar thermal power station installed at the BK headquarters at Mt Abu, Rajasthan*
- *Contributing, via our meditation practice, to the success of the Great Green Wall project across the African continent*
- *Collaborations with many individuals and organisations in a wide range of fields: leadership, the environment, interfaith work, youth, education, renewables.*

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU), with its spiritual headquarters in Mt. Abu, India, comprises a worldwide network of centers in 110 countries and is an international non-governmental organization of the United Nations accredited with General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); Associate Status with the Department of Public Information (DPI); Consultative Status with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); Observer Status to the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Observer Organization to UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); Flagship Member of Education for Rural People (ERP), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

OFFICE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

Suite 436
866, UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017
U.S.A.
Tel.: +1-212-688-1335
bk@un.brahmakumaris.org

SPIRITUAL HEADQUARTERS

Pandav Bhawan
Mount Abu 307501
Rajasthan
India
Tel.: +91-2974-238261
abu@bkivv.org

INT. COORDINATING OFFICE

Global Cooperation House
65-69 Pound Lane
London NW10 2HH
U.K.
Tel.: +44-20-8727-3350
london@brahmakumaris.org

Environmental webpage: www.environment.brahmakumaris.org

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