The Brahma Kumaris at UN Biodiversity COP17 in Yerevan, Armenia

October 19–30, 2026

First Three Days of Activities

Taking Action for Nature

The UN Biodiversity Conference COP17 opened in Yerevan, Armenia, bringing together governments and other stakeholders to reflect on humanity's relationship with the natural world and the urgent need to protect biodiversity. The Brahma Kumaris delegation began its participation by bringing spiritual values, reflection and practical tools for reconnecting with nature into the conversations and activities of the conference.

COP17 venue in Yerevan, Armenia

Welcome to Armenia

Biodiversity COP17 got off to a spectacular start! Following welcome speeches from the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, and other delegates, participants were treated to a theatrical performance combining music, dance and powerful multimedia images of the natural world.

The performance unfolded as a journey through humanity's relationship with nature. It began with the Voice of Mother Earth, expressing the beauty, wisdom and vitality of the natural world. A celebration of diversity reflected the richness of life and the interconnectedness of all living things. The narrative then shifted towards disconnection, as humanity's relationship with nature became fractured.

COP17 opening ceremony in Yerevan

A moment of silence invited reflection on this rupture and its consequences, before the performance moved towards restoration: a call to reconnect, heal and renew our commitment to protecting Earth's biodiversity. The Armenian Orchestra and Choir brought these themes to life through a powerful artistic expression.

It was a moving introduction to COP17, reminding us that this gathering is about more than technical discussions and government commitments. Human creativity can raise awareness, inspire reflection and encourage the attitudinal shifts needed to restore balance in our relationship with nature

Monday, October 19, 2026

Cultivating Ecoconsciousness Workshop

On Monday morning, the Brahma Kumaris delegation jumped straight into action with its first workshop, **"Cultivating Ecoconsciousness: Tools for Reconnecting with Nature."** Held on the first morning of COP17, before all delegates had arrived, the workshop welcomed 12 participants and three young volunteers.

The team facilitated an interactive workshop inviting participants to reconnect with nature.

Our model introduced six simple steps to cultivating ecoconsciousness:**Pause – Listen – Belonging – Awaken – Practice – Act.** Participants were guided through experiences connected to each step, beginning with meditation and grounding, and reflecting on what nature might be teaching them.

The exploration of belonging included the indigenous Mí'kmaw expression mi'stogoma ("all my relations") and an invitation to experience nature not as something outside ourselves, but as part of a larger community of relations. Participants then explored qualities nature can teach us: **respect, compassion, gratitude, humility, generosity, simplicity, peace, interconnectedness, responsibility and love**.

Moving into practice, participants considered small **seeds of change** such as gratitude, nature walks, forest bathing, tree planting, wildflower and food gardens, local and seasonal food, conscious simplicity, meditation, giving back to nature and intergenerational learning.

The workshop concluded with guided meditation and a reflection: "We are learning to live with both urgency and gentleness. To act boldly and walk humbly." The final question was: **What is Mother Earth calling you to do?** Many participants stayed after the 90 minutes to continue the discussion - a wonderful beginning to the team's service at COP17.

Cultivating Eco-Consciousness Workshop at COP17

Being Present and Sharing Blessing Cards

The first few days of a COP are often filled with practical matters: collecting badges, finding our way around the conference venue and organizing transport across the city. We are especially fortunate to have the BK family here, taking care of our needs and helping us navigate our surroundings. Their support enables us to serve others in quiet, often unseen ways—simply by being present, remaining stable and smiling amid the chaos, and looking for opportunities to share blessing cards with those we meet.

We have beautiful blessing cards featuring butterfly images, printed in both English and Armenian. It is magical to see how opportunities arise to share Baba's blessings with others on buses, in security queues and in conversations with fellow delegates. People often appreciate the cards as a different kind of energy—a moment of kindness and connection amid a busy day.

The Armenian-language cards are particularly well

received. People are often pleasantly surprised to receive a blessing in their own language and appreciate the respect shown for their culture and heritage. These small exchanges remind us that even simple acts of kindness can create meaningful moments of connection.

Sharing blessings and meaningful connections at COP17

Faith and Biodiversity Side Event

The first day also featured a side event organized by the Biodiversity and Faith Coalition. Twelve panelists shared their hopes and expectations for COP 17, along with inspiring examples of faith-led initiatives supporting biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration around the world.

The discussions expressed a shared hope for a world in which faith communities work across cultural and institutional divides to protect the web of life, uphold Indigenous rights and address the suffering of both people and planet.

Participants called for ethical finance, greater corporate accountability and increased investment in ecosystem protection. They highlighted the importance of collaboration that is inspired by faith and informed by science, while empowering young people and local communities through restoration, sustainable farming and community-led monitoring.

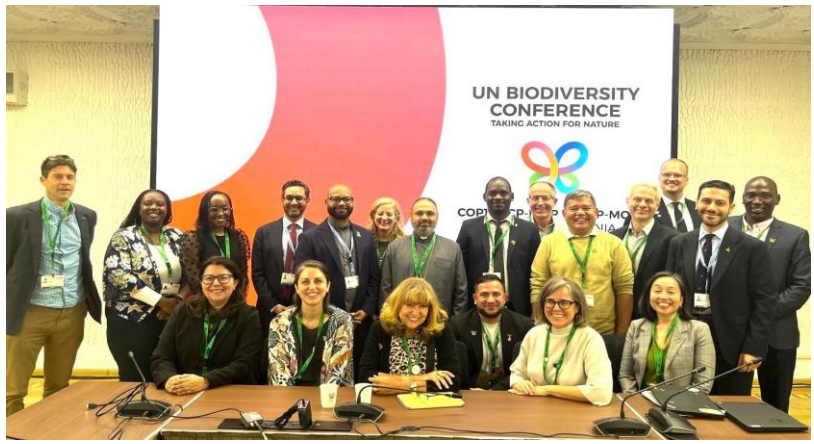
Grounded in spiritual teachings and a shared sense of responsibility, the vision is to build relationships that respect nature's integrity, recognize local knowledge and ensure that institutions listen to—and act on—the evidence and experiences of communities.

The discussion reinforced an important message: protecting biodiversity requires not only policies and resources, but also the values, relationships and collective commitment that inspire people to care for the living world.

Faith and Biodiversity side event at COP17

Tuesday, October 20, 2026

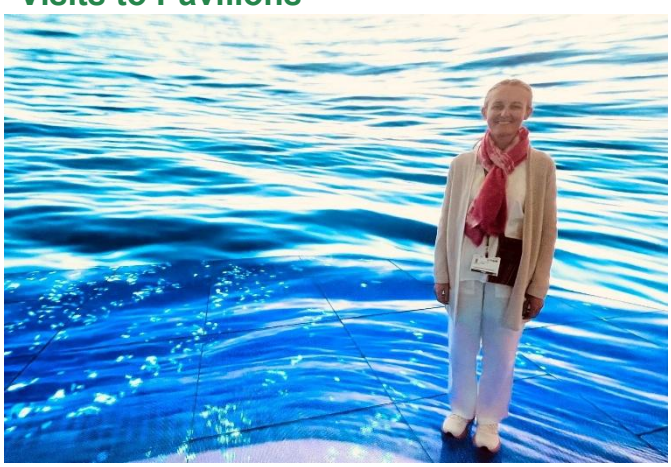
Meeting with Astrid Schomaker – CBD Executive Secretary | COP 17



An inspiring and meaningful exchange highlighted the importance of integrating ethical and spiritual values into biodiversity action. The discussion emphasized the need to strengthen collaboration between faith communities, the CBD Secretariat, governments and other stakeholders, while encouraging greater youth engagement and exploring the possibility of a Global Faith for Biodiversity Action Day.

For the Brahma Kumaris, this dialogue opens new opportunities to contribute through inner transformation, compassion, peace and respect for all life—translating spiritual awareness into collective action towards living in harmony with nature.

Visits to Pavilions



The Armenian Pavilion is beautifully designed. Walking through it feels like exploring a castle in the mountains, with the curators making thoughtful and fascinating choices about what to present.

One particularly interesting feature is the Armenian alphabet, whose letters are inspired by forms found in nature, including the shapes of birds and fish. This ancient alphabet offers a striking demonstration of the deep connection between Armenian culture and the natural world. The first letter is associated with the name of God, further illustrating the relationship between people, nature and the divine.

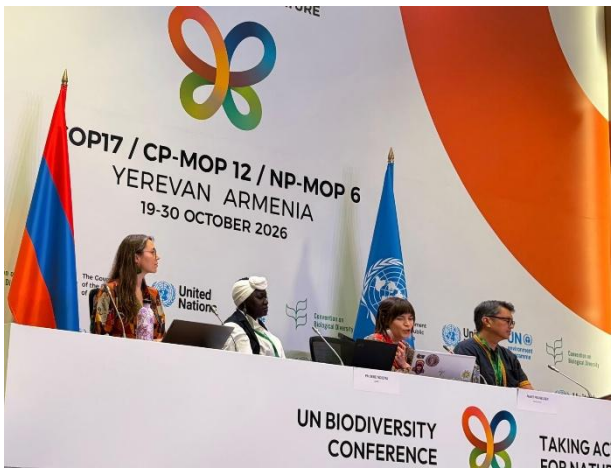
Statues of local wildlife also feature prominently, with different animals representing virtues such as strength, prosperity and perseverance. These animals are presented as carriers of cultural memory, embodying values that remain important to the Armenian people.

The pavilion offers a meaningful and powerful way to encourage visitors to reflect on their relationship with nature. Our thanks to the Government of Armenia for this inspiring presentation.

The China Pavilion was also welcoming, with sessions and demonstrations showcasing activities taking place in the country. **The IUCN and Nature Positive Pavilions** offered interesting programmes—and good coffee! We also visited a pavilion featuring a Lake Sevan project that demonstrated the effects of sound pollution on water and the

species living within it. It was a practical, visual example of how environmental challenges can be explored and addressed.

Attendance at Press Conferences



The first press conference focused on the essential role of **women in biodiversity conservation and restoration**. Despite their valuable contributions, women—particularly those from Indigenous Peoples and local communities—continue to face significant barriers to accessing funding and participating in decision-making.

The key message was clear: women should not simply be beneficiaries of biodiversity funding, but active participants in shaping decisions, with direct access to the financial resources needed to sustain their work.

The second press conference **highlighted the vital role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities** in protecting biodiversity. Their ancestral wisdom, deep connections with nature and traditional practices have helped preserve ecosystems for generations.

One powerful message stood out: for Indigenous Peoples, protecting nature is not simply a project or an obligation imposed from outside. It is an integral part of their way of life, rooted in ancestral wisdom and a deep sense of responsibility towards the land.

Protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples also means protecting biodiversity.

Lunch Time Faith Community Gathering

Each day at lunchtime, faith groups have an opportunity to meet at the Faith Hub to network, share perspectives and strengthen relationships.

During our first gathering, faith leaders discussed the prospect of meeting with the CBD Executive Secretary and explored ways to cooperate more effectively across the three Rio Conventions on biodiversity, climate change and desertification. One proposal was to establish a “Week for Nature,” during which faith communities around the world could organize biodiversity events and engage their respective constituencies.

The discussions also explored how to maintain stronger connections between COPs, including the possibility of holding a retreat during the intervening years.

We received encouraging feedback from the Secretariat, and these conversations are helping to strengthen the credibility and recognition of faith communities as partners in global biodiversity action. It was encouraging to see a shared commitment to moving beyond dialogue towards more sustained collaboration.

Launch of “Common Ground” Report

The Common Ground report explores how partnerships with faith groups can help nature recover through relationships, shared values and collective action. Drawing on seven case studies involving youth, women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and businesses, it demonstrates how diverse knowledge, moral leadership and complementary strengths can support meaningful ecological restoration.

Examples include community-led forest monitoring in Cambodia, Islamic-led reforestation in Pakistan, youth-led Buddhist initiatives and faith-business collaboration in Ghana.

The report identifies good practices for building inclusive and lasting partnerships that empower communities, influence policy and support biodiversity. Its practical framework is available at www.biodiversity.faith.

The launch discussions explored how faith-based organizations, women, youth, local communities and businesses can work together to protect and restore nature. Inspiring examples demonstrated how cooperation, shared knowledge and spiritual values can lead to meaningful and lasting action.

One beautiful message stood out: *“Nature recovers through relationship.”*

It was a timely reminder that restoring biodiversity requires more than technical solutions. It also calls for stronger relationships—with nature, with one another and across the many communities working to protect the living world.

Wednesday, October 21, 2026

Biodiversity Begins with Belonging – Reconnecting People, Communities and Nature

During this session in the Green Zone, participants learned how the Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative is awakening greater environmental awareness through collaboration, practical activities and learning with local and international partners.

We introduced six guiding principles that underpin our environmental activities, including nature walks, community clean-ups, vegetarian diets, meditation for Mother Nature and thought campaigns. Many of these initiatives have received recognition through awards from government bodies and national and international organizations.

We then focused on two key initiatives: *Prakriti Parivartan – Transforming Nature* and *Kalp Taruh – One Person, One Plant, One Planet*. Sister Vidhatri from ORC spoke with great enthusiasm about her involvement in these programmes.

Prakriti Parivartan is built around five pillars of transformation: conscious living, education, village, community and the Change Makers' Programme. Each pillar includes educational and training components, supported through partnerships with government, academic institutions and funding organizations, including CRS and bilateral donors.

We focused particularly on the Change Makers' Programme, which aims to certify 10,000 environmental champions. Participants are equipped with practical skills in communication, data recording and reporting, supported by a central dashboard to track progress.

Kalp Taruh takes an integrated approach, bringing together environment, technology and spirituality to help create a more sustainable India. To date, 1.6 million trees have been planted, with 1.6 million people involved in caring for them across 3,530 locations.

The initiative has also expanded internationally and has reached diverse groups throughout India, including schools, women's and children's groups, spiritual communities of different faiths, workplaces and police forces. Individuals in these groups pledge to become Environment Champions and commit to taking practical action.

We concluded the session by inviting everyone to repeat the Environment Champion pledge and identify an action they personally intended to take. It was an inspiring way to bring the session's central message to life: meaningful environmental change begins when awareness is translated into personal commitment and collective action.

Exploring the Green Zone

Following our morning session, the team took some time to explore the Green Zone, a popular gathering place where COP 17 delegates and members of the Armenian public can discover biodiversity initiatives, visit hundreds of exhibits by local NGOs and participate in educational sessions.

We were particularly impressed by the educational zone, developed through a partnership among local and international NGOs. The organizations have created a wide range of educational games and activities in a bright, welcoming space where children can play, learn about local biodiversity and discover ways to protect nature.

It was exciting to see so many creative educational resources being developed—initiatives that can continue to inspire learning and environmental awareness long after the COP has ended.

Another highlight was an immersive, multisensory forest experience. Visitors could take a virtual forest walk and even experience what it might be like to travel underground beneath a tree, where visual displays illustrated the communication and exchange of resources between plant species and fungi.

The experience offered a fascinating glimpse into the hidden relationships that sustain forest ecosystems, reminding us that nature is interconnected in ways we cannot always see.

Ocean Action for 30x30: Words That Change Our Relationship with the Ocean

This session, hosted by Faiths for Oceans—a global initiative mobilizing faith communities for sustainable ocean protection and governance—introduced an engaging glossary of terms related to the ocean. The glossary is available at oceans.faith/glossary.

Three speakers representing different faith traditions each selected words that held particular significance within their spiritual understanding of the ocean. These included sacred healer, teacher, sustainer, making the invisible visible, healthy ocean and rights of nature.

Juan, representing the BK Delegation, spoke about ‘inner and outer harmony’ and ‘Earth balance’, emphasizing the relationship between our inner state of consciousness and the way we interact with the natural world.

It was an interesting and stimulating session, exploring how the words we use can shape our attitudes, values and actions. By changing the language through which we understand the ocean, we can also begin to transform our relationship with it.

Ocean issues are taking an increasingly prominent place in discussions at COP 17, and the session was a valuable reminder that protecting marine biodiversity requires not only policies and commitments, but also a deeper sense of connection, respect and responsibility towards the ocean.

Off to a Good Start

Our participation in COP 17 is off to a good start! We look forward to learning and sharing in the days ahead and contributing good energy to the deliberations towards the implementation of the Kunming – Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).