# The Brahma Kumaris at UN Biodiversity COP17 in Yerevan, Armenia

October 19–30, 2026

## *Days 4 to 7 of Activities*

### Taking Action for Nature

The UN Biodiversity Conference COP17 continued in Yerevan, Armenia, bringing together people to reflect on humanity's relationship with the natural world and the urgent need to protect biodiversity. The Brahma Kumaris delegation hosted events, joined others' discussions and interacted with delegates to bring spiritual values, reflection and practical tools for reconnecting with nature into the conference.

## Thursday October 22, 2026

### Greeting Big Cats Project Director, India

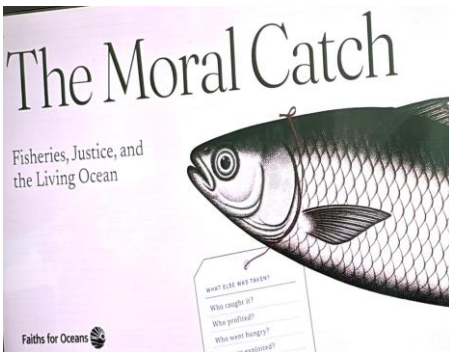
We had a beautiful encounter with a member of the International Big Cat Alliance, who passionately shared his commitment to protecting big cats and their natural habitats.  His message was powerful: If big cats can survive, humanity can survive too. By protecting these magnificent animals, we are helping to preserve the balance of nature and life on Earth.

We also had the wonderful opportunity to share a meditation commentary about the Snow Leopard which was developed as part of the BK Peace Drops for Ecorestoration Project.  He was delighted to learn others support the work with Big Cats.

View the video

## From Moral Responsibility to Ocean Action - Faiths for Oceans

The session marked the launch of ***The Moral Catch: Fisheries, Justice, and the Living Ocean*** and highlighted the Faiths High Ambition Coalition for Ocean & Nature Action (HAC). The dialogue brought together faith communities, scientists, conservation organizations and other partners to explore how moral responsibility can translate into concrete ocean protection. Juan, representing the Brahma Kumaris, spoke about compassion and how refraining from eating seafood should not be seen as a burden, but rather as an opportunity to explore more sustainable alternatives. Compassion allows us to expand our choices and, instead of simply taking from the ocean, gives us the opportunity to respect its living systems and allow them to regenerate naturally.



## Taking Action for Nature: the inner transformation behind the GBF

The Green Team hosted this event that emphasized that meaningful progress towards the GBF begins with transforming our awareness, attitudes and values. David introduced Two-Eyed Seeing, revitalized by Mi'kmaw Elder Dr. Albert Marshall, and shared insights into revitalizing Indigenous food systems shared by Dagara Elder Bern Guri of Ghana. The presentation highlighted the importance of world views, Indigenous knowledge and rights. It explored how shifts in consciousness inspire a new vision for our relationship with nature, leading to personal action and wider societal change.

The second part of the session showcased the BK Environmental Initiative and its practical approach to environmental transformation, grounded in six principles: **buying compassionately, using economically, learning continuously, sharing generously, leaving no trace and living with simplicity**. The Prakriti Parivartan (Transforming Nature) programme was presented as an approach encompassing conscious living, education, village and community transformation, and a Change Makers' Programme – intended to equip 10,000 environmental change makers, with the skills, tools and commitment to inspire sustainable practices and track community-level impact. The session concluded by inviting participants to consider how shifts in mindset and values can help address implementation gaps and accelerate action towards the goals of the GBF.

## A Peaceful Haven at COP17 – The Prayer Rooms

Amid the busy atmosphere of COP17, two dedicated prayer rooms, one for women and one for men, offer peaceful spaces to pause, reconnect with oneself, and recharge spiritually.

These quiet sanctuaries also provide beautiful opportunities to meet souls from different faiths and spiritual traditions, sharing a common aspiration for peace and harmony.

A precious space to turn inward, reconnect with the Supreme Soul, and renew our inner strength before returning to the activities of COP17.

# Friday October 23, 2026

## Common Ground: Faith Partnerships for Nature - Press Conference

This press conference brought together members of the interfaith community who are working to implement the Global Biodiversity Framework. The panel members worked with the simple idea that biodiversity is sustained through relationships, and its recovery depends on relationships as well. Faith leaders spoke about why relationships are central to delivering the GBF and presented a report featuring seven case studies and six pathways for collaboration going forward after COP17.

## Meaningful Connections with Indian Government Officials

The presence of Sr Vidhatri from the Om Shanti Retreat Centre (ORC), Delhi, provided valuable opportunities to connect with and share good wishes with *senior Indian government officials* attending COP17 in Armenia.

Sr Vidhatri met with *Shri Ashutosh Agnihotri*, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and Head of the Indian Delegation at COP17.  She also had a warm exchange with *H.E. Mr. T. Armstrong Changsan, Ambassador of India to Armenia*, following a special event marking International Snow Leopard Day at the India Pavilion.

These meaningful encounters offered opportunities to build connections and share the Brahma Kumaris' message of peace and harmony with nature.

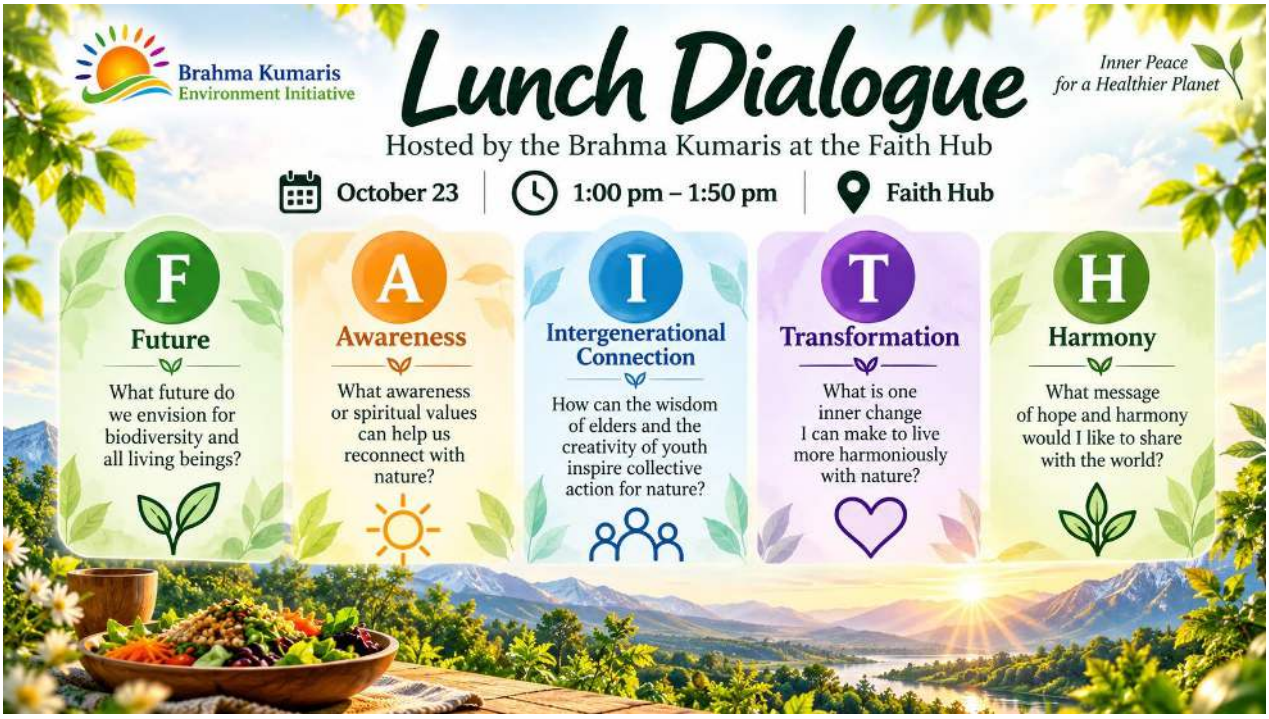
## Beyond Borders for Biodiversity – interfaith discussion

Hosted by the Colomban Mission this session brought together representatives of various faith organizations to discuss commonalities in their commitments to biodiversity and creating harmony with nature by 2030.

In a world where borders between people, geo-political alliances, religions and cultures separate people the discussion demonstrated how shared listening, awareness and values can lead to collaborations “beyond borders” to enable us to create a better world for all living beings.

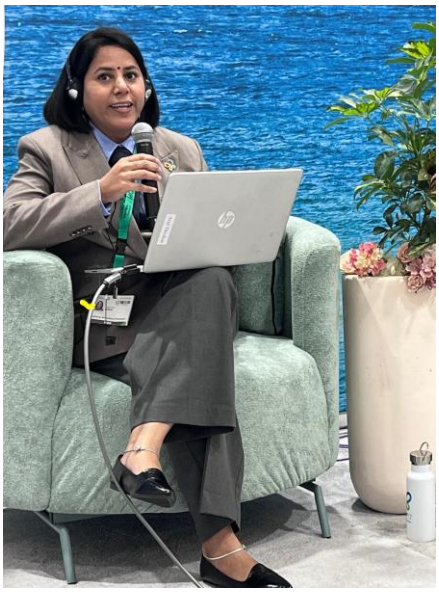
## Lunch Time Dialogue – Faith Hub

The Green Team hosted an informal dialogue with a small group at the Faith Hub. We called it “Checking your Faith” and asked participants to respond to any of five questions based on an acronym for F - A – I - T- H.




It was a beautiful intimate time of reflection that participants said they enjoyed very much.  It is a simple design for a dialogue that could be used again in the future.

## Women Leading Biodiversity Conservation: Lessons from India



COP17 has an Action Zone with lots of meeting rooms and small hubs for different sectors, the women's hub was right next door to the Interfaith Hub, where the BK team spent most of their time. Debbie was very interested the women's Hub sessions and the first one she attended presented the story of Women Rangers in the Government Parks in India. Although the numbers are growing, there are currently about 19% of Park Rangers are women who have been accredited by the Government for the protection of nature and biodiversity within the parks. They have the same responsibilities as the male Rangers as forest guardians and walk about 20 km per day with two assistants to monitor the physical nature in the parks – trees, plants, animals, insects – to manage any irregularities of the day – fallen trees, dead animals, etc. They also spend time educating community members who live beside the parks and to provide support if necessary to wives of their male counterparts. Through their own empowerment they offer educational services to women and men in communities and in government services to protect nature and biodiversity. Previously their special contributions went undocumented and now they are in positions to help shape priorities and decisions.

## Transformative Change for Biodiversity - Attendance at IUCN / SNAP Quebec

This excellent series of sessions explored why addressing biodiversity loss requires more than new international commitments: it demands transformative changes to the economic models, values, institutions, and production and consumption patterns that drive nature's degradation. Drawing on the IPBES framework, speakers examined how transformative change can support implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and the goal of living in harmony with nature.

What was truly inspiring in these sessions was the acknowledgement that it is not only transforming structures and practices that is necessary but also transforming the values that guide our actions. Through three sessions, participants explored how to define and measure transformative change, assess progress through meaningful indicators, and translate global commitments into practical action. Powerful contributions from leaders representing the CBD, IPBES, UNEP-WCMC and civil society highlighted the challenges and opportunities for moving beyond observation towards systemic change and solutions on the ground. In two open dialogues following the sessions David was able to make an intervention and celebrate the focus on values, offer the faith communities experience in helping people learn values and extend the discussion to cosmovisions and spiritual practices. The interventions were appreciated.

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## Attendance at Working Group Discussion II

We dropped in on this working group discussion – primarily to give Sister Vidhatri a taste of formal negotiations. Various sub-committees of the Working Group reported back, and each asked the chair for more time to finish their reports. The approval of a "Conference Paper" was on the agenda and we heard the discussion around some simple amendments to one paragraph about state responsibility in the context of each state's current status. We were only in the room for about 20 minutes, but the obstacle to approving the Conference paper seemed to be differing views of the European Union and Russia. It was a real taste of the challenges with negotiations in a multilateral context, and we spent a few minutes before we moved on sending good wishes and the power of respect and harmony to all the negotiators.

# Saturday October 24, 2026

## Transformative Change for Biodiversity - Attendance at IUCN / SNAP Quebec

David and Juan returned to the IUCN – SNAP Quebec sessions on transformative change. Saturday included three sessions: **Aligning the economy within planetary boundaries: inspirations for real transformative changes; Values, knowledge systems, and cultural dimensions; and Establishing guidelines to operate transformative changes as a foundational basis for living in harmony with nature. An impressive group of panelists once again shared their views, including David Obura** – Chair, Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and Founding Director, CORDIO East Africa; **Yesenia Hernandez** - Zapoteca Indigenous woman, biocultural advocate and **Ernesto Herrera** - Chair, Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy, IUCN. Both David and Juan were able to make comments and ask questions in the sessions. We were able to add to the discussion from a spiritual perspective and affirm our ongoing commitment for working for transformative change in awareness and personal value commitments that can lead to action on the ground. Videos of both Friday's and Saturday's events will be available on the SNAP – Quebec website and it was a wonderful networking opportunity to connect with others who acknowledge the importance of a values shift to support a shift in biodiversity.

## Field Visit to Geghard Monastery and Symphony of Stones

With Tatevik as our guide, Anne-Christelle, Vidahtri and Debbie enjoyed a beautiful day outside Yerevan. We visited three very old culturally significant sites, 2 man-made and one an amazing display of thousands of natural stone 'cylinders.

First, we explored Geghard Monastery which was a worship site that became a Catholic Monastery early 4th century. Carved out of stone with natural water sources, it was an amazingly sheltered set of caves turned into prayer cells. Then on to the Symphony of

Stones, where we were met with kilometers of towering natural stone structures – uniform cylinder-shaped stone reaching upward and towering over the landscape. Our last visit of the day was to the Garni church and temple, which sits on top of a small mountain looking out over the valleys and mountains of Armenia. Beautiful day.

## Meet and Greet / Eco-consciousness Reception with Friends

Saturday afternoon the BK Family in Yerevan hosted a Meet and Greet Reception at the Arpi Yoga Studio in Yerevan. Several contacts from COP 17 were able to join us and interact with souls who are friends and contacts of the BK Centre from Yerevan. Translation was provided in English, Armenian and Russian. It was a great opportunity to interact. Ecologists, engineers, university professors and schoolteachers from Yerevan were able to learn a little more about the COP and we all appreciated getting a perspective on environmental issues from Armenian people – unfortunately quite rare in the international hallways of the Blue zone. Green team members were introduced, and each shared an important value that they felt resonated with nature and the themes of the COP. People spoke about tolerance, humility, love, healing and harmony. It was a lively and mutually supportive interaction where everyone left feeling a sense of belonging.

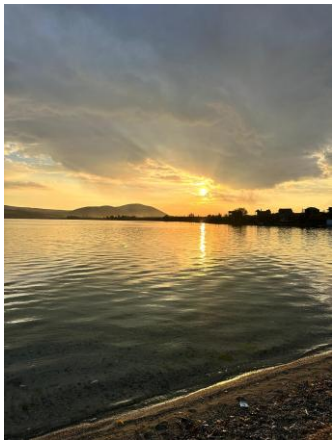
# Sunday October 25, 2026

## Visiting Lake Sevan

We had a wonderful field visit about an hour outside Yerevan to Lake Sevan to get a view of the landscape and bio-cultural diversity of Armenia. Much of the area is steppes with few trees, but we learned they are still an abundant sour of flora and fauna biodiversity. We climbed a hill on a peninsula to visit an old church built in 700 AD and to get a view of the lake in 3 directions. The team went to the beach (even though it was only 11 degrees) and everyone put their feet in the water. One brother even made a polar bear dip – and jumped in the ice-cold waters for a one-minute swim. Next, we visited a botanical garden and were able to take our lunch and share stories around a beautiful lunch spot in a glade of pine trees. As always, we were able to spread positive energy with those we interacted with and to share blessing cards. It was a wonderful excursion out of the city.

## The Nature and Culture Summit

An event that explored topics such as bicultural diversity, Indigenous knowledge and rights, spiritual and cultural values, action and financing.
Juan participated in the Culture Field trip on Sunday the 25th where he visited Guided tour Norashen Reserve (also known as the "Island of the Seagulls") and Sevan Botanical Garden, screening of the documentary film "Memory of Sevan: Fishing Culture" with that included a discussion with the local fishermen featured in the documentary, traditional songs of the Lake Sevan Basin, Creative platform for painting on Sevan stones. It was a great opportunity to meet other delegates and immerse in the beauty of Armenia's natural & cultural heritage.



## Meeting the Brahma Kumari Family in Yerevan

We had a beautiful evening on the roof top terrace with the BK Family in Yerevan.  Everyone shared that special moment when they joined the BK family.  It was a lovely evening of intimate story telling with delicious snacks and toli.  We are so blessed when we attend these international conferences that we have a local family to meet and interact with.

## Our Contributions to COP 17

As we pass the halfway point of COP 17 we realize the abundance of opportunities we have had to contribute to this important biodiversity conference.  We may not be contributing directly to the monitoring of the GBF in a formal way, but we are consistently bringing a message of eco-consciousness to all our activities.  Whether it is an event we hosted, a panel we were invited to join, our simple presence at an event or the connections we make sharing blessing cards and making and nurturing individual relationships, it is a valuable role we are playing in this gathering.  More is to come in the second and final week.