



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

The United Nations at the Turn of the Century: Global Issues, Global Actors, Global Responsibility

Statement to the

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The annual NGO/DPI Conference constitutes a gathering of diverse individuals from a variety of cultures but probably nearly all of us would agree that a major feature of life today is a sometimes overwhelming daily deluge of developments and details. Under this barrage of hour by hour, if not second by second, news and updates, it is easy to lose track of the broader trends and impulses from which each day's events arise. This annual conference, and to an even greater extent, the turn of the century, offer us the chance to step back and take stock of the deeper aspects and longer term implications of what is happening in our world. Whether we are in Rio, Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen or Beijing there are many issues which affect the international community. Practically each day reveals new and often worse instances of increasingly familiar and obvious problems and brings a louder call for urgent and immediate action by the global community.

Many of us here are deeply engaged in such action but the theme of this conference invites us to reflect on our actions and how effectively we are addressing the various issues before us. Identifying the issues is easy. Eloquent international documents set forth lofty ideals and noble goals for which we all strive yet much of our time is dedicated to struggling to prevent the continuing abuse or denial of those standards, norms and ways of behaviour which we recognize as the rights of all people. There are so many conflicts, problems and concerns in the world that most people know or have heard of the issues. However, there is also much unexplored territory in this domain, for example: To what extent can sustainable development and a higher quality of life actually and practically be achieved given the often severe conflict between the need for economic growth and the imperative of environmental protection and recovery? How can we create a safe and secure world when many individuals and countries benefit from the conflicts of others? How can information and rapid communication technologies be used to bring benefit to all people and not just a privileged few? And perhaps more importantly, how can the necessary political will be mustered to implement and put into effect all that is agreed or recommended?

There is no shortage of issues to address and so rather than restating them let us consider our response and responsibility with regard to such issues. Whatever it is, we need to be certain that we are not just cutting the tops off the weeds of the various world problems while their roots grow deeper and stronger, and spread wider, under the ground beyond our vision. For while we may, if we are successful, be neatly removing unsightly thorns which

prick our conscience this is often only a short-term solution and over time the situation in question is likely to become more acute and harder to remedy. In short, we need to be sure we are addressing the root causes and not just the symptoms of the Hydra-headed challenges that are today's global issues.

This is not, however, to deny the need for immediate remedial measures, for the pain and anguish must be addressed and alleviated. But this should be complimentary to and not a substitute for a longer-term solution. This requires us to be aware of the cause of human actions as well as the effects of the actions themselves. Just as a doctor will compliment his or her eyesight with x-ray vision, so too, we must also understand that problems are not just skin-deep and that we need to look beneath the surface and see what is the substance of the ailments afflicting the world family. This involves seeing and understanding what mental processes have precipitated present day circumstances and are prompting our destructive patterns of behaviour and courses of actions.

The view of the Brahma Kumaris, on the basis of study and observation throughout the past 60 years, is that the nature of the crisis confronting humanity today is fundamentally moral and spiritual. The issues with which we are concerned are all global in terms of their impact, presence and scale; but ultimately they are also individual in terms of their origin and effect, for the global community comprises a collection of individuals. The notion of interdependence highlights the fact that no one is an island and the actions of each one of us has some impact on the planet and the global community as a whole, even if on its own that impact is too small to be measured. It is therefore our own principles, values and motivations that must be considered for these are the basis of our actions and the state of the world today is the consequence of our collective actions. We are indeed all actors on the same world stage. However, while we may have learnt to act in highly sophisticated and accomplished ways we must now learn how to react to the consequences of our past actions.

Increasingly, recognition is being given to the fact that economic progress is not the best measure of the quality of human life and progress but this evolution in thinking must move forward another stage to acknowledge that our judgment, principles and actions must be guided by moral and spiritual considerations as well as social and economic ones. From global actors we must now become spiritual reactors - we must find spiritual responses to our changing and hazardous times.

Greater technological capacity has enabled us to have access to an unparalleled reservoir of facts and figures about every aspect of life on earth to such an extent that, for many, an incessant barrage of information and knowledge may seem a burden or liability, rather than an asset. In such circumstances knowledge does not fulfill its promise of setting us free. This is not just because of the sheer volume of material but also because the information and knowledge accumulated largely relates to the physical and ignores the spiritual and metaphysical. If knowledge is to set us free it must be knowledge of the type that results in wisdom rather than just being information flowing freely in quantity and accessibility without also paying regard to quality and purpose. We have tremendous technological capacities to communicate but growth in this field has yet to be matched by a corresponding development in our ability to trust, understand and respect others. Much has been achieved, thanks to a far greater understanding in the realms of science and technology, but the balance must be redressed by placing greater emphasis on understanding the spiritual and moral dimensions of human life.

In chapter 7 of *The Global Neighborhood*, *The Report of the Commission on Global Governance* there is a call for “commitment to core values that all humanity could uphold: respect for life, liberty, justice and equity, mutual respect, caring and integrity” and the report’s concluding chapter states that “all people share a responsibility.” If this is our global responsibility and what we wish to see in the world community then what is our corresponding individual responsibility? These qualities and values are universal and transcendent in nature; they go beyond all that is physical and temporal and have their origin in a source which is available to us all: our common spirituality. However the world of today is often not conducive to the expression, sharing and nurture of such inherent values, qualities and personality traits and so our responsibility is to make a conscious personal effort to develop, sustain and practice them ourselves in order to be sure that we do indeed live by them. The attention required is of a spiritual nature since such is the nature of these qualities. Further, our responsibility is no different if we wish others also to live by such values for just as when we wish to teach someone to read, we must first have that skill ourselves. So also, when we wish to create a peaceful, secure and equitable planet, and if we are urging others to live in such a way, then we as individuals must have and operate from those habits too.

Living Values: A Guidebook a publication of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University in honour of the United Nations' fiftieth anniversary, was written and published with that aim in mind: to develop an increased awareness and practicality of our original, inherent, spiritual values and to facilitate their practical expression in daily life. However, in order to accept the importance of, and act on, the basis of spiritual values we need to see ourselves as spiritual beings. This understanding of ourselves, and corresponding vision of others, can form a strong foundation on which to develop an integrated and across-the-board approach to the many interlinked issues that we face. The universal nature of spirituality brings with it an approach that is interdisciplinary. Thus instead of attempting to solve one problem, but in so doing, as is often the case, exacerbating or creating other problems, a more spiritual approach can help us to address the root-cause of interconnected problems in an integrated way. While this method may not be able to boast the seductive appeal of the quick-fix solution it is the basis of arriving at solutions with long-lasting effects. As the turn of the century approaches we must therefore turn within ourselves to explore the inner realms of our moral and spiritual identity, both individually and collectively.

This additional, spiritual perspective would strengthen and enrich the broad framework of existing United Nations programmes and activities. The understanding, practice and expression of moral and spiritual qualities, including peace, unity, tolerance, respect, love, care, cooperation, justice and empowerment, constitute the pillars on which the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations will stand or fall.

As we stand at this pivotal point of the UN at 50 and humanity on the threshold of a new century and millennium let us take the courage to look at the world, and ourselves, with a spiritual perspective. And as global actors let us invoke the strength, wisdom and directions of God, the ultimate Director of the divine drama that is life on earth. It has been very well said that the 21st century will be a spiritual one or not be one at all. We are not powerless for we have the capacity to think, choose and act - but let us be sure that the choices we make are the right ones.

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

The BKWSU is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in consultative status with UNICEF.
The University was founded in India in 1937 and has branches in over 100 countries worldwide.
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