



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

The Spirit of Habitat

Oral Statement to the

2nd United Nations Conference on Human Settlements – Habitat II

June 10, 1996, Istanbul, Turkey

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Brothers and Sisters, Om Shanti and greetings of peace.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address this assembly and to share with you some ideas about what we see as The Spirit of Habitat. And I would also like to pay tribute to Dr. Wally N'Dow, the secretary-general of the conference, who throughout the Habitat process kept reminding us of this spirit. I have also been fortunate to have had the chance to discuss some of the spiritual dimensions of Habitat as one of the Wisdom Keepers. A picture tells a thousand words and the Habitat logo tells a story of the world, the home and people. It reminds us that Habitat II is not only concerned with cities and settlements; it is also about the rights that we have as human beings.

Although on an outer level we may have come from many different countries and cultures, within our hearts I think we hold the same vision of a better world of greater security, peace, justice, understanding and respect for all people. Once we have seen in the eye of our mind that such a world can and should exist, it is our responsibility to help make it happen. And the world will only be a better place when its inhabitants are better people. The past sixty years of my life have been dedicated to this – to realizing a vision of a better self and a better world. Houses can be built with bricks but it is what is in our hearts that build a home. Not all of us can work with bricks but all of us can work with our hearts and it is from there that we must generate will-power and motivation. There is not only something that all of us can do but something that all of us must do. When a family is facing a crisis, responsible family members may have to make sacrifices to help the family as a whole. The crisis that we are facing has many aspects; countless numbers of our brothers and sisters are without proper food, water and housing and their basic rights are ignored. But all these problems have one root: poverty of social and human values resulting from moral and spiritual decline. Each one of us must therefore look within and check: to what extent is my consciousness and personality still affected by hatred, greed, anger, pride and selfish desires and dependencies. Our actions are an expression of our personality which is formed out of the values we choose to live by. The values that we live by depend on how we define and understand ourselves. So we must see to what extent our personal values are in conflict with the values in our vision of the better world we seek.

We are all here because we recognize the need for action and feel that we can make a difference. I recognize and salute the commitment I have seen and heard people express --

a commitment to put into practice many plans of action for a better world. To give strength to these plans and wishes we must lay a firm spiritual and moral foundation. The two cornerstones of this foundation are firstly sacrificing our weaknesses and selfish desires and secondly deepening an understanding of ourselves as moral and spiritual beings. Through spiritual study and practice we can bring about a change in our consciousness so that we know and experience ourselves to be spiritual beings and are aware of the eternal truth that I am a soul. As this consciousness becomes stronger and more natural it can lead to a change in personality so that we balance doing good with being good. This balancing of consciousness and action is the foundation of a long-term change in lifestyles and the human condition. It is spirituality that can refine and uplift our being and doing. This process of personal growth is also easier when time is given to silent reflection and contemplation on God, the Supreme Source of truth, justice and love and the One who is remembered as the Creator of the Garden of Allah.

As we leave this conference our commitment must be to make a personal and collective investment in moral and spiritual education. The Brahma Kumaris are inviting global educators to help develop a curriculum entitled "Lifelong Learning: An Education in Values". and would be pleased to work with others in this field. Our most valuable resource is not so much right in front of our eyes as right behind them and it is this resource – the soul—that we must develop as the key to the city of the 21st century. As Shakespeare asked many years ago: "*What is a city but its people?*", to which might now be added: "*And what is its people without their soul?*".

Thank you.

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

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The University was founded in India in 1937 and has branches in over 100 countries worldwide.
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www.bkun.org

OFFICE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS
Suite 436
866, UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017
U.S.A.
Tel.: +1-212-688-1335
Fax.: +1-212-504-2798
bkun@bkwsu.org

HEADQUARTERS
Pandav Bhawan
Mount Abu 307501
Rajasthan
India
Tel.: +91-2974-238261
Fax.: +91-2974-238952
abu@bkivv.org

INTL. COORDINATING OFFICE
Global Cooperation House
65-69 Pound Lane
London NW10 2HH
U.K.
Tel.: +44-20-8727-3350
Fax.: +44-20-8727-3351
london@bkwsu.org

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