



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Religious Intolerance

Oral Statement to the

Millennium Assembly Regional Hearings

“The UN: Moving into the 21st Century”

organized by the

UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

July 7 – 8, UNECE, Geneva Switzerland 12 April 1999

Mr Chairman,

Religious intolerance seems to have peaked to a point of conflict or even wars in many corners of the world. Examples of these abound on every continent and amongst adherents of all the major world’s faiths. Even those religious traditions namely Buddhism and Hinduism committed to the tenet of non-violence have witnessed situations where people of those faiths have reverted to violence.

In resolution 1998/18, adopted at its fifty-fourth session, the Commission on Human Rights urged States “to promote and encourage through the educational system, and by other means, understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief.”

The Special Rapporteur is of the view that prevention can be ensured mainly by the establishment of a culture of tolerance, notably through education.

Madame Chairperson, you may be aware that research undertaken in the 1980’s by the University of Minnesota and other studies since then, confirm that discrimination escalates as self-esteem degenerates. Where there is a high level of self-esteem, discrimination is considerably reduced, and where there is a low level of self-esteem, discriminatory behaviour increases. This perhaps explains to a certain extent the situation we find ourselves in today. One of the crises facing humanity today, paradoxically is an age known as the information age, is the question of knowing the self, and coming to terms with the identity of the self. For a long period of time, the association of human identity has been with physical external factors such as place of birth, birth in a specific culture or religion, or family of birth. The culmination of this has resulted in the loss of the essential ‘human’ or spiritual identity of the individual. The lack of self-esteem is directly connected with this. Self-esteem creates respect for the self and this in return generates respect for all others and also all forms of life.

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University since its inception in 1937 has provided an education for the development of the human individual through the emergence of innate divine qualities, values, inherent in each person. There is the recognition of the original state of goodness of each human being.

In 1995 an international project: Sharing our Values for a Better World, led to an educational programme called: [‘Living Values’](#) now operational in over 70 countries worldwide in partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO.

There have been consistent references to the subject of education being the means to develop a spirit of respect for human dignity and equal rights over the years. The Special Rapporteur refers to this in the context of the 1968 International Conference in Teheran, in the same year the request of the General Assembly to the Member States for the same, at the UNESCO International Congress in 1978, again the General Assembly resolution of 23 December 1994 proclaiming the 10-year period beginning on 1st January 1995 as the UN Decade for Human Rights Education.

The intention is quite clearly visible, however to achieve the realisation of this vision requires a commitment to creating a culture of values through personal transformation. Realisation, attention and determination are key factors in personal change that can definitely lead to changes in the world and the creation of a better world.

Madame Chairperson, as the Special Rapporteur notes in the “Conclusions and Recommendations: “despite the adoption of successive international human rights instruments guaranteeing the right to freedom of religion and belief, one cannot help noticing the persistence of manifestations of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief in countries”, in Europe in particular.

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University requests that a Special Rapporteur be appointed in examining the situation in European countries in particular that have listed organisations as sects without proper investigation or the opportunity for organisations to demonstrate their work and values.

Thank you for your kind attention and consideration.

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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