



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Human Rights and Human Values

Oral Statement to the

55th Commission on Human Rights

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Madame Chairperson, Your Excellencies, Friends, greetings of Peace

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains a powerful reminder of the fundamental human standards, which we all want, and need, to live by. The Declaration not only reminds us of our rights but also of the responsibilities that we have towards ourselves and our fellow human beings. The vision of what we want to achieve - the universal observance of these fundamental rights and freedoms - is clear. And yet notwithstanding the universality of the Declaration, its standards are often relegated to the back seat of social progress, leaving exploitation, violence and injustice to prevail in one form or another. It is as if the link between aspiration and action, between principle and practice, has been severed, exposing a gap between what we believe and accept as correct and what we actually do.

This raises the question of why we are unable to do that which we want to do: to implement clear and cherished aspirations that make for a better quality of life for all. It may help if we start by clarifying the foundation on which the Declaration's values are based. The reason why human beings are entitled to rights and values such as life, liberty and security of person, freedom of thought and belief is because the human person has worth - because the human form is the vessel within which resides the human spirit. It is not matter itself, mere flesh and bones, which gives rise to such rights but the soul that animates such matter and without which the human body is little more than an empty shell. The physical elements themselves that make up the human body also exist elsewhere and are not themselves worthy of such rights. Only the soul, that sacred spark of divine light, the origin of our consciousness, personality and will-power, can lay claim to such rights. Thus we need to understand and accept our own spirituality - understand the essentially spiritual nature of our own identity - before we can understand why we have such rights, and their corresponding responsibilities, and then respect and observe them.

Furthermore, while we should remain conscious of our own worth and rights, we must not forget the worth and rights of others and the impact that the expression or fulfilment of our rights may have on others and their rights. Rights carry with them a responsibility as to the way in which we exercise such rights. We have to see humanity as one human family and think in terms of the fulfilment of collective rather than just individual needs and rights.

We must also understand that denying another's freedom for the sake of my own is ultimately self-defeating and misguided; if I deny or limit another's freedom then sooner or later my own freedom will be diminished. One of life's natural laws also states that I can never hope to keep receiving without first giving. And I have no right to deprive another of a right that that person has because of who he or she is - a fellow human soul and child of God.

Socially responsible behaviour that leads to people's human rights being respected requires that we make the right choices. In this regard, we should remember that our attitudes and actions find their roots in, or are derived from, our understanding. With no understanding our actions are often directionless or liable to be pulled by a passing whim rather than a conscious and committed choice. With some sense of understanding we can at least be guided by our conscience. However with a clear understanding firmly rooted within, we can be empowered by our conscience: it will drive us and give us the strength to act notwithstanding that some personal sacrifice may be involved. We will be happy to make that sacrifice for the sake of fulfilling a higher goal. An active conscience that is a crystallisation of clear understanding will not lie down and sleep but must speak and find expression in action.

To reaffirm faith in the dignity and worth of the human person we must first understand why we have such worth and then experience it. Spirituality will enable each of us to find our soul, the only aspect of our identity which is common to all humanity, and which gives rise to the universal rights of the Declaration. It is only when we have a spiritual perspective that we can be free and equal and can truly act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood as the Declaration urges us to.

Human rights are derived from the worth of the individual and that worth can be seen in the exercise of reason and conscience and the expression by the individual of values such as respect, freedom and justice. We must bring those human values back into our personal, professional and societal relationships to reaffirm the worth of the individual. When we do so, human rights will be the unwritten laws, which will be upheld and followed naturally by everyone, everywhere, as a way of life.

Each individual, and all of us collectively, determine the future of humankind. The more we accept the personal challenge and responsibility of bringing these values back into our daily lives, the more certain and secure the future will be. The method is to develop a greater awareness of our own spirituality and inner goodness. The choice, and the consequences, is ours.

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

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