



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Informed Individuals: Spiritual Societies

Statement for the

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Access to information has long been a powerful driving force for progress and so there is much to be welcomed in humanity's increased capacity to create, disseminate and make use of information. Proof of this can be seen in the fields of medicine, education, commerce and the environment, to name but a few. Yet there is much to be concerned about as well – not just the obscene divide between haves and have-nots, the lack of transparency and equity, the abuse of information and the misapplication of technology – but their underlying root cause: a world in which there is a poverty of practical wisdom, human values and sometimes plain common sense. Quantity of information is important but so is its quality, relevance, accessibility and distribution, and the ability to make use of it and create meaning. Knowledge is power and the challenge we face is to make the most of and share the new capabilities at humanity's disposal, and the governance and application of them, in ways that truly bring benefit and improvement to the lives of all people.

The potential afforded to us by the convergence of the ability, capacity and skills to generate and capture new information, and the means to access, absorb, use and transmit it cheaply and widely, is indeed tremendous. But like all capabilities it can be used in a variety of ways, and a concerted effort, based on clear guiding principles, is required to ensure that it is appropriately applied. Perhaps above all, we need to be clear about the vision that we hold for tomorrow. What kind of world do we wish to see? What future do we want to help shape for humankind? How do we see ourselves? Do material goods really have the redemptive power that we seem to give them? And what kind of relationship do we have, and want to have, with others? Such questions are not an invitation to indulge in a fantasy world divorced from reality so much as a wake-up call so that knowledge and technology are harnessed and managed in a coherent, synergistic and effective manner for participatory, collaborative, sustainable human development.

We must also remember that while the latest technology, open source software and public domain information are part of the solution, they are not going to end the scourges of poverty, disease and exclusion overnight. Further, they will typically not be the starting point for many, as there are a profusion of more fundamental needs to address first. Further, technology is used in a social context by individuals with varying preferences, systems and ways of living that must be taken account of, including those who prefer a simple life closer to nature. We also need to remember that while part of the answer we are struggling for may be more things, a larger part of the answer revolves around the use that

we make of things, the value that we give to them, and the way that we relate to ourselves and other people.

The information society promises a world of greater connectivity but there are many instances of people today being less connected with each other and their own selves. We must not allow the powerful machines that are being made available to us become our masters, distract us from who we are or obscure the purpose of life. As distances diminish and boundaries dissolve, we need to re-learn how to live our own lives, striving for a culture of human values, of interdependent rights and shared responsibilities, that respects and appreciates cultural, linguistic and social specificities. Let us globalize a civilisation of peace and wisdom, an ethic of inclusion, solidarity, dignity and compassion, founded on the understanding that there is but one race, the human race, expressing itself in many diverse co-existing traditions and cultures. In doing so, it is meaning, wisdom and love, eternal notions of truth and timeless values that must guide us.

In order for an inclusive home for all and a culture of human values to emerge from our fractured world of extremes and exclusion, we must now tap the transformative potential of spiritual knowledge. The divide between the haves and have-nots, the missing link between principle and practice or intention and action, will not be bridged without the awareness of the spiritual dimension of the individual, the consequent one-ness of the human family and the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood that arises from this. In this regard, education must be at the front line of our efforts as it is a fundamental strategic instrument for personal and social change and development, the attainment of peace, freedom and justice. Human capacities must be developed so that the information society is an educated society comprised of individuals with those values, attitudes and skills needed to handle tough challenges and make the most of the opportunities of contemporary possibilities and a globalizing world.

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University therefore believes that achieving our vision of an inclusive development-oriented, people-centred information society requires that we place a high priority on learning and education that is not only functional, practical and relevant in content but which also has spiritual and moral principles and values at its heart and the overall development of the whole person and society as its aim. For over 60 years the Brahma Kumaris have been offering a very practical, accessible and yet effective education in self-awareness, spiritual principles and values and a personal practice of reflection or meditation. Recently, the University has developed specialized e-learning courses to facilitate the inner development of the individual. These courses complement vocational training and skills-development programmes and will be piloted free of charge, in cooperation with various institutions within Africa, from March 2006; they cover: Empowerment of the Self through Positive Thinking; Stress Management; Building Self-Esteem; and Inner Harmony through Positive Affirmations and Meditations.

Information must now be refracted through the prism of spirituality so as to give the light of wisdom by which we may lead our lives as one human family, a society of free human beings, not just a society of information. It is a task for all of us, in quiet moments of reflection and decision, to bring about newness and growth in ourselves, followed by committed action and personal practice. Indeed, it is only when we change our inner world that we can begin to bring about change in the outer world around us.

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. It has been affiliated to the United Nations Department of Public Information since 1980.

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