



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Unfinished Business: Effective Partnerships for Human Security and Sustainable Development

Statement for the

United Nations 59th Annual DPI/NGO Conference

September 6 – 8, 2006, United Nations Headquarters, New York, USA

To describe our work for human security and sustainable development as unfinished business may seem a harsh judgement: can such work ever really finish? Is it possible to attain security in its fullest sense for every individual in the world? And for each of us to benefit from development that takes place in a truly harmonious, inclusive, non-detrimental, sustainable way? It does not take much knowledge of recent events and descriptions about the state of the world to fall back on the view that such notions, and the Millennium Development Goals, are unachievable ideals, notwithstanding admirable accomplishments of recent years. But perhaps it is our very way of thinking and behaving that has taken such aims out of reach and keeps them so elusive. For sure, if humanity does continue down a path paved with injustice, discrimination, short-sightedness, greed, arrogance and violence these objectives will be a bridge too far. On the other hand, if, as one human family living in the common home of one planet, we can embrace a higher and deeper way of understanding ourselves and our relationship with each other and nature, can we not dare to have such dreams? And do the values and wisdom that they are based on not bring with them the responsibility to work for their realisation? And the strength to help make that happen?

The real unfinished business: Spiritual development

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University is convinced that the real unfinished business is that of our own development as human beings. Human security, sustainable development, peace, justice, freedom and dignity will be no more than impossible illusions until we have crossed the frontier that separates us from our own hearts and souls. We must find a secure place within ourselves in which to anchor an understanding of the innate spirituality that is the essence of what it means to be a human being. The understanding, experience and awareness of our inner being, and the innate positive qualities of the soul, are the foundation on which all other efforts for development are based. We will not be able to get the outer world in order until we have first learned to get our inner world in order. We must draw on spirituality and a reinvigorated sense of our own integrity to dissolve the conflict between stated aims and other factors. The business that we must complete, if we wish to see positive changes in the world around us, is for us all first to bring about those changes in ourselves and exemplify the qualities and ways of living that we call for.

This is not to ignore the tangible or material aspects of development work but to point out

that our goals and efforts have no foundation and no sustainability unless this inner development also takes place. Nor is to say that it is a task for us each to carry out in isolation; partnerships, solidarity and a pooling of skills, resources and know-how are called for. But such partnerships will not arise out of or survive in a vacuum; they depend on that first partnership of all: the partnership and cooperation between our head and heart, between what we know we ought to do, and perhaps even want to do, and what we actually do.

It is the inner self, the spirit, that is the basis of the worth and dignity of the individual. And it is with a spiritual perspective that we can recognize and support the worth and dignity of others. The awareness that spirituality constitutes the essence of every human being also brings the recognition that, sharing a common identity, we are truly fellow members of one human family. Ultimately, our security, both individually and collectively, is born of this awareness. Likewise, partnerships are facilitated when there is the understanding that the world's people are but one family of many sisters and brothers, each of whom should be treated as such, with a vision of respect, responsibility and inclusion.

A partnership of head and heart, body and soul

It has become more than clear that our development aims and an effective response to the many global issues on the world's agenda cannot be handled by any one organisation, corporation or government alone; certainly we must work together, with everyone bringing their respective skills, know-how, ingenuity and experience to the task. It is also apparent that development outcomes or conditions of security and freedom cannot just be mandated by declarations and statements, or by approaches that rely solely on military, technical or political prowess. We must continue to make clear, specific, time-bound action plans, and commit to them, but they should include the missing link of moral and spiritual standards and principles and an integrated and holistic view of life in envisioning relationships and structures that involve all concerned as true partners and fellow-travellers along the road towards mutual security and development.

Most importantly we must all remember that even the best of plans or most beautiful of goals will take us nowhere unless each of us supports them with spiritual understanding, awareness and practice. Like a chain, a partnership is only as strong as its weakest link – and we are all interdependent and interlinked partners in the human story. It is for each of us to make sure that we are part of the solution and to give strength and support to those around us.

If our way is the way of the heart, guided by timeless truths, and our actions are based on spirituality, self-respect and selflessness, there is every reason for courage, hope and confidence to be our companions as we embrace the challenge of achieving that which may not be so easy but is certainly possible.

So the shift that must take place is to adopt the policy and practice of incorporating the spiritual in the development agenda and actions. The vision of spirituality is holistic and it recognises both the material and spiritual. The spiritual must be welded in partnership to the material in all aspects of life, starting with our own bodies, if the material is to have the meaning and purpose that we look for and to bring with it the fulfilment that it promises.

Sustainable development

Our understanding of the world has increased tremendously in the last century or so. One of the important research methodologies in the growth of scientific knowledge has been a reductionistic approach through which we have studied the smaller parts that constitute the greater whole. This has enabled us to come to terms with molecules, atoms and invisible

electrons and the like. The achievements this has brought are many, and yet we have also seen that there are limits to what we have learned. Thus for example while we have identified the DNA sequence of genes, our understanding of the phenomenon of life as a whole remains incomplete, and it is apparent that “dark” matter and energy are far greater than known matter and energy, so making clear the need for a holistic approach to the world and life if we are not to miss the wood while looking at the trees. The development agenda too must embrace such a holistic methodology and approach.

So we must not look at any aspect of human activity as being an isolated entity in itself but see both other activity, even if apparently separate in time and space, and the surrounding environment, as constituents of the greater play of life overall. By integrating our knowledge of parts under the great canopy of the whole that is spirituality, we may seek out the ways of being and doing that align us with the rhythms and cycles of life and nature and ensure that our behaviour and interaction with others and the natural world is respectful and responsible. While this may seem abstract, it is the basis of the practical wisdom that must underlie the complexity of life and the myriad ways and forms of such interaction if it is to be harmonious, just, inclusive and sustainable. Trade, the use of technology and resources, agricultural productivity and liberalisation, supply and distribution chains, rural development and involvement in the global marketplace all affect real people and places in tangible ways but in considering them we must not lose sight of the greater scheme of things, nor of the fundamental aim of bringing benefit to humanity and building a better world for all.

Recent events in the world of science offer us another useful lesson: the need to keep re-assessing, questioning and honing our beliefs and practices. Most of us took for granted the common knowledge that Pluto was a planet in our solar system, but a few took it upon themselves to keep questioning this basic fact and, notwithstanding its almost universal acceptance, to point out anomalies that had sufficient weight for the prevailing view eventually to be overturned. We too must keep researching and reviewing our basic assumptions, and be prepared to change them.

At a time where so much of our outer world has been explored there is perhaps no better place to start our research than within the laboratory of our own minds by spending time in stillness and contemplation, listening to that quiet inner voice that tells us so much, when we let it speak. In a fast-forward era of rapid-fire action and decision-making, the practice of taking time out for the self in reflection not only helps us keep in touch with our inner being, deeper identity, values and principles, but also provides a nurturing space within which to be able to see more clearly what needs to be done. Sustainable development in the outer world will remain a dream until we also focus on the development of ourselves as individuals and members of global society.

Human security

As with most issues on the global agenda, the question of security is multi-dimensional. It is easy to look for, and see, threats and enemies all around; but we must not allow the basic human goodness that unites us to be hijacked by an us-versus-them logic that only divides us. Too easily, this generates and exaggerates over-simplistic perceptions of good and bad while running contrary to the general populace’s goodwill and the shared concern to build a future for our families and children. Just as the development agenda will not be carried out by reducing societies and parts of the social fabric into tradeable packets of money, so too, peace, security and harmonious co-existence cannot be attained by thinking the worst of others and imposing militaristic force or violence.

It is again a holistic, life-affirming approach that is called for, built on the recognition that

the deeper realities that unite us (such as our common human identity, nature, concerns and experiences) are far greater and stronger than that which divides us. So instead of letting ourselves be led down a nihilistic road to nowhere, or blinded by our own self-seeking agendas, we must walk the path of self-awareness, fairness, and mutual respect. Old assumptions and ways have failed to bring us peace and security and often only seem to take us away from facing reality, with its possible attendant discomfort. We need to change our mode of thinking and acting. Grounding our approach in spirituality will help remind us of that which is possible while also encouraging us to embark on necessary processes of engagement, compromise, reconciliation and change.

Development and security start with the self

The targets that we have set ourselves in the Millennium Development Goals, and of achieving human security and sustainable development, amount to ambitious tasks, as the MDG indicators show. Yet they are clearly feasible in technical, financial and practical terms. The political will to meet them has been stated. Partnerships are required, and some are being formed, but by themselves partnerships alone will never be enough. The question as to what extent these goals are or are not attained is, in reality, a very human question. To reach the destination that our vision has set, can we overcome the human obstacles and weaknesses that lie in our way, our prejudices, suspicions, short-sightedness, selfishness, arrogance and greed? Can our hearts help take us to the place our heads tell us we can go? The first security that we must pay attention to therefore is to keep ourselves, our aspirations, thinking, purity of intent and commitments, secure from the ever-present and corrupting threat of such weaknesses. For sure, this is a task and obligation that no one can ignore, for these goals are not just political commitments but moral responsibilities that all of us owe to each other to enable our fellow human beings to live in peace, security and dignity.

While development and security objectives involve responsibilities towards others, the first responsibility must be for the self: to discover and put to good use the multiple capacities and abilities that each of us has, to keep learning and continue improving ourselves. It is clear that there will be no lasting positive change in the state of human affairs without there first being such a change in human hearts and development of the self within each of us. The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University envisions a society of peace, dignity, well-being and fulfilment for all people. In cooperation and partnership with the United Nations, Member States, civil society actors, the private sector and individuals, the University will keep working to help realise this vision through its continuing commitment to offering an education in spirituality and the development of values within the self and our institutions, systems and societies.

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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