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Statement submitted by Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Collaborative Leadership through Supportive Networks

Humanity is yearning for a world of love, equity, peace and prosperity. Women must play a pivotal role in the renewal we seek, and this calls for a new way of being and leading. Effective leaders give attention to personal mastery and a balanced approach to their inner and outer worlds. They have the capacity to connect with others meaningfully and can lead in a manner that is inclusive, draws co-operation and is supportive in nature.

Having laid the foundation with the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action in 1995, governments have been tasked to review how far they have reached. Together with a review of the goals outlined in the Beijing Platform of Action, a deeper look at how we can be more effective and sustainable in our approach to implementation is needed. Our world has changed drastically since 1995, with an increase in wars, frequent and eroding impacts of climate change, a global pandemic and the aggressive use of advanced digital technology. Across the Platform of Action, and specifically in the area of Women in Power and Decision-Making, women can pioneer a new approach which is co-creative, collaborative and supportive.

Leadership as Networks of Support

In the current climate of complexity and uncertainty, hierarchal leadership structures are ineffective. Organically, we are witnessing organisations with common areas of focus forming networks to be more effective in responding to the growing crises. Working as networks offers an opportunity of bringing together resources, research and skills so that there is a collective approach towards a solution.

Although we see an increase in working as networks, often organisations fail to be effective because individuals get locked in personal battles of ego, competition and jealousy. To overcome this, individuals need to be internally secure and develop a strong sense of self-esteem grounded in a spiritual practice. What we are missing is the subtle thread of higher values and a spiritual connection which hold all together.

Personal Characteristics of a New Generation of Leaders

Personal care and wellbeing are the bedrock on which we can serve selflessly in the world, without feeling overwhelmed by challenges; circumstantially through events, interpersonally through relationships or through one's own vulnerabilities.

Self-care

Leaders cannot continue on the treadmill of serving without taking time to sustain themselves. Without prioritising self-care at the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual level, the individual runs the risk of burnout and disheartenment because they do not always see the progress or outcomes they expect. Self-care means creating the space needed to embark on an inner journey of self-awareness. This journey opens the heart to reconnect with the essence of love within which naturally extends to love and understanding of others. This internal state of love enhances the capacity to listen to one's own inner needs, which leads to being more empathetic towards others. As Thuli Madonsela, the former Public Prosecutor of South Africa, once said that I need to listen well so that I hear what is not said.

Often, taking time for self-care is looked upon as being weak and unable to cope with pressure. However, when one takes the courage to create space both externally and internally it opens new capacities and strengths. An example is Simone Biles, who withdrew from the Tokyo Olympics in 2020 under tremendous pressure. She had

the courage to prioritise her wellbeing to reflect, heal and renew herself. This gave her the space needed to develop her skills and capacities even further as we witnessed how she performed so exceptionally in the Paris Olympics in 2024.

Sustaining a Spiritual Practice

Spirituality begins by creating the awareness that we must transcend the notion of ourselves as only material beings and attune to our subtle inner consciousness, the living spark that gives life to the human being. This living spark holds innate qualities which embody goodness and light. Being in this awareness of the self as consciousness enables one to feel close to the Divine and experience the Divine's purifying and transformative current. This connection supports the individual with the strength to remain true to higher values and live with the clarity of an awakened conscience. This connection allows the individual to draw a subtle power that brings quietness of the mind, clarity of intellect for decision making and catching the intuitive signals of what's needed in the moment to serve selflessly. A daily practice of intentional silent pauses to return to this internal centre and connectedness is necessary to maintain an elevated awareness of the self and others.

Building Confidence

There is often a constant backlash on women leaders, having to face aggressive attacks through social media, fake, misogynistic and vengeful rhetoric aimed at trying to dilute, deny or diminish them. Many find themselves so depleted that they withdraw to heal. To remain stable in one's truth and dignity, keeping one's head above turbulent waters requires an alignment of one's conscience and actions. It is this alignment that truly builds self-confidence. Basing one's decisions on conscience and higher principles gives one confidence in those decisions. This confidence grounded in truth and benevolence builds resilience and sustains a conviction to continue for the greater purpose of serving.

Networks Based on a Spiritual Foundation

A challenge of working in networks and making joint decisions is that individuals often feel the pressure of safeguarding their positions and interests of their organisations. The emergence of a greater possibility unfolding is hampered because decisions tend to be compromises people are willing to live with. Working as networks requires a spiritual finesse otherwise it's all too easy to resort to old fear-based patterns of control and exclusion.

In his article - Meeting in Safe Spaces, published in the Experiments in Silence, the Journal of the Call-of-the-Time Dialogues - Peter M. Senge asks us to imagine leaders coming together around important decisions in conversations that expand the possibilities filled with insights, ideas, and fresh perspectives. They might find themselves making decisions that nobody would have anticipated.

Creating Safe Spaces

Creating safe spaces requires individuals to come together beyond their work titles, to be themselves, feeling safe to share their vulnerabilities and hopes. When leaders come together in such authentic ways and have honest conversations, they can build a deeper sense of connection. Being in a natural environment, sitting as a dialogue circle and consciously taking time to be in silent reflection offers an experience of being grounded and an inner slowing down. This creates a subtle field of understanding, acceptance, and trust of each other. Fundamentally, it is through trust that sustainable pathways are created. Trust allows for a heartfelt collaboration built on the acknowledgement of both the intention and capabilities of the other.

In this reflective coming together one can collectively tap into a higher energy, the Source of Divine Love. The subtlety of this experience on the collective enhances an awareness of leading through humility and embodying the spirit of servant leadership.

The Brahma Kumaris has been offering similar spaces for leaders internationally since 1998 through the Call of the Time Dialogues and Experiments in Silence Retreats. These spaces have offered leaders an invaluable opportunity for personal reflection and rejuvenation of their spirits to continue the work they are called to do in the world. Together with that, this network of leaders has become friends and draw support and collaborate with each other.

Creating Support Networks for Women

Women's strength is that they easily form networks and work most successfully as cohesive groups. However, many women work in environments and systems influenced strongly by patriarchal mindsets and attitudes. Networks of support for women leaders, where friendships are created which allows for authentic conversations and genuine feedback are essential to continue courageously with their work. It is vital that individuals who hold positions of influence, who share this common approach show up, be present and add their voices when needed.

An inspiring project by Jacinda Ardern, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, called Field, is about lifting up empathetic leadership in politics, by supporting those in the thick of day-to-day politics across different countries. Through this project she aims to support leaders in meeting the expectation of the people they serve, focusing their time and energy on policy solutions that make a difference, that go beyond a political cycle, and that shows politics can be more than 'a bear-pit'.

Shiv Shakti Leadership Approach

During the COVID years there had been a backlash on many important advances made in gender equality and the empowerment of women. To respond to this and support women, the Brahma Kumaris initiated the Shiv Shakti Leadership Approach. This initiative offered a safe space of dialogue, silence and reflection to explore the emergence of a co-creative leadership. One of the key elements has been leading from our being; focusing on personal growth of learning and unlearning old patterns. Many felt a sense of relief that the focus was on the self and not outer project based, reaffirming a posture of the Brahma Kumaris that inner change creates positive, outer shifts.

The initiative is guided by four principles of 1) creating and sustaining a connection with the Divine, 2) integrate peace intentionally in all we do so that there is no trace of violence, 3) connecting and collaborating with others – by seeking out their strengths and working with them and 4) to be free from ego by adopting the attitude of being a server. From this inward facing approach, we invite women leaders into this learning circle as a model of leadership.

The Brahma Kumaris Approach

Since its establishment, the Brahma Kumaris have been led by women. Our work is based on the premise that there are not two worlds: an inner world and an outer world. The inner and outer are parts of the same world connected through ways that our thoughts, feelings and awareness shape our vision and relationships in the world. Powerful work on fields of action begins with clear, elevated levels of awareness inside. These subtle connections weave the individual and collective and are the essence of leadership. We see this need for healthy networks supporting each other from within the organisation across the world as essential to the sustainability

of our work. Our strategy of being open to continuous learning and redefining our leadership approach is held by the collective elevated vision of world transformation.

Conclusion

In reviewing the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and its further implementation, it is vital that we build stronger networks which are forged with a subtle connection through a spiritual practice. Fundamental to this is prioritising self-care and the development of our internal capacities. By creating a culture of ongoing honest conversations in safe spaces, we cultivate learning that facilitates the emergence of new ways of leading and supporting each other. The way forward lies in the collective lived experience and expertise.

As Dadi Janki, former Administrative Head of the Brahma Kumaris once stated that our most valuable resource is right behind our eyes, the soul. Develop this resource.

As we take the time to care for the self, see the best in each other and support our highest intentions, we collectively create a new path forward for the renewal of our world.
