

Living in Harmony

Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative



Report from Climate Change Conference COP20 in Lima

Wednesday 3rd Dec. - COP20

Focus on Interfaith and Indigenous Communities



Wednesday started with a press conference arranged by our old friend and partner in climate changes conference since 2009; Stuart Scott:

Press conference – “Faith and Science: Climate Unity”.

Stuart Scott, moderator of the press conference set the context by saying, “*Religion and Science are often considered divergent areas of the human experience... immediate and decisive climate change action is required of nations, corporations, banks and financial institutions, NGOs, all stakeholders and the public. The voices of Faith and Science affirm that no amount of money is worth risking the human suffering we face and our very survival*”.



Participants included: Martin Kopp, from the Lutherans; Dr. Chi-Ming Peng from the Tzu Chi Foundation (Buddhist); Paul Bockwith, Scientific of University of Ottawa; Valeriane Bernard from the Brahma Kumaris and a representative of the Executive Secretary of UNFCCC, Christina Figueres.

Valeriane Bernard said she would share a simple message: *"This is our world, our human family and our planet, there is no planet B.. The living world is actually the result of the relationship of three living systems: The physical dimension of matter, the human dimension, and the dimension of spirit. By only functioning on the physical level and forgetting the spiritual dimension human beings have brought about imbalance in these very sensitive systems.*

Climate change is a result of not fully understanding the self, our relationship with others, the physical world of matter and the subtle world of the spirit. We are very rightly speaking of historical responsibility of common but differentiated responsibility but we could, and should, also speak of personal and ethical responsibility towards others, our Pachamama, (mother earth), and ourselves. Our lifestyles are in our hands; the way we eat, consume and live are in our hands, our very survival is in our hands...

Our choices are what make us powerful. When we fulfill our responsibility by keeping in our awareness the sacred relationship between these three subtle energies we would then not destroy our environment and we could experience the joy of the dance with matter."

Directly after the press conference, Valeriane Bernard was interviewed by Vilde Blix Huseby from Vårt Land (which literally means "Our Country" in Norwegian) a daily newspaper published in Oslo. It is by far the largest Norwegian newspaper with a Christian editorial outlook.



For more information, please read **Appendix 1**.

Side event - IFOAM COP 20: Building Resilience to Climate Change and Managing Disaster Risks through Sustainable Agriculture.

Event hosted by IFOAM, the World Farmers' Organization, Caritas International, International Fund for Agricultural Development. This event was well attended with Ms Adriana Opromolla of Caritas International as moderator. A good friend of Brahma Kumaris, Ms Patricia Flores Escudero (IFOAM Latin American Office Coordinator) also spoke. Tamasin Ramsay attended this side event.

For more information, please read **Appendix 2**.

Side event - Indigenous peoples: health and community-based monitoring systems.

This side event co-organized with McGill University, discussed community-based adaptation, monitoring and information systems, as well as health impacts in indigenous peoples' communities. One of the more formal projects' slogans was of Science, Traditional Knowledge and Community Values, which they said underpinned the whole project. There was also a dynamic indigenous woman, Tarcila Rivera Zea, who represented a self-organized group of women from the indigenous community in Peru. They proactively looked at how they could adapt to the changing circumstances brought by climate change. This community group was able to identify more than 150 medicinal plants as the intellectual property of their people and recover knowledge of different types of cotton from their grandmother's time. For more information, please read **Appendix 3**.



Meetings - Women and people's summit



Women's meeting was held at San Isidro BK center. Valeriane met the ambassador of Panama and Switzerland and a good friend of the Brahma Kumaris Peru. During this meeting, Valeriane shared with them a project in which she collects people's stories about a particular life's period in which a woman has inspired them.

The meeting finished with a meditation where God inspired each one to feel and to heal the souls and matter for two minutes. www.giftofwomen.org

At the end of the day, Valeriane stayed at a short meeting of the people' summit. She addressed a short message (from faith group) to the audience. This meeting there was young people, some representative indigenous of Andean communities (Bolivia, Brazil), Peruvian farmers. This meeting was a preparation for a march for the environment that will take place the 10th December.



BK Program – A real relation with God

At the evening, in the Bk center (San Isidro), François Becher (France) gave a class, focused on the relation with God and the creation.



He hasn't created conscious and he hasn't created matter because matter is in constant transformation with energy by physic laws. Everything is in constant change from matter to energy and reverse, as we turn into matter, we lose energy.

When we fall to deep, everything falls into disorder and this is when God comes to put order and to do his role.

François and Moira sharing with the BK family in Lima.

Read more at: www.environment.brahmakumaris.org

Annex 1. Press conference – “Faith and Science: Climate Unity”.

Stuart Scott, moderator of the press conference set the context by saying, *“Religion and Science are often considered divergent areas of the human experience. Today they agree that immediate and decisive climate change action is required of nations, corporations, banks and financial institutions, NGOs, all stakeholders and the public. The voices of Faith and Science affirm that no amount of money is worth risking the human suffering we face and our very survival. While nations backed by commercial interests vie for economic advantage despite scientific consensus, our future goes up in smoke”*. He then invited scientists and religious panelists to share their perspectives.

Christina Figueres, Executive Secretary of UNFCCC was unable to be present but sent a representative, who accepted a declaration of “Faith and Science Initiative” and said: *“ It is absolutely important that the religions get on board. We welcome this. In the last 2 years and particularly last 12 months the voice of the faith communities has become louder.”*

Martin Kopp, from the Lutherans spoke of the “Fast for the Climate*” Initiative saying: *“December the 1st this year was the biggest climate fast ever and they were going to keep it going on first Monday of month till Paris”*, and they would also be holding one-day religious conference in February next year in preparation for COP in Paris. * [From the 1st of December 2014, at the beginning of COP20, to the 30th of November 2015, at the beginning of COP21, 365 fasters will successively fast for one day – that is, refrain from food during a whole day, or at least one meal. This chain of fasting will travel from Lima, Peru to Paris, France. The 365 fasters will successively fast on all continents. This initiative was born when Typhoon Haiyan had just devastated the Philippines in November last year. Climate commissioner Yeb Saño was at the UN climate talks in Warsaw. His own family was caught up in the disaster that killed thousands and destroyed homes and country. In a moving speech he said he would not eat until countries at the Warsaw conference delivered actions that would ‘stop the madness’ of the climate crisis.](#)

Dr. Chi-Ming Peng who spoke next, represented the Tzu Chi Foundation (Buddhist) and was also a scientist and weatherman. He said, *“the road to Paris was too slow and natural disasters are increasing. Disaster relief needs an international standard and all people are stakeholders so all must be more active and dedicated”*.

Paul Bockwith, University of Ottawa, a scientist studying extreme weather change warned that the artic is warming fast and the Methane being released is 150 times more powerful than the release of CO₂. This Methane is gradually enveloping the planet.

Annex 2. Side event - IFOAM COP 20: Building Resilience to Climate Change and Managing Disaster Risks through Sustainable Agriculture.

Event hosted by IFOAM, the World Farmers’ Organization, Caritas International, International Fund for Agricultural Development. This event was well attended. And counted with Ms Adriana Opromolla of Caritas International as moderator. As speakers: Mr Charles Ogang, World Farmers’ Organisation, Kampala; Ms Patricia Flores Escudero, IFOAM Latin American Office Coordinator; Mr Jorge Lafosse, National Director, Cáritas del Peru; Mr Jaime Conrado Oliveira, National Coordinator, Cáritas Brazil and Ms Estibalitz Morrás Dimas, International Fund for Agricultural Development.

The other side of the debate is that by having a human centered approach, it can give permission for policy makers to consider nature as a commodity for human wants, rather than prioritizing harmonious living with nature and other species. In this regard, agriculture is also a moral and ethical imperative. The main consideration of this event was for the world's farmers: "considering the impacts they have to face and new risks they must overcome due to climate change". Also, the question was posed: "*What responsibilities do they have and what role can they play in improving the environment through their sustainable agricultural practice?*"

Agriculture and food are core issues in Climate Change negotiations. There is also a deepening realization that a 'new climate deal' is not just an environmental issue but also a human right's issue. The main consideration of this event was for the world's farmers: "considering the impacts they have to face and new risks they must overcome due to climate change".

The speakers gave the following recommendations, encouraging farmers to do the following:

1. Reduce deforestation
2. Plant trees to act as a wind break and improve soil strength
3. Actively seek advice
4. Water harvesting
5. Contour planting
6. Seed banks
7. Encourage soil fertility through organic methods (e.g. banana leaves).
8. Small scale irrigation
9. Crop diversification
10. Family farming - crops close to homes increase involvement of women and youth
11. Minimal tillage, crop rotation, and cover crops.
12. These ways we can adapt under climate change.
13. Encourage women farmers through their skills of communication, networking and knowledge transfer
14. Develop partnerships with communities, local governments and other stakeholders.

Annex 3. Side event - Indigenous peoples: health and community-based monitoring systems.

This side event, co-organized with McGill University, discussed community-based adaptation, monitoring and information systems, as well as health impacts in indigenous peoples' communities.

There was a PhD student whose thesis was on how indigenous concerns are represented at an international level and specifically in the UNFCCC process. She was glad to report that adaptation decisions in the COP process were being mentioned more frequently and the level of interaction of indigenous concerns was greater in and around UNFCCC including milestone documents at the World Conference of Indigenous People this September.

Tarcila Rivera Zea represented a self-organized group of women from the indigenous community in Peru. Her community also faces the reality of external logging

companies and other foreign companies who take their plants and fruit illegally invading and pillaging their forests whilst they are pushed out of their homes and lands. This community group was able to identify more than 150 medicinal plants as the intellectual property of their people and recover knowledge of different types of cotton from their grandmother's time. They started a data collection by sharing their knowledge with each other and developed a database within their own local communities -- all have contributed, the elderly and youth - raising awareness of their own brothers and sisters of what has been lost and recover what we still have.

She spoke of how colonizers scorch the land and don't even use it. This is very dangerous as the majority of the land is the primary forest, which now has very, very, few trees. They have to replant trees, and adapt to new changes so problems of malnutrition and illness are cured and not attended to by the state. They have started by recovering the medicinal plants because in this area, there is a wonderful climate for corn and fruits. They have a huge challenge, but it is a challenge worth living for.

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A representative from the Massai pastoral people of Kenya spoke of how their vulnerability is well known but their resilience based on traditional knowledge is not so well known. They monitor their environment and ecosystems naturally. Everyone in the community is involved; when they meet with each other during the day they are always informing each other of the environment in which they live. So their data collection is a natural system of continually sharing of news, having traditional meetings, guidance of the community from their spiritual leader, along with written reports to government agencies, and all this is regulated in customary law and indigenous systems. This holistic approach is not an activity it is their lifestyle -- they are experts naturally. Key to resilience of indigenous peoples is this 'real time' monitoring.

Finally there was a scientist who spoke about the transmission of infectious diseases. *"When climate change happens, then illnesses come. When the balance is broken then epidemics increase and then migration of peoples and animals happen. There is a need of local preventive programs as well as those that will mitigate the effect... a clear association between climate and increased incidence of vector borne, diseases such as malaria and Dengue, food borne diseases, such as acute diarrhea and airborne such as pneumonia. Climate change is a serious danger to our health especially in Peru"*.