



The Brahma Kumaris at UN Biodiversity COP16 in Cali, Colombia

October 21 - November 1, 2024

Initial Report of Activities

COP16 is underway in Cali, Colombia. With the theme of "**Peace with Nature**", this pivotal gathering hopes to unite governments and stakeholders worldwide, in assessing progress toward halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. Now is a critical moment to accelerate action on the Global Biodiversity Framework, fostering a harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world.

The Brahma Kumaris is represented by a diverse delegation of **nine members**. The Green Team includes Maureen Goodman (UK), Valeriane Bernard (France), Anne-Christelle Le Hir (Canada), Debbie Castle (Canada), David Fletcher (Canada), and Juan Vazquez (Canada). From Colombia, we are proud to have Marcelo Bulk, Maria-Paula Cervera, and Manuel Ceron joining us.



Our message of inner peace and spiritual regeneration aligns perfectly with the COP16 theme. We believe that **creating a culture of peace is essential for restoring balance with nature**. Through meditation, a conscious change of lifestyle, values-based leadership, and spiritual consciousness, the Brahma Kumaris delegation will create opportunities to share the deep connection that exists between inner peace and environmental stewardship.

The Green Team has already been involved in a number of activities, bringing peaceful and positive energy to the discussions about nature, humanity and biodiversity.



In the Faith Pavilion



With Susana Muhamad,
President of COP16 and Minister
of Environment of Colombia



Plaza Quebec, where the Faith
Pavilion is located

Saturday October 19, 2024

Even before the official opening of COP16, the Green Team participated in two important events.
Global Youth Biodiversity Network, Conference of Youth (COY)



Maria-Paula attended this creative and joyful event with 300 young people, who came together to co-create a more empowered, positive vision of the future. It was a unique space that included storytelling for nurturing peace with nature, and taking actions rooted in hope, commitment and heartfelt intentions to build a better world. A Climate Justice Youth Camp featured the climate justice and human rights youth leader from Colombia, Juan David Amaya, and advocated for the profound need to restore power to nature and, to awaken to the responsibility we all have collectively, to make a difference. As a voice for change, the youth who participated in the events co-created a **Youth Statement, that will be brought forward to the Blue Zone of COP16.**

The Convention on Biological Diversity Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI-5)

This important meeting identifies the progress countries are making toward implementing the Kunming - Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and for setting the final agenda for the COP16. Juan attended on behalf of the Green Team.

Some **highlights** from the discussions include:

- 100 countries submitted national targets aligned with KMGBF.
- 31 countries also provided updated National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans (NBSAPS).
- These targets and plans are the main instruments for protecting biodiversity at the national level.

COP16 discussions are intended to address all these agenda items and include continuing discussions on resource mobilization and financial mechanisms.

Key takeaways from these multiple planning documents are:

- Urgent need for capacity building & technical support 🛠️
- Finance remains a critical challenge 💰
- Whole-of-government & whole-of-society approaches crucial 🤝
- Regional dialogues valuable for sharing experiences 🗣️
- An experiment was conducted with a new pilot forum for voluntary country review 🌐
- Concerns about slow progress on NBSAPS submissions ⏳
- Creative ideas are emerging, yet biodiversity is still declining 📉





Feeling at Home in Cali.

On Oct. 19, all members of the Green Team had arrived and settled into their accommodations. Heartfelt thanks to all those hosting us, and to everyone at the Brahma Kumaris Center, who are really making us feel at home serving us delicious and nutritious meals and providing transport as needed to get to the COP16 venue.



Colombia Youth Exchange Project Panel

Maria-Paula and Debbie attended this refreshing presentation that engaged children and youth, 12-25 years, in **creating and generating solutions for the protection of nature's biodiversity**. This transformative process used 'horizontal learning' among young people from different regions of Colombia, using cooperative games, dialogue and conversations to include, empower and motivate children to use their own experience and knowledge to protect nature. Through exchanges, young people learned how others, their own age, were able to find solutions to problems in their communities. Working together they created new possibilities for inclusive governance models and messages of hope for protecting biodiversity. Friendships became important spaces in which to witness the qualities and virtues of cooperation, creativity and unity.



Sunday October 20, 2024

Meeting and Greeting

Some of the best service and networking happens just because one is in the right place at the right time. Maureen was able to meet and interact briefly with the **Colombian Minister of Information and Technology**, Mauricio Lizcano, prior to the opening ceremony. He is a long-time friend of BKs and appreciates the energy BKs and other faith-based groups bring to the COP deliberations. Maureen extended an invitation for him to the Spirit of Humanity Conference in Iceland.



Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony of COP16 was colourful and opened with a powerful and inspiring multimedia performance by **Indigenous Peoples of Colombia**. They pleaded for making peace and living in harmony with Mother Nature in spite of the destruction human beings have caused to the planet and biodiversity. They brought the loving voice of Mother Earth to the conference.

The **President of Colombia** gave a provocative speech about the need for transforming our global economic model away from neo-liberalism. Rather than nature being seen simply as resources for generating profit, he advocated for behavioural change and a new human awareness regarding the way economy and societies interact.

A major highlight was the **Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development of Colombia** who is the new President of COP16. She spoke passionately about the fact that we are now at a confluence and we can no longer make decisions using our clever intellect, but need to discern and take our actions based on "life". Further she said, "We are cognitively divorced and disconnected from the systems of life" and we need to make a radical transformation on how we interact with nature.



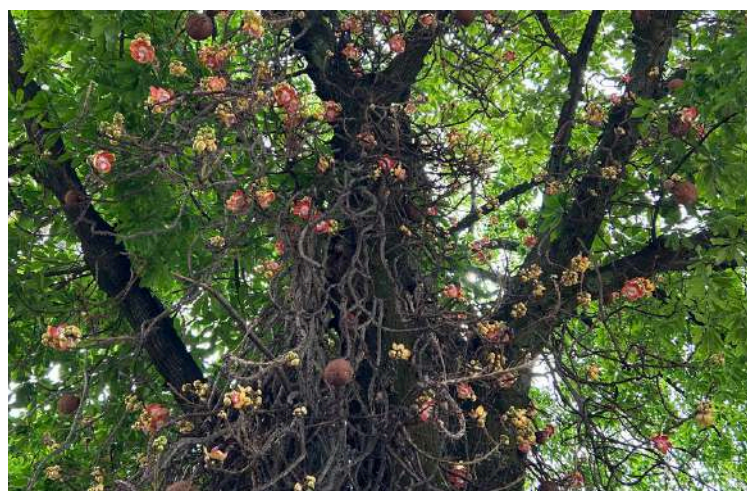


A main event in the Blue Zone at the Nature Positive Pavilion was **“Faith Actors at The Forefront of GBF Implementation”**. At this event, the Faith and Biodiversity Coalition released a new report showcasing some of the work faith groups are doing globally in implementing the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). This report includes 25 success stories, best practices, and examples of cross-sector collaboration by faith groups toward meeting the GBF Goals and Targets. The speakers at this event were a number of long time colleagues of the BK Green Team, Gopal Patel, Co-chair of the Faith and Biodiversity Coalition; Flore Ghetti, Soka Gakkai International; The Rt. Rev’d Graham Usher, Church of England, Bishop of Norwich; Allen Ottaro, Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa; Neddy Astudillo, Center for Climate Justice and Faith; and Tariq Al-Olaimy, UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

The report articulates a number of good practices in KMGBF implementation and contains important recommendations. The report can be found at www.biodiversity.faith/report. The panel members spoke about work being done by their own constituencies, and about the faith, values and profound moral sensibilities that drive and inspire their work. Panelists named: hope, compassion, caring, love, responsibility and listening to the “cries of the poor, and the cries of the earth”. Some panelists also spoke transparently of connecting with the Divine to guide our work, and using prayer, meditation and other practices to sustain and empower the work being implemented to make peace with nature.



Joining Caucus Groups. Green Team members also dropped in on a variety of caucus events – Youth, NGO, Women, Researchers. Being the first full day of the conference, not a lot was happening at these caucuses. We will continue to monitor them as COP16 unfolds over the next two weeks.





Meet the Green Team. In the evening, there was a wonderful event hosted at the Brahma Kumaris Centre in Cali. Brother Manuel acted as MC for the event that was designed to introduce international members of the Green Team to the Colombia BK family and friends. It was a full house with more than 60 souls in attendance, many who were visiting the Centre for the first time. Each member of the Green team spoke in turn about their relationship with nature and their hopes for the conference. Maria-Paula served as interpreter.



Maureen provided us with a broad overview of the relationship between human beings and nature - the dramatic loss of species and ecosystems in recent history and the need for changing our habits and consciousness, to reverse and restore a healthy relationship with Mother Earth.

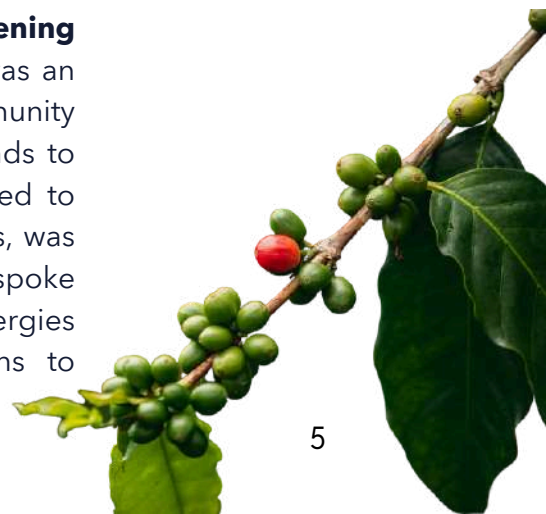
Valeriane underlined the fact that we are facing a critical moment, as a result of cultural conditioning, as owners of the world. We must now face the fact that we are together on one planet and that our habits of colonization and consumption need to change in order to make peace with nature.

Anne-Christelle shared a personal story about healing her own body with nature. To transform our own relationship with nature is to first, understand the needs of our bodies, which are a wonderful gift of nature and then, to be able to take care of them with a spiritual awareness.

Debbie shared about the conflicts in the world, that start with the conflicts inside ourselves and that we can learn skills to address the conflict inside ourselves. When we learn to care for ourselves and think of other living beings as family, we will then be able to transform the conflicts in the world.

David discussed revitalizing the sacred relationship with nature, something he has learned from Indigenous People and from the wisdom of trees that breathe and reach for the sky, and remain connected to their roots.

Juan was not with us for the meeting as he was attending the **official opening of the Green Zone, which is being called the Peoples' COP**. This was an energetic event with thousands of civil society representatives and community people present. The President of Colombia spoke about why he intends to make this COP different, and ensure peoples' voices are heard related to restoring our relationship with nature. His speech, of almost 45 minutes, was met with enthusiastic applause. The Minister of the Environment then spoke and also encouraged everyone to get involved by putting their energies forward to heal our relationship with nature and implement plans to regenerate and preserve life of all beings for future generations.





Early on the 3rd official day of the COP16, Maureen was involved in the **official opening of the Faith Pavilion in the Blue Zone**. This pavilion serves as a hub for showcasing the impactful work of faith-based organizations. It will host multiple events highlighting the contributions of faith groups to biodiversity conservation. Maureen spoke about the role of faith-based organizations in the biodiversity conversation and how we are a different kind of actor and that the voice we bring, is very important. Spiritual organizations do a lot of practical work and also bring the values we stand for into the conversation. Biodiversity is precious and we need to act in the world as children of God.

Wednesday October 23, 2024

Course on the Potential of COP16 for Colombia and the Global South attended by Marcelo.

Henry Garay, president of CAEM (Corporación Ambiental Empresarial - Environmental Business Corporation). His introduction was a "basic" "crash-course" on carbon credit and his proposal was not to wait for the Global North to work better, but to work from the Global South, to unite to other countries.

Natura foundation - talking about the wetlands and the carbon; how to measure carbon capture and how to identify the diversity. One of the main projects by the government is to make a transition from coal mining to agroindustry. The rest of the course was of a high level, by explaining about carbon credit and biocredit, the need of going back to the 80's in terms of climate, etc.



Off and Running! COP 16 is now well underway! Green Team members are feeling most welcomed and taken care of by the Cali family and the opportunities are growing for interacting with souls present at the conference - to share vibrations of peace, hope and positivity as we all seek to make peace with nature.

Check our social media channels for regular updates – and look back on this web page for a report of activities at the end of week one.