



Ms. Vita de Waal, Chair of the NGO Forum on the Environment and United Nations Representative for the Foundation for GAIA and the Planetary Association for Clean Energy, gave welcoming remarks noting the significance of the Mother Earth Day panel\*\* taking place on the same day of the signing in New York of the Paris COP21 Agreement.

Ms. Valeriane Bernard, United Nations Representative for Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, introduced H.E. Mme Nardi Suxo Iturry.

Ambassador Suxo expressed gratitude from Bolivians for the honor to speak at the Mother Earth Day panel. The Ambassador praised Mother Earth and said all things are intertwined and complementary; that all beings depend on Mother Earth to survive. She recognized Bolivia's indigenous people and their innate knowledge and wisdom of the earth underscoring that Bolivians respect equity and justice in nature and that Mother Earth must be restored and nurtured.



She emphasized that Bolivia welcomes initiatives that propose to establish alternatives to development that respect the Mother Earth and the right of Bolivians, and all peoples, to live in dignity, equity and justice.

The Ambassador made example of Bolivia's renewable and alternative energies projects that respect Mother Earth and that aim for Bolivia to become the center of regional energy by 2020. The Ambassador promotes balanced development so Mother Earth can generate sustainable lives for the Bolivian people. She spoke of Bolivia's commitment to defend the rights of the people and to respect life. She reaffirmed Bolivia's historical principles that state, "Do not be a thief, don't be a liar, and don't be lazy." She believes in the rights of the people to enjoy a holistic development and to live without material poverty, social poverty and spiritual poverty.

[Mr. Robert Hall](#) , Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage in Sweden and President of [GEN Europe](#), took the floor and spoke about global ecovillages saying that the ecovillage concept resonated with him years ago when he was first introduced to the model, emphasizing the wisdom the villages create and his interest in their sustainability.



He explained GEN, [Global Ecovillage Network](#) that started in 1995 in Findhorn, Scotland to support the experimental creation and preservation of human settlements that not only sustain, but regenerate their social and natural environments. Mr. Hall spoke of the value he sees in working together and underlined that ecovillages are communities in which people feel supported by and responsible to those around them. He explained that the GEN system currently consists of five continental organizations with their national and regional networks.

Mr. Hall mentioned a few basic facts about GEN:

- GEN Europe was founded in 1996 with offices currently in Germany, Spain and Scotland.
- Ecovillages are in 30 countries.
- National networks are found in 15 countries and the Regional Network for the Baltic Sea Region.
- GEN is a founding member of [ECOLISE](#).

He explained GEN Europe’s Mission as the following:

- Promotes the development of sustainable settlements in Europe.
- Communicates the benefits of the ecovillage experience to policy-makers, planners and professionals and to the wider public.
- Works to strengthen the capacity of individual ecovillages as well as national ecovillage networks.

Mr. Hall reported that most ecovillage projects fail within five years and stressed the need for support mechanisms to improve the success rate of ecovillages. He explained that ecovillages focus on four dimensions that need to be addressed as a holistic approach to sustainability. These focus areas are social, the cultural/worldview, economy and ecology and are further explored in the diagram he presented:

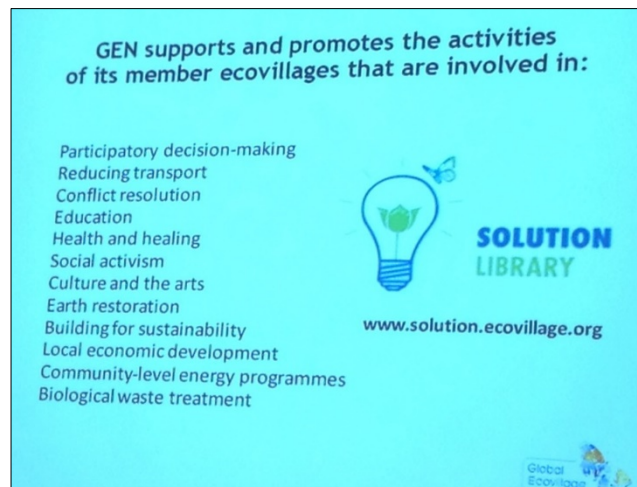


Mr. Hall spoke about GEN’s youth branch and their efforts for the next generation. He made particular reference to GEN’s partnership with [GAIA Education](#) who promotes a holistic systems approach to education and who is a leading-edge provider of sustainability education that promotes thriving communities within planetary boundaries.

He went on to say that there is a need to keep aspirations high with a focus on cutting edge changes and innovation. Mr. Hall cited Senegal as an example of the first African national ecovillage network that seeks to improve and protect its 45 member villages. Striving for sustainability while preserving their heritage, ecovillagers, and their Senegalese and international partners live and work together. He praised the Senegal government for having launched a program to transition 14,000 traditional villages into models of ecological, social, economic and cultural sustainable living.

Mr. Hall explained GEN's [Solution Library](#) where grassroots ideas are published online for easy access to ecovillage information and best practices. He underscored that the Solutions Library, started by six Muslim women, is now globally available so people can learn strategies for eco-community mobilization and improved ecovillage success rate.

Mr. Hall shared the following Solutions Network graphic:



An attendee made the point that ecovillages must be accepted by the local communities so that members can integrate with people in the region for inclusion and to generate income.

Mr. Hall invited everyone to join 500 ecovillagers from 30 countries at the 2016 ecovillage conference in at the Arterra Eco-village in Spain 4-8 July.

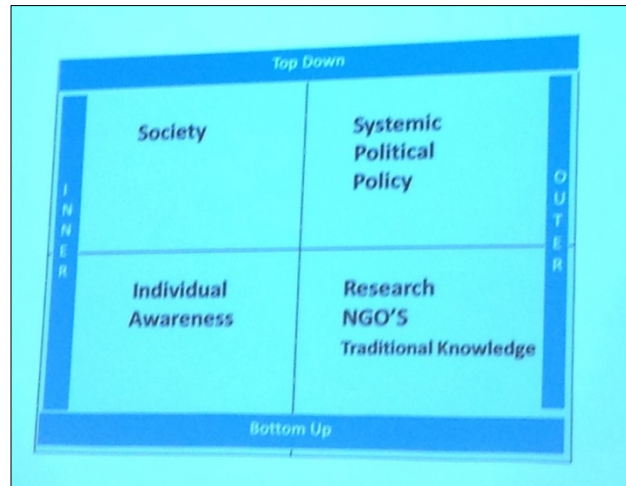


Ms. Sonja Ohlsson, a meditation teacher with the Prison and Probation Service in Copenhagen, spoke about Brahma Kumaris. She expressed delight for today's meeting, April 22, as it coincided with the signing of the Paris Climate Agreement in New York.

She explained that Brahma Kumaris is dedicated to personal transformation and world renewal with 8500 centers spread over 110 countries. She went on to say that the Brahma Kumaris commitment is to helping individuals experience an awareness change; to transform their perspective of the world from material to spiritual.



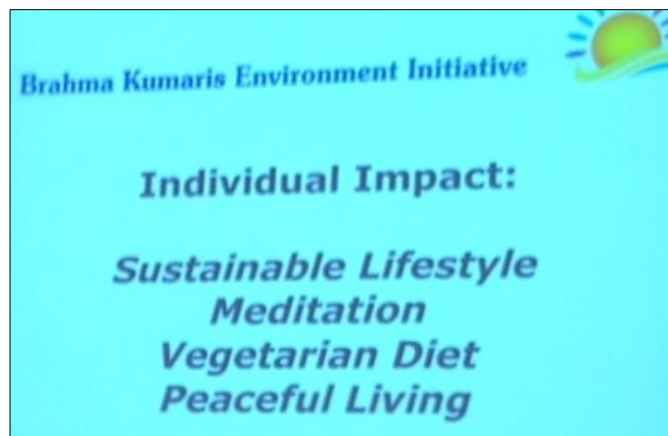
Ms. Ohlsson presented the following diagram saying that, although, the graphic is divided into sections, the left side being one's inner world and the right side one's outer side, she suggests rather than one side influencing the other that one should address all four areas of awareness.



Ms. Ohlsson spoke of the Brahma Kumaris Environmental Initiative that strives to help people achieve greater well-being through inner peace and higher values based on these five main principles:

- Living with simplicity
- Buying compassionately
- Using economically
- Learning continuously
- Sharing generously

She explained that, on an individual level, the Brahma Kumaris Environmental Initiative strives for the following impact:

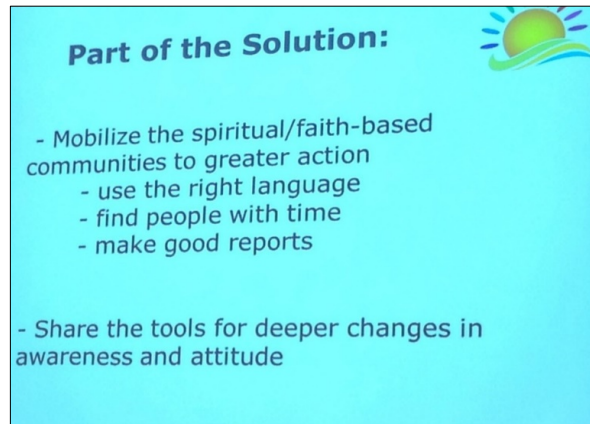


Ms. Ohlsson presented the role of faith-based groups as:

- Reach the masses, 85% of the human family embrace religious traditions.

- Articulate a value-based response.
- Ethical issue – climate change affects the poor.
- Raise fundamental spiritual question: Role of the human beings within this created world – from lordship to creation care.

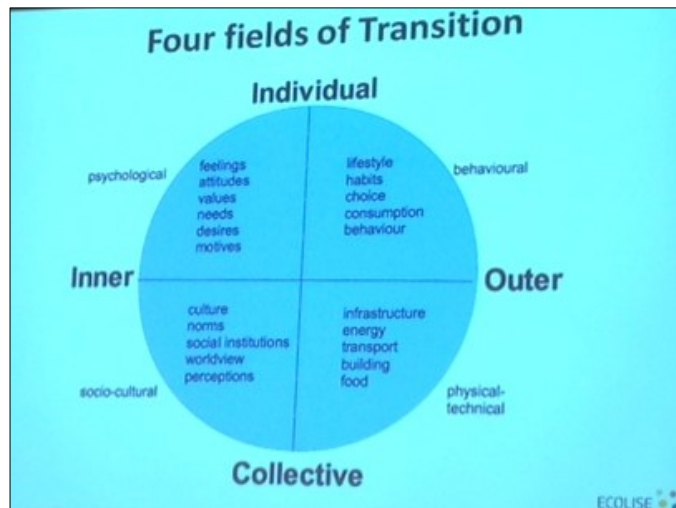
She went on to introduced the [Green Angel Initiative](#) and explained how the initiative is part of a solution to a peaceful consciousness. She described that people following the Green Angel Initiative practice a spiritual lifestyle that understands that this life is a holistic awareness that requires the development and integration of the mental, intellectual, spiritual and physical. She went on to say that love plays a great role even in business suites. She shared the following slide:



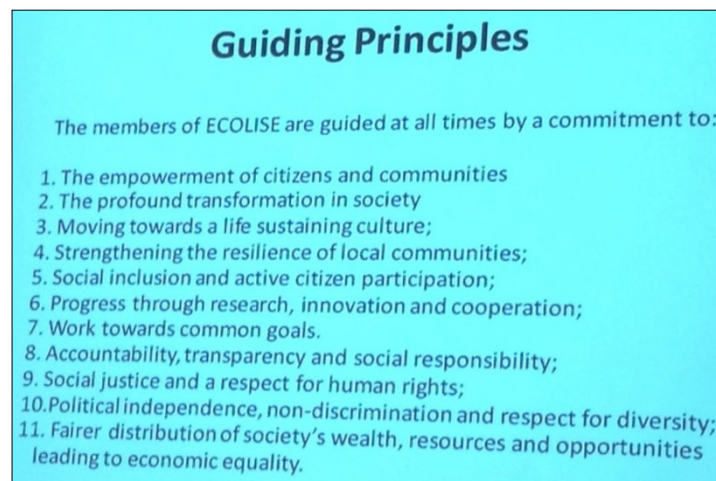
[Boyan Slat](#), founder/CEO of The Ocean Cleanup Project could not be present. However, his message was relayed via [video link](#). The Ocean Cleanup Project develops technologies to extract, prevent and intercept plastic pollution from the oceans. The current goal is to cleanup of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch to become the largest ocean research and cleanup project in history. Mr. Slat has been recognized as one of the 20 Most Promising Young Entrepreneurs Worldwide, and was crowned *2014 Champion of the Earth*, the United Nations' highest environmental accolade. In 2015, HM King Harald of Norway awarded Mr. Slat the maritime industry's *Young Entrepreneur Award*, and *Foreign Policy magazine* included Mr. Slat in their 2015 list of *Global Thinkers*. [More links](#), > [also](#) >



Mr. Hall took the floor again to speak about [ECOLISE](#) which is the European umbrella organization for all networks of community-led initiatives on sustainability and climate change. [ECOLISE's](#) vision is of a Europe where every citizen and local community plays an active role in promoting social, environmental, economic and political systems towards a sustainable planet. The blue circle graphic shown by Mr. Hall represents feelings and what one can do; the graphic suggests what is inside us as beings and that we are not just transformed by outside influences and technology.



Mr. Hall explained the guiding principles of ECOLISE with the following graphic that underscores that societies should work together leaving logos identities behind and working together because working and acting together leads to action.



Citing ECOLISE achievements, Mr. Hall presented a collection of highlights that include:

- Establishing an association of member organizations.
- Fostering connections among many super-national networks.
- Initiating various collaborations with the network such as strong academic partnerships and assembled a wider research network of potential academic collaborators.
- Attended COP21 in Paris as an official stand holder who provided access to the main conference to many member organizations.
- Release of the book *Permaculture and Climate Change Adaptation*.
- Participating as a full partner in a successful application for EU Horizon 2020 research funding.
- Formal recognition by the European Commission with acceptance to the ESIF consultative committee.
- Contributor to several EU policy initiatives.
- Prepared funding proposals for, and opened discussions with, a number of funding organizations.
- Initiated the process of mapping initiatives and stories.
- Launched website and social media accounts.

Turning to ECOLISE focus on the future, Mr. Hall presented the following graphic to illustrate future focus in the field of exchange, cooperation and learning:

## Future focus in the field of exchange, cooperation and learning

- Ensure the ongoing management of the **website and database**, including the editing of all content;
- Establish an **information watch** in order to systematically gather content from various sources (network and non-network);
- Carry-out a **survey** of member organisations to **identify skill/knowledge gaps** and training needs within the wider network;
- Create **deep understanding** of who is in ECOLISE and which external partnerships are synergetic and symbiotic;
- **Integrate ECOLISE in EU research** and implementation project consortia, where ECOLISE supports, or benefit directly from, the aims of those projects and networks;
- **Support members** in connecting to national and European funding and identifying opportunities to create funding partnerships;
- **Encourage** the establishment of **national umbrella bodies**, resembling ECOLISE on the national level;
- **Develop tools** to support the professionalisation of volunteers and the integration of persons who are under-represented in local initiatives.

Ms. Ohlsson took the floor again to speak about faith communities and how they can invest in renewable technology. She cited the [India One](#) power plant project that is 25-acre solar thermal power plant situated near the Brahma Kumaris Shantivan Campus in Abu Road, Rajasthan, India. This innovative project uses 770 new developed 60m<sup>2</sup> parabolic dishes and features thermal storage for continuous operation. The plant, scheduled to open in 2016, will generate enough heat and power for a campus of 25,000 people and is capable of supplying power for more than 38K meals per day with its solar energy. She underscored that India One is a milestone for decentralized and clean power generation in India. Additional information can be found at [India-One.net](#).



Franco Zunino, General Secretary of the [Wilderness Associazione Italiana](#) (AIW), sent his apologies as he was accompanying a *National Geographic* photographer for a feature on AIW wilderness areas. Ms Vita de Waal was asked to convey Mr Zunino's talk. As Europe's first Wilderness organization, AIW was founded in Italy in 1983 and has since created 67 wilderness areas in 10 regions to which a further 18,000 ha of special natural interest are to be added. What is remarkable is that AIW has managed to protect areas by cooperating with a number of diverse local and regional stakeholders, thereby setting an example of collaborative initiatives that are possible to address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), e.g. Point 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. Franco Zunino, considered the *Italian John Muir*, was consecrated in 2009 *Wilderness Pioneer* by the WILD Foundation

\*\* Mother Earth Day panel flyer represents first mention of panelists and formal introductions.\*\*

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