

Faith leaders Mark World Environment Day

Hindu Forum of Europe is the umbrella organisation in Europe with 14+ member organisations from different European countries on board, where more than 2 million Hindus reside. A whole host of spiritual leaders from around the world came together to mark the World Environmental Day.

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Hindu Forum of Europe - World Environment Day

The themed event, 'It's time for Nature' was organised by **Dr. Lakshmi Vyas, President Hindu Forum of Europe (HFE) and Member of the *Religions for Peace* International Women's Coordinating Committee**, attracting high profile names from ten countries linked up via a virtual platform. The primary message was to emphasise humanity's responsibility towards conserving the environment and preserve the balance of Mother Earth.

HFE was founded in 2006 which currently has membership of fourteen European nations working collaboratively to cohesively share and promote the European values of interfaith, friendship and peaceful coexistence drawing on the Hindu ethos.

HFE's President, **Lakshmi Vyas** welcomed everyone with NAMASTE and addressed the relevance of environmental issues at this critical time. "Due to COVID-19, the environment forcibly took its own holiday in untold ways."

She added that, "The foods we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink and the climate that makes our planet habitable all come from nature. Yet, these are exceptional times in which nature is sending us a message: To care for ourselves we must care for nature. It is time to wake up, to take notice, to raise our voices. It is time to build back, a better place for People and Planet."

This World Environment Day (WED), it is particularly important on account of COVID-19, which has taken a huge toll of life all over the world. In a short span of time, coronavirus has disrupted the world order of normal life. It has come to stand still due to a worldwide lockdown.

The Animal Kingdom especially in cities, get a good respite, especially the birds, insects and bees freely move around and bird migration and animal encroachments presents one of the best visual treat to city dwellers who are visited by rare birds and animals.

The air is cleaner, increased visibility, mountains which were hidden by smokes are visible and sky looks much clearer. Similarly, the water in our oceans has also undergone a dramatic change in their appearance and colour. In other words, the environment forcibly took its own holiday in many untold ways. We must respect environment and follow an ethical attitude to environment.

The Chairman of the Palan Foundation, **Nitin Palan MBE** added, "Looking after the environment is not once a year event, it is a way of life. This year, we need to remember the

importance of biodiversity. It comes to us as a reminder of our sense of responsibility. Not only as enjoyers of fruits and flowers, should we also be gardeners who make sure that it blossoms beautifully.”

First held in 1974, WED is officially celebrated on 5 June every year. It is the United Nations’ principal vehicle for encouraging awareness and action for the protection of the environment. The flagship campaign focuses on a specific theme each year.

Irish Member of European Parliament, Mairead McGuinness MEP, added, “It is important to reflect on where the world is today in terms of public health and our relationships with nature. Nature may perhaps have been feeling the suffocation by the way we were living and working.”

Ms. McGuinness, who served as the First Vice-President of the European Parliament since 2017 sits on the EU Environmental Committee. She explained that “At the European Parliament, we are not divorcing the economy from the environment. We are honouring our commitment to climate change. We must act now to achieve the big ambition of being climate-neutral by 2050.”

“It can take some time to change people’s attitudes and way of life. We must encourage and support people in this transition. A lot of people around the globe do not have access to safe drinking water. Those of us who do, are privileged, and must value that. We have a duty to respect Mother Nature,” she concluded.

Sister Jayanti- European Director of Brahmakumaris and Bharat Gaurav Awardee, highly respected European Director of the Brahma Kumaris, and Bharat Gaurav Award winner, reiterated the importance of looking after the planet. “If we look after our home, the home looks after us. Unfortunately, for the last several hundred years, we have forgotten this simple fact... There is no other species that destroys their own nest, their own home, in the way that we have done to our planet. COVID-19 has come as a warning bell, we certainly realised that we need time to repair the relationship between ourselves and living creatures and nature itself.”

Ragasudha Vinjamuri presented a beautiful Abhinaya on the Mantra Pushpam from Yajurveda, as an obeisance to water and the elements of nature. Before presenting the artistic aspect, she presented the interpretation of the meaning of this mantra, which highlights water as the source of life and foundation of the entire universe, being present in Wind, Fire, Moon, Sun, Stars, Clouds and Rain, and vice-versa. It also underscored the interconnectedness and the inner conscience of realisation towards the nature.

Swami Rameshwarananda, Founder and Director of Yoga Vedanta Meditation in Spain discussed Ecology on Campus PHI, and stated why this project is a modern example of the triad of essential values that every human being must practice in life. The Campus PHI aims to become a manifestation of those ancient principles and values, described in the Gita and in other sacred scriptures, based on respect for human dignity, knowledge and transformation.

Additional speakers included **Swami Amarananda**, Director of Vedanta Centre in Switzerland, **Swamini Hamsananda Giri**, Vice President Hindu Forum Italy, and **Krishna Kripa Das**, President of Hindu Forum of Spain.



Other distinguished members included:

- **Madhupathy Dasa** - Communication Officer at ISKCON, Hungary
- **Parabhakti Das** - President of Villa Vrindavan, Italy
- **Krishna Kripa Das** - President of Hindu Forum, Spain
- **Marie Mandakini** - VP, Hindu Forum of Europe, Sweden
- **Gianluca Triano** - Treasurer, Hindu Forum of Europe, Italy
- **Kesh Morjaria** - CEO, Hindu Forum of Europe, UK
- **Desh Ramnath Awasthi** - VP, Hindu Council of Netherlands
- **Amarjeet Singh Bhamra** - Secretariat, APPG on Indian Traditional Sciences
- **Satya Minhas** - Co-Chair, HCUK
- **Suma Parahakaran** - Professor in Bioethics in Malaysia
- **Abhik Gupta** - Vice-Chancellor of Assam University