

INTERVIEW: In fighting for girls' education, UN advocate Malala Yousafzai finds her purpose

5 October 2017 – More than 260 million children, adolescents and youth are out of school around the world, according to the United Nations. Despite some progress in achieving gender equality in the world's poorest countries, far more girls than boys still do not have access to a quality education,

Research has shown that educating girls, in particular, has a 'multiplier effect'. Educated girls are more likely to marry later and have fewer children, who in turn will be more likely to survive and to be better nourished and educated. Educated women are more productive at home and better paid in the workplace, and more able to participate in social, economic and political decision-making.

Earlier this year, UN [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres designated education activist and Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai as a UN Messenger of Peace with a special focus on girls' education. Ms. Yousafzai began speaking out for girls' education at the age of 11 in her native Pakistan. After surviving an assassination attempt by the Taliban in 2012, she co-founded the Malala Fund with her father Ziauddin to champion every girl's right to 12 years of free, safe, quality education.

In September, the Malala Fund started the Gulmakai Network to support the work of education champions in developing countries and speed up progress towards girls' secondary education around the world. The 20-year-old, who will be attending Oxford University, spoke to *UN News* about the need to increase investment in education, the importance of allowing girls to be who they want to be, and when it was that she discovered the power of her own voice and the purpose for her life.

UN News: Tell us more about the new initiative the Malala Fund is carrying out to help girls education in a number of countries.

Malala Yousafzai: The Malala Fund started the Gulmakai Network, and the goal of this mission is to empower local leaders and some local activists. So we support them and we are already working in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and also the Syrian refugee areas. So we want to increase that investment and also support local advocates, as well as local girl advocates. So for that we have \$3 million and we want to expand that group, redouble our efforts, and make sure we can give to as many local activists as we can because they are the real change-makers in their community, and when we empower them, through them, we can bring change.

VIDEO: Malala Yousafzai discusses her push for global education, her motivations in continuing her campaigns, and how she came to be the person

she is.

UN News: Specifically, how would you like to see this money used?

Malala Yousafzai: We will invest in local leaders and local activists. These local activists speak out, locally, nationally; they campaign for girls' education. For example, in Nigeria, our activists, together with the Malala Fund, campaigned to ensure that the Nigerian Government increased education from 9 years to 12 years. So we succeeded in that campaign and it became part of the law. We are doing similar campaigning in Pakistan and Afghanistan. We are also including teachers' training. We are also including empowering others girls and helping them so they can also talk to leaders. It also includes e-learning and other improvements in the quality of education. So it's a vast project that covers many areas but our main goal is to empower local leaders.

UN News: What are some of the things you observed in your efforts to promote girls' education during your travels?

My goal is very clear, and that is to continue fighting for girls' education, their empowerment, their rights.

Malala Yousafzai: So this year I went on a Girl Power trip and I went to America, Canada, then Nigeria, Iraq, and Mexico, and in these places I met amazing and incredible girls and I heard their inspiring stories. In Iraq, I met a girl called Najla. She was 14 years old when she was wearing her wedding dress and she took off her high heels and she escaped from her wedding. She ran away. And later on, her village was captured by the extremist ISIS and she was actually attacked but she did not stop. She is still continuing her education, speaking out... and she wants to be a journalist.

These are the stories that inspire me but my aim is to bring these stories into a global platform like the UN and allow these girls to meet their country leaders and local leaders so their voices can be raised.

UN News: You also brought a young woman from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. What was her story? What made you bring her to the UN to speak to world leaders?

Malala Yousafzai: So in Lancaster, in America, I met this young girl, and I think she did not know what my story was but she was telling me her story. She really inspired me because she went through a lot of difficulties in her country, [DR] Congo, and how she saw brutalities in front of her eyes. Her family members were killed. She has seen worse than what we can ever imagine but she resisted all those conflicts, all those wars that she saw. And now she is in the US, she is fighting every day. She's achieving her dreams to be a nurse, and her name is Marie Claire. And I am really proud of her, and I am there to support her so she can achieve her dreams but also so she can speak for other girls like her.



Malala Yousafzai responds to a question from the audience as Secretary-General António Guterres looks on. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

UN News: What would you say is your key message to world leaders?

Malala Yousafzai: I'm just reminding them of their responsibilities – that they are holding the positions in which they are responsible for their people and for the future generation. I remind them that they have to increase investment towards schooling, towards quality education, otherwise we would lose these future generations. This would impact not just the children, not just the girls, but all of us. So we have to invest towards the 130 million girls who are out of school, we have to support them, we have to stand with them, and make changes in the law and also take action.

UN News: What can men do to help achieve education for girls?

We have to believe in our sisters, in our daughters and allow them to be who they want to be.

Malala Yousafzai: Well I think men have to do a lot. My father is an inspiration because his five sisters could not go to school. So, he decided he would allow his own daughter to go to school, to get her education, and then to raise her voice. When we started campaigning in Swat Valley, when terrorism started and girl's education was banned, there were many other girls who wanted to speak out but their parents, their brothers did not allow them. My father was the one who did not stop me.

We have to believe in girls, we have to believe in our sisters, in our daughters and allow them to be who they want to be. As my father says, you do not have to do something, just do not clip their wings, just let them fly and let them achieve their dreams. So men have to come forward, they have to support women. It's better for the whole economy, better for each and every one of us. It will help the economy to grow even faster, it will improve the standards of living of each and every one of us, it would improve health. It also benefits the children because when women are educated, they are more likely to take care of their children, and their education, and their future.

UN News: How do you relate to your parents and brothers, and manage to have a little bit of fun in the midst of all the things you're doing?

Malala Yousafzai: So I'm grateful that I have such a beautiful family. Both of my parents have supported me and always stand with me, and for them I'm just their daughter. It's just like when other parents have a daughter, they love her, they take care of her. But then I have two younger brothers, and as usual brothers are cheeky ... We still fight, we still argue. My brothers, they just don't care what awards I'm winning or who I am or if I am ambassador or something, or UN Messenger of Peace.



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (left) meets with Malala Yousafzai, global advocate for girls' education and the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

UN News: When you became the youngest winner of the Nobel Prize, what did your brothers say to you?

Malala Yousafzai: So when I won the Nobel Peace Prize and I came back to the hotel where we were staying, my little brother started saying: 'Look you have won the Nobel Peace Prize but it does not mean you become a bossy sister.' They want to me be just as normal as I was.

UN News: You're getting ready to go to Oxford University. Tell us about that.

I want to help as many girls as I can to make sure they get quality education and achieve their dreams.

Malala Yousafzai: So I always wanted to get quality education, to go to a good university, it was my dream, and now that dream has come true and I am going to Oxford. I really worked hard for it ... And I was so happy when I received the offer. I'm excited to meet new people, to make friends, to learn. It is a great place of learning. I also want to enjoy a bit as well, to have some time with friends, and just to live like a normal student.

UN News: What are you hoping to be 5, 10 years from now, after Oxford?

Malala Yousafzai: It's hard to say what I want to be in the coming 10, 20 years because my mission and my goal is very clear, and that is to continue fighting for girls' education, their empowerment, their rights. In that I will continue my journey. But in the coming years, I want to complete my education. I want to continue working on education. I want to empower more young girls like me so that it's not just about one girl speaking out but we have hundreds and thousands of girls speaking out. We give them a voice. We give them a platform. Once you encourage them, once you tell them that your voice can change the world, then they can do it, they can come forward and speak out for themselves.

UN News: Maybe you'll be UN Secretary-General?

Malala Yousafzai: I'm not sure about that.



Nobel Prize Laureate and UN Messenger of Peace Malala Yousafzai being interviewed, with her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, looking on. UN Photo/Mark Garten

UN News: What would you tell a young girl of eight or nine to inspire her to

keep rising like you?

Malala Yousafzai: So I started speaking out when I was only 11 years old, and I did not know if my voice would have any impact or not. But when I got attacked I realized that my voice was powerful, and it did reach to those people, and they were scared of my voice. So believe in your voice, believe in yourself, and always follow your dreams. Because especially young girls, they dream big but as they grow older they start underestimating themselves, they do not believe in themselves, they don't dream big. So I would ask all young girls to dream big, as big as you can, and just follow your dreams and you can do anything.

UN News: You have shown tremendous courage, resilience. What within you gives you that power?

Malala Yousafzai: I have seen a lot in my life from terrorism, extremism, to then being attacked. And I was at the point where I had to make a decision [about] whether I want to continue my campaign for girls' education or not. And I've been away from my home in Pakistan for a long time. So going through all these situations in my life, I've learnt that, now surviving that attack, this life is for a purpose and that is for the education of children. It's only 70, 80 years that we live, and why not live it for a good purpose? Why not live it for a service that can help humanity, that can help the world. So I want to help as many girls as I can, to make sure they get quality education and achieve their dreams.