

World needs generation of self-empowered 'superheroes', UN youth forum told

The world needs young people who dream big and can endure both failure and pain, a Tongan Olympic idol told a gathering of youth at the United Nations on Wednesday.

"The world does not need violence, does not need bombs, the world needs today's youth to become superheroes," said Pita Taufatofua, the Tongan athlete who became a "superhero" himself two years ago when he marched shirtless, carrying his country's flag during the opening ceremony of the Rio Olympic Games.

At the UN, wearing a shirt, he said his brother advised him to "keep your shirt on and leave oil at home".

The second piece of advice from his brother was, "tell your truth, leave the youth with something they can take into the future," Mr. Taufatofua said.

One day in his childhood, he was coming home with his father, expecting that a superhero outfit was waiting for him at home. But there was nothing waiting for him. "That was my first experience of disappointment," he said.

So what do people do when they get disappointed, he asked.

"They minimize their expectations of themselves because that's how we reduce pain," he said. "Unfortunately, with minimizing expectations, we also minimize our potential to achieve our dreams and goals."

The formula for becoming a superhero is to have the ability to deal with failures and pains and to dream big, he said.

He dreamt of becoming an Olympian when he was 12. That dream never left him. After 20 years of pain, his dream finally came true in Rio.

Now 36, he was one of the many speakers invited to today's event, titled [Youth Dialogue](#), which was held to bring the United Nations closer to young people.

(Check out our exclusive interview with [Pita Taufatofua](#) here)

The one-day event sought to highlight the ideas, needs and concerns of young people on education and employment, as well as how to prevent radicalization of youth.

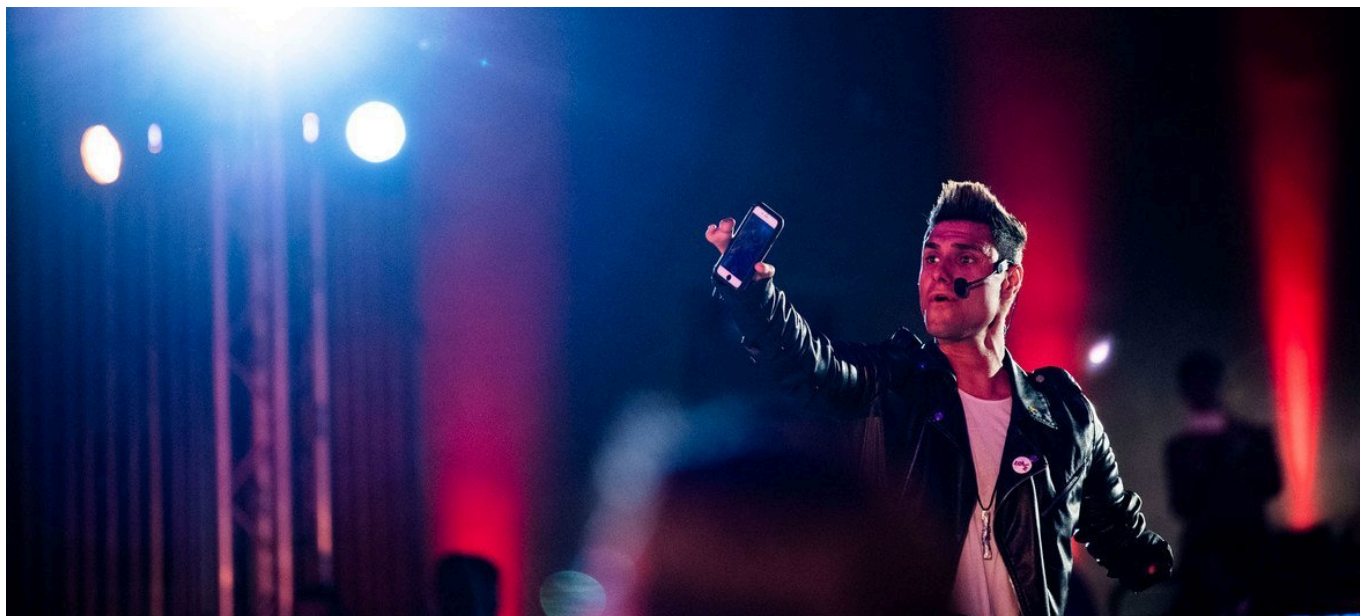
"They still feel they are excluded, from the decisions that are affecting their lives. They are not invited to the table where they are supposed to be.

Quite often, they have a feeling that when they speak no one is listening,” said [Miroslav Lajčák](#), the President of the UN General Assembly, explaining that this is why he hosted the event.

Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary-General’s [Envoy on Youth](#), said most mainstream media appears to be “on a mission” to create an image of young people as a generation of careless or lazy individuals, who, if not managed well, could turn into a threat or burden to a country.

However, that is not the case, she argued: “If we are to realistically achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is our generation who is going to do this. We are the SDG generation. The rest of the world can try, but they can’t, or won’t, make it without [us].”

Otherwise known as the Global Goals, the SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Singer Emmanuel Kelly performs during the General Assembly Youth Dialogue at UN Headquarters in New York.

Other speakers included Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al-Thani, Vice-Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development; Mari Malek, model, disc jockey and founder of “Stand For Education” and singer Emmanuel Kelly.