

Statement made by the UNESCO Director-General, Ms Irina Bokova.

Nobel Peace Prize: Director-General congratulates Malala and Kailash Satyarthi

Oslo/Paris, 10 October: Education activists Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzay have won the Nobel Peace Prize "for their struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education." Both laureates have been working closely with UNESCO to promote education, especially for girls and for child labourers. The Director-General of the Organization, Irina Bokova, issued this statement on the awards:

My heartfelt congratulations go out to Malala Yousafzai and Kailash Satyarthi for winning the Nobel Peace Prize. The award of the Peace Prize to these two ardent defenders of education and human rights sends a resounding message to the world about the importance of education for building peaceful and sustainable societies. UNESCO works closely with both Nobel laureates.

Kailash Satyarthi is a close friend of UNESCO and has been at the forefront of the global movement to end child slavery and exploitative child labour since 1980. As founder and president of the Global Campaign for Education and of the Global March Against Child Labour, he has worked with passion and courage to fulfill every child's right to education.

After being shot and struggling for her life for speaking out about the right to attend school, Malala is known to the world for her courage and commitment. She stands with us in the struggle for universal education, especially for girls.

"We are proud that these two champions have been honored with the Prize. This prize is a clear recognition of the fact that peace depends on quality education, and particularly on the education of girls. This basic right is under attack nowadays, schools are targeted and in many parts of the world students are prevented from going to school. We must fight with all we have to protect schools and make them safe havens of development and tolerance," the Director-General declared.

"This prize is particularly significant for UNESCO. It is the Nobel Prize for education for peace. It is the Nobel of girls' right to education. It is the Nobel Prize of all the women and men around the world who are dedicated to ensuring that the basic human right to quality education becomes a reality. Women nowadays represent two-thirds of the world's illiterate population. Thirty-one millions young girls still do not have access to primary education and an equal number of them are deprived of secondary education. Educating these girls is a world priority, a lever of social change and development, the condition for lasting peace. The Nobel Prize comes as an encouragement for us to redouble our efforts to ensure that no child is deprived of education," Ms Bokova concluded.

On 10 October, the Nobel Peace Prize 2014 was awarded jointly to Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzay "for their struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education."

This Award pays tribute to the outstanding commitment of Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzay to promote education as a basic human right for all and to the unique courage that they have brought to taking this forward.

"The award of the Peace Prize to these two ardent defenders of education sends out a resounding message to the world on the importance of education for building peaceful and sustainable societies," said Irina Bokova, the UNESCO Director-General.

This is especially important today, when some 58 million children are out of school, more than half are girls -- and close to the same number of children are out of secondary school, and as schools are being increasingly attacked. These developments throw a shadow over the sustainable development of entire societies, as countries accelerate to meet the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All objectives by 2015.

This Nobel Peace Prize recognizes the power of education for peace. Education is essential for human dignity and fulfilment, for more resilient societies, and for inclusive sustainable development. These are the foundations for lasting peace, as expressed in the UNESCO Constitution, almost 70 years ago.

"Education is a force for teaching respect and tolerance, for deepening mutual understanding and for building new bridges of dialogue, as well as for eradicating poverty," said the UNESCO Director-General. "The strongest foundation for peace lies in respect for the equal dignity of every girl and boy, every woman and man, and this is why education is so essential."

UNESCO works closely with both Nobel laureates. Kailash Satyarthi has been at the forefront of the global movement to end child slavery and exploitative child labour since 1990. As founder and president of the Global Campaign for Education and of the Global March Against Child Labour, he has worked with passion and courage to fulfil every child's right to education. UNESCO has supported the work of Malala Yousafzay, in the struggle to promote access to quality education for all, especially girls.

Promoting girls education is a priority of all UNESCO action, as the most powerful positive transformational force for more just and inclusive societies. This is the goal of the Malala Fund for Girls' Education, launched by UNESCO and the Government of Pakistan, working through teacher training, community advocacy and gender sensitive education to advance girls' education.

To these ends, UNESCO is also working across the world to strengthen the protection of schools in situations of conflict, most recently to support implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1998 (2011), including through the 2014 Field Guidance Note on Security Council Resolution 1998.

"I see this as the Nobel Peace Prize for education, a Prize for girls education -- all girls and boys must be in school, they should not be married off, not working, not traded commodities," said Irina Bokova.

"This is why education must stand at the heart of the new global sustainable development agenda that States are shaping to follow 2015 – because quality education and lifelong learning for all is the strongest force for the sustainability of all development and for lasting foundations for peace," she continued.

In the 1990's, Mr. Satyarthi founded Bachpan Bachao Andolan (Save Childhood Movement) to focus on child labor as a human rights issue, not just a problem related to welfare or charity. He then connected his movement with efforts to achieve Education for All. So far his organization has freed more than 80,000 children from servitude and successfully re-integrated them into society through education. In 2001, Mr. Satyarthi had led the campaign Fundamental Right to Education - a 15,000 km. march across India that led to a constitutional amendment and an Act of Parliament called The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education. He has long worked with UNESCO and served on the Board of the Global Education Partnership.

Malala Yousafzay has become famous for her activism for girls education, especially around her home in the Swat Valley of Pakistan, where the local Taliban had banned girls from attending school. In 2009, at the age of 11, she started to campaign for education, appearing in the media worldwide. A year later, a gunman boarded her school bus, asked for her by name, then shot her three times. The attack nearly killed Malala. After her condition stabilized, she was sent to a hospital in Birmingham UK for rehabilitation. That is where she now lives, attends school and continues to speak out for girls education. UNESCO and the Government of Pakistan have established a fund in her name to finance programmes to improve girl's education.