

In the mid 1990's, a bright young youth made a global impact on Child Slavery. Iqbal Masih's life was cut short just shy of 13 years but his powerful and eloquent speeches encouraged thousands of bonded laborers and child slaves to follow his example. He brought awareness and promoted education so that others could stand up for their rights and end the injustice in sweat shops around the world.

In 1983, Iqbal Masih was born in the poor community of Maridke outside of Lahore, Pakistan. His family was financially burdened, and his father Saif Masih decided to leave when Iqbal was young. When he was 4 years old, Iqbal's mother Inayat needed funds to pay for his older brother's wedding. Because the family was already in debt, she took out a loan in Iqbal's name from a local businessman. However, when their debt went unpaid for two years she was forced to "loan" Iqbal as a laborer to pay off the debt.

Iqbal became one of the many child bonded laborers at the carpet factory. Despite working 14 hour days six days a week, Iqbal never earned enough money to pay off the debt, the cost of his "apprenticeship", his tools, his food, fines for his mistakes or the rising interest. Though considered "debt bonded" he was really like millions of other children who were enslaved to their employers without hope of earning their freedom. Bonded labor, child labor and slave labor were all outlawed in Pakistan. However, it ran rampant due to a corrupt government and a police force that was living off the bribes of local business men.

"Children should have pens in their hands not tools" – Iqbal Masih

When Iqbal was 10 years old he made up his mind to escape. He had endured hot, cramped conditions, air filled with wool debris and countless whippings, beatings and cuttings whenever his work slowed. Though stunted by malnutrition and weakened by lack of exercise, Iqbal and a few of his friends escaped. He ran to the local police and explained how the employer was beating the children and keeping them as slaves. Unfortunately, the police officer was more willing to receive the "finder's fee" for escaped slaves and returned Iqbal to Arshad, Iqbal's owner. At the direction of the police officer, Iqbal was chained to the carpet machine and Arshad forced him back to work with a combination of physical abuse and starvation.

At the age of 12, Iqbal found away to attend a freedom day celebration held by the Brick Layer Unions. There, Iqbal heard about his rights as a laborer and that debt slavery was outlawed a few

years before. In addition to the law against slavery, the government had cancelled all debts with businesses so they could in turn free those indebted to them. However, very few businesses actually released their slaves. When others were asked to speak before the crowd Iqbal volunteered. After hearing Iqbal's story, one of the union leaders named Ehsan Ullah Khan organized an effort to free Iqbal from bondage. After much convincing about the illegality of his factory, Arshad freed Iqbal and some of the other child slaves.

The 12 year old Iqbal became a prominent leader of the anti-slave movement in Pakistan. He attended the Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF) School for former child slaves and quickly completed a four year education in only two years. As his understanding of labor laws and human rights grew, he began using his energetic personality to speak on behalf of the enslaved workers. He would sneak into factories and begin asking the children about their experiences and if they were slaves. Even though this was an incredibly risky job, his malnourished body and stunted growth made him appear to be only around six years old so he was rarely perceived as a threat.

The BLLF sent him to speak at businesses and demonstrations all over Pakistan where bonded slavery was known to exist. With his powerful personality he educated the slave laborers and encouraged them to escape. Despite death threats from the organized business mafias that dominated the communities, Iqbal continued to speak against their practices with confidence and eloquence. It is estimated that over 3,000 Pakistani Children escaped their owners after visiting rallies, hearing speeches and attending meetings put on by the BLLF that year.

Because of his powerful story, Iqbal Masih began visiting other countries, raising awareness of child slaves and advocating for their freedom. Everywhere he went he inspired others (especially children) to become involved in the mission to end child slavery.

"I would like to do what Abraham Lincoln did... I would like to do it in Pakistan" -Iqbal Masih

After a visit to speak in the United States in December of 1994, Iqbal returned home to Pakistan. He would spend his last few months of life attending school in hopes of becoming a lawyer to fight on behalf of bonded laborers.

On Palm Sunday, (the 16th of April, 1995) Iqbal was assassinated after being shot in the back with a 12 gauge shotgun. He was riding home on a bicycle with some friends after attending mass earlier in the day.

The official police report claims that it was an accidental firing by a local farmer named Ashraf Hero. They claimed he confessed to the accident after hours of being tortured. Because Iqbal was a prominent enemy of the local Carpet Manufacturer Mafia, The Pakistani Human Rights Commission looked into the murder but quickly agreed with the police story. Despite the official report, most everyone believes that Iqbal Masih was assassinated by an agent of the Carpet Manufacturer Mafia who already held influence over the police and that Ashraf Hero was framed for the murder.

Iqbal Masih is our hero because he took courageous action on behalf of child slaves and bonded laborers in Pakistan and around the world. Despite his short life, his passionate and powerful message encouraged thousands to seek freedom and inspired many more around the world to join in his efforts. There are still an estimated 75,000 slaves in Pakistan Today. One organization, Free the Children was started by a Canadian youth named Craig Kielburger who had heard about Iqbal's story and wanted to help make a difference.

Kutcher passionately testifies on his anti-sex trafficking efforts

By Betsy Klein, CNN

Updated 11:26 PM ET, Wed February 15, 2017

Story highlights

Ashton Kutcher came to Capitol Hill Wednesday

He spoke out against modern slavery and human trafficking

Editor's Note: Join the CNN Freedom Project on March 14 2017 for #MyFreedomDay -- a day-long event when students around the world will be holding events to raise awareness of modern slavery.

(CNN) — No one got "Punk'd" Wednesday morning when Ashton Kutcher came to Capitol Hill.

The actor testified Wednesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in a hearing on progress in combating modern slavery. Kutcher spoke on behalf of Thorn: Digital Defenders of Children, an organization he co-founded with then-wife Demi Moore in 2009 that builds software to fight human trafficking.

These days, he called his "day job" his work as chairman of Thorn and also as a father -- he and wife Mila Kunis welcomed son, Dimitri Portwood, in November, and daughter, Wyatt, is two years old. (He caught a red eye to Washington after a Valentine's Day dinner with Kunis and will return home this afternoon.)

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Ashton Kutcher walks with Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Sen. Bob Corker (R-TN) before testifying on Capitol Hill on February 15, 2017 in Washington, DC.

In an impassioned 15-minute opening testimony, Kutcher praised the committee for bipartisan cooperation on the issue, calling his opportunity to speak "one of the greatest honors of my life," his voice cracking multiple times as he recalled his work with victims.

March 14, 2017 is #MyFreedomDay

"As part of my anti-trafficking work, I've met victims in Russia, I've met victims in India, I've met victims that have been trafficked from Mexico, victims from New York and New Jersey and all across our country. I've been on FBI raids where I've seen things that no person should ever see," Kutcher said. "I've seen video content of a child that's the same age as mine being raped by an American man that was a sex tourist in Cambodia. And this child was so conditioned by her environment that she thought she was engaging in play."

Kutcher pressed the importance of using technology as a tool that can be used to disable slavery, citing specific progress.

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Ashton Kutchner testifies at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee, examining "Ending Modern Slavery: Building on Success," on Capitol Hill on February 15, 2017 in Washington, DC.

It's working. In six months, with 25% of our users reporting, we've identified over 6,000 trafficking victims, 2,000 of which are minors. This tool has enhanced 4,000 law enforcement officials in 900 agencies. And we're reducing the investigation time by 60%," he said of a software tool called "Spotlight."

Another tool called "Solis" has taken investigation times from dark web material from three years to three weeks, Kutcher said.

He spoke knowledgeably on the issue and called for specific actions, including additional funding for the technology, fostering public-private sector relationships, looking into the pipeline for victims, including working with the foster care system and the mental health system, and differentiating solution sets for sex trafficking and labor trafficking with enforcement and legislation initiatives.

Committee Chairman Sen. Bob Corker called Kutcher's work "inspirational," and "a true testament to entrepreneurialism and people taking a risk toward social good."

Corker, his fellow committee members, including Sens. Tim Kaine and Marco Rubio, and Kutcher all wore red X pins, a symbol calling awareness to the issue of modern slavery.

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Senator Bob Corker
@SenBobCorker

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Thankful for Ashton Kutcher and the work @thorn is doing to rescue trafficking victims. It was great to have him on the Hill today.

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"Thankful for Ashton Kutcher and the work @thorn is doing to rescue trafficking victims. It was great to have him on the Hill today," Corker tweeted.

The former host of "Punk'd" got political at times, speaking out on the current political climate regarding the refugee crisis.

"When people are left out, when they're neglected, when they're not supported, and when they're not given the love they need to grow, it becomes an incubator for trafficking, and this refugee crisis, if we want to be serious about ending slavery, we cannot ignore them, we cannot ignore our support for this issue in that space, because otherwise, we're going to have to deal with it for years to come," he said.

Last month, Kutcher spoke out against President Donald Trump's executive order on immigration:



ashton kutcher
@aplusk

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"My wife came to this country on a refugee visa in the middle of the Cold War! My blood is boiling right now!" he tweeted, adding, "We have never been a nation built on fear. Compassion that is the root ethic of America. Our differences are fundamental 2R sustainability."

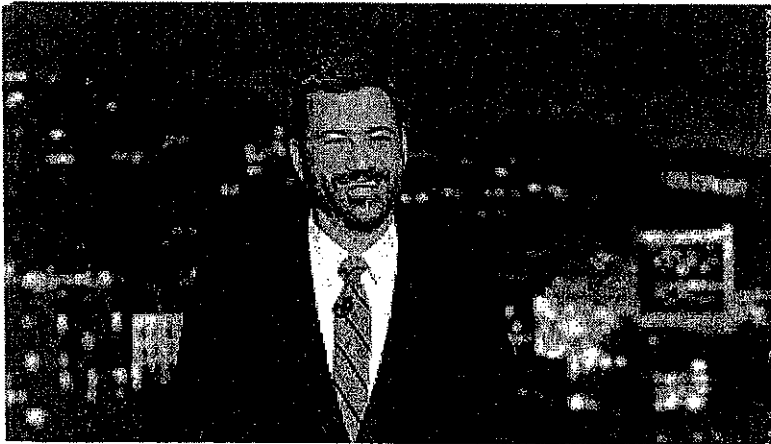
Asked by Rubio about sites like Backpage.com that can be used to provide an internet forum for transactional sex, Kutcher said he's been working to fight this for six years alongside sites like Craigslist and Village Voice, but when one site closes, another opens.

"It's a game of whack-a-mole, right? And the only question we have is not relative to censoring it, it's not relative to shutting down the internet, it's relative to can we build the tools that are better than their tools to fight what's happening?" Kutcher said.

The hearing wasn't without it's lighter moments: Sen. John McCain is not a member of the committee but came to thank its members for dedication to the issue, acknowledged the committee's famous guest.

"Ashton, you were better looking in the movies," McCain said.

Kutcher blew the senator a kiss, saying his wife thought so, too.



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Frustration with Trump -- even among Republicans -- mounts on Capitol Hill

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Sexual Assault Survivors Are Being Discouraged from Reporting, but everyone else. Why?



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Vice President Joe Biden: We're in a situation where one in five women on a college campus is likely to be sexually assaulted. Young women were the most susceptible to be assaulted again after first being assaulted. They became victimized. There's even data growing [from] the Centers for Disease Control that women suffer from post-traumatic stress as a consequence of this.

We had thousands and thousands of high school and college students on the telephone and I addressed them ... by saying look, we need your help. Any suggestions you have how we can make the college campuses or high school campuses safer for you, let us know.... I felt like an idiot when I got the responses. The overwhelming, spontaneous response without any prompting was, get men involved. *Get men involved.* Although we had been working on trying to change the culture with men as well, all of a sudden it hit us.

That's when we started the "It's on Us" campaign, going out to college campuses because bystanders who see something happen, in my view, if they don't holler, scream, pick up the phone and call and intervene, they are complicitous in the commission of a crime. They are complicitous.

Look, if you see a brother taking a drunk freshman coed up the stairs to his room and you do nothing, you're a coward. You are a coward. You have an obligation to step up. You know that she's not able to give consent. And so, I went on campuses, we put together this program, and more than 400,000 people have signed the pledge to intervene. That's how you change attitudes -- get a critical mass of people beginning to speak out so that the attacker or the bystander is the party not the woman being assaulted, whether she's drunk or sober.

TV: You had a recent PSA come out and it featured some very realistic text messages between two young men where they are talking casually about a sexual assault. What were you hoping to show with this, and is this an example of a larger problem?

JB: It is an example of a larger problem. It's an example of a larger cultural problem. We're trying to let young men understand that without consent, meaning saying yes, it is OK to touch me, yes it is OK to pull me into this bed, yes it is OK to have intercourse with me, then it is not consent. If a young woman is drunk, SHE CANNOT CONSENT. She cannot consent, and it's rape. It's rape. It's rape. I wanted them to see because it's clear what the subtext is.

I've had young men on campuses say to me, "I've never thought of it that way. I've never thought of that way, as long as she wasn't screaming and kicking me and yelling help then it was probably OK." It's not OK. It's not OK unless she can affirmatively consent.

TV: Are there any expectations that young men face that you think actually contribute to rape culture?

JB: This is a cultural problem. A fundamentally cultural problem. What is built into the system? The assumption that you must have done something. You knew him, you must have at least by implication consented to something. You must have led him on. There were laws all over the country that in fact contributed to this notion that there's no need to respect a woman's autonomy because it's just not that important. The other thing is that there are a lot of young men who come up because of that culture that they were raised in and think they have to be tough guys. They think, if you go to kiss her and she doesn't want to kiss you, pull her tight and kiss her anyway: "Be a man, stand up." There are those pressures that are waning, but they've existed. They've existed in society, but none of them justify anything other than parents beginning to teach their children, their boys, what appropriate conduct is, and we have to turn this idea on its head.

Being a man means respecting a woman's autonomy, not invading a woman's autonomy. You want to be a strong man? Respect.

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I carried the White House task force on this issue, and because of our report, many schools now conduct what we call climate surveys to quantify the extent of Sexual Assault Survivor Attended Prom to Show Her S assault on campuses. So what happens is these results of these campus surveys begin to validate what we've known for 20 years that approximately one in 10 women in college experience sexual assault, so schools began to beef up their assault response teams that put procedures in place to make sure that there is no ongoing threat of retaliation if a woman does report, and more research has been conducted on prevention programs and more schools [are] implementing these Michigan State University President Addresses Sexua... ion programs.

Now, this commitment has to come from the top. College presidents have to be involved. You can't view this problem as somebody else's problem, and schools across the board are getting better at this. No school wants to do a lot of reporting, because if you're a great school, you're academically qualified, and you report you have X number of incidents of rape or sexual assault on campus, you say, well, maybe we'll be downgraded, but since everybody is starting to step up, it really is now, everybody is realizing it doesn't matter whether you're at a great Ivy institution or you're in a tier-3 college. It's the same everywhere.

TV: You've mentioned Title IX a couple of times now. People believe Betsy DeVos may be severely limiting Title IX protections for sexual assault survivors.

JB: Let me tell you, it bothers me most if Secretary DeVos is going to really dumb down Title IX enforcement. The real message, the real frightening message you're going to send out is, our culture says it's OK. You know, the major reason why women drop out of college when they're a freshman is because of sexual assault. Not their grades, sexual assault. And so, it would be devastating.

No father or mother should drop their kid off this late August, early September at their first day at college and drive away worried [if she is] going to be safe. Most parents don't drive away saying, Is she going to do all right in school? Is she academically qualified? Will she show up for class? How well is she going to do? That's not the conversation going on. The conversation that's going on is, is she going to be safe? That is an obligation of the school, and Title IX is the vehicle, and when Secretary DeVos by her silence didn't affirm that rape and sexual assault are forms of sexual discrimination ... God, if anything is sexual discrimination, it's rape and assault. And that's why schools have an obligation under Title IX to prevent this from happening.

I'm often asked over the years, because I'm so passionate about this, "OK, Senator, Mr. Vice President, when will you say you've succeeded?" There's always going to be violence, but we will have succeeded when no young woman in a high school or college campus who is sexually assaulted or raped ever ask[s] herself, "What did I do to deserve this?" It is never, never, never, never her fault. She could be drop-dead drunk. She could walk across the campus naked. Nobody, *nobody*, has a right to touch her. Nobody. And it will be a success when no young man actually believes [it] when he says to himself, "Well, she deserved it" or "I had a right to do that."

Interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Related: This Campaign Sends an Important Message About Who Should Prevent Sexual Assault

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Carrying On the Message

Article

ATLANTA, Georgia (Achieve3000, December 20, 2007). Civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. has been gone for 40 years, but he made a permanent impact on the generations that followed him, including his four children. Yolanda King, Dr. King's eldest daughter, used drama and motivational speaking to pursue her father's dream of creating racial harmony.

A Life in Civil Rights

Yolanda Denise King was born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. From the start, she became immersed in civil rights by witnessing her father's activism and how it affected others. Yolanda was only 2 weeks old when civil rights activist Rosa Parks refused to relinquish her seat to a white person on a city bus. When Yolanda was 7 years old, Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. In the speech, Dr. King mentioned Yolanda and her three siblings: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Yolanda was 12 when her father was assassinated in 1968.

Becoming an Actress

When she finished high school, Yolanda decided to continue her education, first attending Smith College in Massachusetts and then going on to New York University for her master's degree in theater. She would use her theatrical training to impart her father's message, which she had adopted as her own. Through performance, she wanted to convey the importance of equality and racial harmony.

As an actress, King appeared in numerous films, many of which dealt with racial strife and the pursuit of justice. She was in the 1996 movie *Ghosts of Mississippi* and portrayed civil rights activist Rosa Parks in King, a 1978 television miniseries depicting the life of her father. In 1990, Yolanda King founded Higher Ground Productions, a company that produces films, plays, and other performances in the pursuit of peace and unity.

"Yolanda was lovely. She wore the mantle of princess, and she wore it with dignity and charm," said the Reverend Joseph Lowery, one of her father's close aides in the civil rights movement. He added she was "thoroughly committed to the movement and found her own means of expressing that commitment through drama."



AP Photo/Dawn Deppi / Saint Mary
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*Yolanda Denise King was the eldest
child of civil rights activist Dr. Martin
Luther King.*

A Leader

Yolanda King's passion for civil rights extended beyond entertainment. Her charisma enabled her to become a gifted speaker and a respected member of several civil rights organizations. The Reverend Jesse Jackson, who also worked with her father, said about Yolanda, "She lived with a lot of the [difficulties] of our [civil rights] struggle."

Yolanda's father was not her only guide as she pursued civil rights. Her mother, Coretta Scott King, was also an active public figure who worked hard to keep her late husband's message alive. Mrs. King died in 2006, and in January 2007, the nation celebrated Martin Luther King's birthday for the first time without her. Yolanda made certain that she took over her mother's leadership position, but in her own way—through theater.

At Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where Martin Luther King had once been the minister, Yolanda performed a series of skits having to do with her father's work. One of them was about a college student's memories of efforts to end segregation in Birmingham, Alabama, and another one told the story of a girl's first ride on a desegregated bus. Yolanda urged the audience to be a force for peace and love, and to use Martin Luther King's birthday each year to ask tough questions about their own beliefs about prejudice.

"We must keep reaching across the table and, in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, feed each other," Yolanda said.

Yolanda King died in May of 2007. She left behind a strong message of peace and equality, just as her father had.

"[Yolanda King was a] torch bearer for her parents and a committed activist in her own right," said civil rights leader Reverend Al Sharpton.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Dictionary

charisma (*noun*) charm; ability to inspire others

depict (*verb*) to represent in a drawing, painting, or other work

relinquish (*verb*) to give up

segregation (*noun*) the act of separating people by race, especially as an act of discrimination

I Am Malala

Article

OSLO, Norway (Achieve3000, March 1, 2015). The Nobel Peace Prize has been called "the world's most prestigious prize." For more than 100 years, the annual award has been bestowed upon world leaders, political activists, and multi-national committees that have made significant contributions to world peace. But 2014 Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai had never held political office. She'd never even voted. In fact, the 17-year-old was pulled out of chemistry class to hear the news that she'd received one of the world's highest honors.

Malala Yousafzai was born in 1997 in Swat Valley, a picturesque area of northwest Pakistan. She attended a school founded by her father, educator Ziauddin Yousafzai. But in 2007, life for Malala and millions of others in Swat Valley changed when the Taliban took over the region. The Taliban passed a series of strict measures that included banning women and girls from attending school. Malala's father, however, stood up to the Taliban. He kept his school open to girls, even in the face of intense threats.

Malala was inspired by her father's actions. In 2008, at age 11, she began giving TV interviews about the importance of education for all children. In 2009, Malala wrote a blog for media outlet BBC Urdu about life under the new regime. But her newfound fame made Malala a target for the Taliban, and in October 2012, the group attempted to assassinate her. Malala was seriously injured. Following the attack, Malala's family moved to England, where Malala received medical treatment.

The story of the attempt on Malala's life drew widespread condemnation. The teen received messages of support and sympathy from people around the world, from children to world leaders.

"[The world reaction] gave me hope," Malala said. "I just thought before this incident I was maybe one girl. Now we are millions."

Just weeks after the attack, buoyed by the international outrage and support, Pakistan's National Assembly passed the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, which guarantees a free education for all children between the ages of 5 and 16.

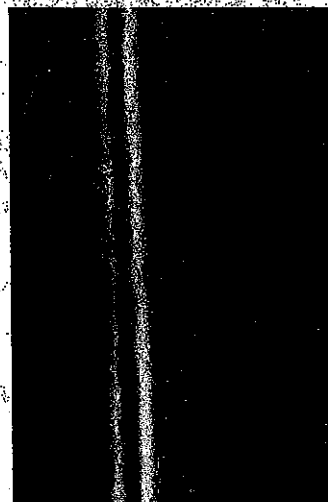


Photo credit: AP Photo/Fredrik Varfjell. NTB scanpix

Malala Yousafzai, the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, waves to the crowd in Oslo, Norway.

In July 2013, the United Nations held "Malala Day," at which the teen addressed a special youth assembly featuring 500 young leaders and education advocates from around the world. In her speech, Malala petitioned world leaders to embrace tolerance and reject prejudice—and to ensure that every child, regardless of gender, has access to a free education.

"We cannot succeed when half of us are held back," Malala said during the address. "Let us pick up our books and our pens; they are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world—education is the only solution."

In October 2013, Malala released her memoir *I Am Malala*, which detailed her struggle against the Taliban and her fight for children's right to an education. The book has been translated into 38 languages.

Around that time, Malala created the Malala Fund, an organization that campaigns for the millions of girls worldwide who are denied an education. In its first three months of operation, the fund received \$3 million in donations from around the globe, as well as a pledge of \$10 million from the Pakistani government.

In December 2014, Malala was recognized for her myriad contributions to education and children's rights with the Nobel Peace Prize. The 17-year-old Malala, who shared the prize with fellow education activist Kailash Satyarthi of India, became the youngest Nobel laureate in history.

After receiving her award, Malala addressed the audience at Oslo City Hall in Norway, where the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony is held.

"I'm pretty certain I'm the first recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize who still fights with her younger brothers," Malala joked, adding, "I want there to be peace everywhere, but my brothers and I are still working on that."

But Malala quickly grew serious as she implored world leaders to make this "the last [generation] that sees empty classrooms, lost childhoods, and wasted potentials."

Malala continued as the audience cheered.

"Leaders must seize this opportunity to guarantee a free, quality, primary and secondary education for every child. Some will say this is impractical, or too expensive, or too hard, or maybe even impossible—but it is time the world thinks bigger."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Dictionary

buoy (*verb*) to make someone feel happy or hopeful

laureate (*noun*) a person honored or awarded a prize for great achievement

memoir (*noun*) a written firsthand account of a person's life experiences

myriad (*adjective*) numerous

tolerance (*noun*) acceptance of differences, including different views