

Young leaders vs The world's biggest problems

"Education is empowerment," Malala Yousafzai told an audience of aspiring young leaders at World Merit Day in Liverpool.

The 17-year-old was addressing the issues of gender inequality and universal access to education as part of the World Merit organisation's fellowship programme.

In the hope of inspiring these future leaders, Malala reflected on her personal journey, which has taken her from being a young girl banned from education by the Taliban when they took control of her hometown in Pakistan, to a global icon.

She said: "I was not allowed to go to school but I wanted to continue my education. I realised that education was empowering me – making me independent, making me able to take part in and contribute to my society."



World Merit Day speakers Malala and Felix. Photo credit: World Merit Day

Another of the key players in the global youth movement working to challenge systems and make positive change, Felix Finkbeiner, joined Malala to address the audience in Liverpool.

At the age of nine Felix embarked on a global mission to plant trees around the world to help reduce rocketing levels of carbon dioxide. Seven years on, his mission has taken him to schools around the world, numerous national governments and even the UN.

His young army of environmental campaigners plant trees themselves and also get governments, companies and individuals to pledge to plant.

Felix told Pioneers Post: "The reason why I am doing this and probably why most of the people involved are doing

this is because it is about our future. We will have to live with all the problems that are not solved today. If we wait until we are adults it will be too late.”

Sir Ken Robinson, author, international advisor on education and a Ted talk legend said what everybody over the age of 25 was thinking following a morning of talks from passionate young people. “I’m depressed. I’ve just listened to Felix, who is just 16, and I feel like I have done nothing,” he joked.

“In many parts of the world the population is getting younger and younger, this is why your generation is so important,” Sir Ken told the audience in Liverpool.

The day ended with a sobering reality check from Malala. She spoke of her recent trip to meet the families of the 200 Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by terrorist group Boko Haram.

“We cannot even imagine what situation they are in. They really need our support right now. We must speak out for them,” she pleaded.

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