

Your excellences, faculty members, my fellow delegates from around the world,

Asalaam o laikum,

Almost two billion global citizens are suffering the indignity of poverty. My country Pakistan represents 48 million of the global poor. Across the world whether we measure poverty using a dollar a day index or the multi-dimensional measure employed by the UN, the conclusion is always the same – poverty is everywhere. The reason I say there is nothing dignified about being poor is because the consequences of poverty are disastrous for the human spirit, mind, and body. I cannot put in words what poverty feels like but a 16 year old Pakistani girl collecting trash and rummaging through leftover food scraps could certainly do so. She's not here though...I am.

I began my Model UN journey three years ago. In that time I have spoken at Yale University and University of Pennsylvania in the U.S. Today, at 16, I am here in Geneva speaking to you at the European Headquarters of the United Nations. In two years, I will graduate high school and travel abroad for higher studies.

Back home, the 16 year old trash collector has never eaten three nutritional meals a day. She has never tasted clean drinking water. She has been sick most of her life due to malnutrition and poor hygiene. As a result, she is suffering from poor gut health, a compromised immune system, cognitive impairment, and her body is shorter than her genetic average due to stunting. Her children will be at high risk of being born with deficiencies and abnormalities. Intervention now would mean she would have a dignified minimum living standard. What she will never have are the opportunities I have to decide my future.

Even if we reached her now, provided above a dollar a day, put food on her table, gave her a roof, it's too late...at best we could make her comfortable and bring some dignity to her standard of living. What she will never have are the choices I have to decide my future.

So, who is responsible? It is obvious that the first responsibility of acting on poverty lies with nation states and governments, elected or not. But all governments have challenges. Some find it easier to build nuclear weapons than feeding, housing, clothing, and educating the poor. Some try but fall short because there is always so much wrong when so much poverty exists. So, who takes up the challenge of alleviating human suffering when governments fall short? The heroes of course. Organizations and people who step in when no one else can or will. They make it their mission to uplift the human spirit and help people lead more dignified lives.

You can see these heroes all around you. We are in one such organization. The story of the United Nations is also the story of people and nations coming together to help every global citizen from every background, every age, every color, every religion, and every gender across the world who is suffering. The greatest heroes of course are the people who make up the UN Secretariat. These men and women risk their lives, working far from home and their families, just so they can get to that 16 year old Pakistani girl and the millions and millions more suffering from unimaginable challenges the world over. I can say this because for many years the UN has tried to reach every child in my country of 200 million every year regardless of absent road networks, conflict, and natural disasters to make sure no child has to live with Polio ever again. Some of these workers have paid for it with their lives, and Pakistan is still not polio free, but I will bet my future they will keep trying and they are so close.

These heroes are also everyday people you can find in every country. In Pakistan, a man who passed away in 2016 created the world's largest ambulance network across Pakistan, built homeless shelters, animal shelters, rehab centers, and orphanages to bring dignity to millions living in poverty. He did this entirely through private donations. His name was Abdul Sattar Edhi, founder of the Edhi Foundation. At the time of his death he was the registered guardian or parent to over 20,000 Pakistani children. His son continues his work through his foundation.

A girl from Swat wrote in defiance of the Al Qaeda backed Taliban in northern Pakistan. All she wanted was to go to school and she was shot for it, but she survived. Today, she is a global advocate for girl's education and Pakistan is Taliban free. Her name is Malala Yousafzai.

Thirty years ago a man campaigned to build Pakistan's first free Cancer research hospital. Today Shaukat Khanum Cancer Research hospitals treat hundreds of thousands of poor Pakistani cancer patients free of cost each year. He also believed in human dignity and vowed to pull people out of poverty. In 2018 he was elected the 22<sup>nd</sup> Prime Minister of Pakistan. One of his first acts was to establish homeless shelters and meal centers across every city in Pakistan where anyone is welcome. His name is Imran Ahmed Khan Niazi.

So, between governments and heroes why are we still struggling with addressing poverty? The numbers are growing and we are no closer to solving this crisis. Perhaps the solution lies in the simplest of questions. How can a burger in Geneva cost 40 Dollars when a girl in Pakistan is eating out of a garbage dump? How can two sixteen year old lives differ so drastically? How can I be here when she is there? The world's poor are victims of our collective excesses. Between the heroes and governments there are still millions of us, unwilling to let go of our luxuries for someone else to afford necessities.

My name is Qirat Fatima, and the dumpster girl in Pakistan, her name is citizen 38 million and one, currently living in abject poverty.