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Write a 1-pg reflection or write a paragraph response on the blog.

Two children's rights activists awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

Source: Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff

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Grade Level 8 Word Count 971

In large parts of the world, adolescent girls are denied an education, kidnapped, gang-raped and sold in the market. They're forced to cart water and they're married off early to old men. Then one extraordinary girl, Malala Yousafzai, escaped the fate of others and soared to freedom, voicing their pain and terror.

Malala, who was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday with Indian children's rights activist Kailash Satyarthi, has become a symbol of hope in her homeland, Pakistan. Girls there are sometimes slain by their families in "honor killings" if they dare to marry for love. They are also kept out of school in deeply conservative communities.

The award comes as girls are under attack by extremists in countries such as Nigeria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Girls are routinely abused in nations including India, Somalia and South Africa.

Horrific Cases Of Sexual Abuse

In Nigeria, hundreds of schoolgirls kidnapped by the violent Islamist militia Boko Haram are still in captivity.

In Iraq, the extremist group Islamic State (ISIL) has kidnapped hundreds of girls of the minority Yazidi sect in recent months. The group calls itself the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and has also been called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Levant is the English term for the region stretching from southern Turkey through Syria to Egypt.

In India, where horrific cases of sexual abuse of girls and young women surface regularly, two girls were killed in a village in Uttar Pradesh state in May. They had gone outside their home at night to relieve themselves in a field because of a lack of bathrooms.

"This award is for all the children who are voiceless, whose voices need to be heard," Malala, 17, said. She was the youngest recipient in history of a prize that is infrequently awarded to women.

Spotlighting the struggles of boys as well as girls, the Nobel committee announced in Oslo that the award was also being given to Satyarthi, 60. He founded Bachpan Bachao Andolan, or the Save the Childhood Movement, which has campaigned to free thousands of children from forced labor and human trafficking. Both Malala and Satyarthi have made exceptional sacrifices, facing the very real possibility of death for their work as advocates for children.

Award Packed With Symbolism

The decision was packed with symbolism: a shared award for a Pakistani and an Indian, each struggling for children's rights in neighboring rival nuclear nations, whose disputed borders in Kashmir have been racked by intense shelling in recent days. The difference in the two recipients' ages illustrated that the struggle for fundamental human rights is everyone's concern. The committee announced that the pair would receive the award "for their struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education." It said it "regards it as an important point for a Hindu and a Muslim, an Indian and a Pakistani, to join in a common struggle for education and against extremism."

Malala, a high school student, was at school in Birmingham, England, when the prize was announced and made the world wait until after school for her comments.

“This is not the end. ... I want to see every child going to school and getting an education,” she said.

The daughter of a school administrator in the town of Mingora, since age 11 she had bristled against a rule by the Taliban group banning education for girls. Despairing at the thought of a life stuck at home, she wrote a blog, campaigning for girls’ education, and appeared on TV and in an international documentary.

Shot By The Taliban

In October 2012, she was aboard a school bus in the Swat Valley, in northwestern Pakistan, when Taliban gunmen asked for her by name and opened fire. A bullet to the head nearly killed her, and she left Pakistan for England to receive medical treatment.

Malala has impressed television audiences with her soft-spoken philosophy of forgiveness and peace, and with the steely strength behind it. Her comments to the United Nations last year voiced her hope for something better for girls: “The terrorists thought that they would change our aims and stop our ambitions but nothing changed in my life except this: Weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage was born.”

Shahidullah Jan, a Peshawar-based activist of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, said Friday that Malala’s campaign had helped improve girls’ access to education in Pakistan. Still, it had done little to change practices such as early marriage and honor killings in deeply conservative regions like the Swat Valley, Jan said.

“It will take time for the girls inspired by Malala to become educated and start speaking for their rights. It will take time to bring change, but she at least has started the process,” Jan said.

A Growing Global Awareness

Liesl Gerntholtz, Human Rights Watch director for women’s rights, said that Malala was awarded the prize was indicative of growing global awareness of abuses against girls.

She said it was important to be aware that boys were also vulnerable to violence, forced labor and other abuses, but added that girls were more vulnerable.

“The fact that Malala, a 17-year-old Pakistani girl, should win a Nobel Peace Prize is an important indication that the world is recognizing that this is a problem that we need to address,” she said. “Progress is being made. But a lot more needs to be done.”

For Malala, the life she escaped, but which millions of others endure, represents a prison.

“I didn’t want my future to be just sitting in a room and be imprisoned in my four walls and just cooking and giving birth to children,” she said in a BBC interview last year. “I didn’t want to see my life in that way.”

Possible Response Questions:

- What search terms might you use to conduct more research to understand some of the topics in this article better? What would you hope to learn in your research?
- What other events are you aware of in the current media that would warrant public attention and activism? Explain your choices and reasoning.
- Select any passage and respond to it.