

Youth Engagement in Politics - October 14th

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This was a Youth UPF event hosted by the Rt Hon Baroness Verma, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Energy and Climate Change and featuring current political figures, Gisela Stuart MP and Rt Hon Tom Brake MP, Deputy Leader of the House of Commons.



Report to come soon:

This was an inspiring occasion to recognise the idealism of young adults to make a difference and improve the world around them. There has been considerable concern expressed about the low levels of voter participation for the 18 to 24 year old demographic in the UK. This has been challenged by the high levels of activity of 16 and 17 year olds in the Scottish referendum. The Universal Peace Federation (UPF) - UK is very interested in engaging young people to work to improve our society. On July 1st twelve young people were presented with Youth Achievement Awards. A few of these young people were involved in the Youth Parliament in their region and others were involved in campaigning for youth issues.



The theme of this year's Parliament week, on November 14th - 20th, is 'Youth Engagement in Politics'. We thought it a good idea to organize a pre-Parliament week event on the 14th of the October where a few parliamentarians will explain how they became involved in politics and some of the lessons they have learned. They will also speak about the opportunities they have had of doing good through politics. We have also invited three young adults from among the awardees who will speak about their motivation to be involved in politics.



We hope to inspire young people to get involved in political activity. It is very important for young people to have support when they are first starting out, and particularly when they come across various different problems.

Notes on some of the speakers comments:

Matteo Bergamini (Shout Out UK)

Bergamini thinks that young people are in fact more active in politics than they have ever been, and this is reflected in cyber activism through things like anonymous and the occupy movement. However he feels there is a lack of education of how to be engaged in politics when you are younger, but you are somehow expected to be clued up on these things by 18 and expected to vote. Thus it is important to teach the youth how to engage.

Gisela Stuart MP

Stuart moved from Germany to the UK in the 1970's but did not join a political party until she was 30 and was not really involved in politics until she was 40. As a result of this she feels she was able to bring real gritty life experience to the table which is something that can cancel out the general disconnect and class disconnect that people feel is present between politicians and people. If young people want to get involved in politics Stuart thinks they must first ask themselves what makes them angry, and this will drive them to want to make a difference through political means.

Naiha Masih (Youth Parliament)

Masih is a young person who wants to contribute to shaping her society and this is what drove her interest in politics. She thinks all youth relationships with politics fall into 3 categories, those who are excited about politics, those to whom politics goes over their heads and those who know a fair bit about politics but feel it has nothing to offer them and feel a disconnect with politicians. It is the latter 2 categories which cause youth not to vote and that's where this common misconception that young people don't vote because they don't care comes from.

John Loughton (Dare2Lead)

Loughton feels all young people are often just thrown in the same box, they are pigeon holed and as a result overlooked. The youth must be viewed as a complex group of people as opposed to one over stereotyped group. The reality for him is that young people are always engaging in politics in ways they themselves may not realise, for example concerns about the cost of living or transport, when these things bother you a solution can be found through politics. Politics needs to be seen as an end to a mean. Young people have also lent their voices to a variety of worthy causes such as make poverty history and speaking out against last decades Iraq war, so the youth have proved that they can use their voice. Because of this he calls us all to continue to use our voice, to be seen and heard and to speak and be spoken to.

Amira El-Houderi (Libyan activism)

El-Houderi spoke very passionately about her friend Tawfik who was recently assassinated in Libya for using his voice to speak out against injustice. He was a blogger and great debater who had spoken out for many great causes in his short but significant lifetime. She believes there are very important things we can learn from his example such as the importance of the language of peace and the necessity of translating your beliefs into action.