UPF United Kingdom: Young UK Peacebuilders Find Their Voice

Robin Marsh
September 12, 2026

London, United Kingdom – Young people explored paths to leadership, public speaking, confidence and peacebuilding during the September session of UPF-UK's Youth Leadership and Peacebuilding Program, held on September 12, 2026, at UPF headquarters in London.

Under the theme "Finding Your Voice, Strengthening Your Leadership," the afternoon combined practical public-speaking training, mindfulness, leadership insights and presentations from participants on the change they hope to create in society. The program encouraged participants not simply to become more confident speakers, but to understand their voice as a tool for leadership, service and positive change.

zz

The Art of Public Speaking

Opening the training session, **Mr. David Rennie**, chair of Milton Keynes Interfaith, shared practical principles for becoming a more effective public speaker. He emphasized that successful communication begins with preparation, understanding the audience and identifying a clear purpose. Rather than trying to communicate too much information, he encouraged participants to concentrate on a few important ideas that audiences could understand and remember.

A speaker's mindset was equally important. Public speaking, he suggested, is more about the listeners than the speaker's performance. Speakers should ask what would be useful, meaningful or inspiring for their audience.

Practical guidance included using concise notes rather than reading a full script, adjusting the pace and volume of the voice, making appropriate use of gestures and body language, and developing a natural connection with the audience.

Participants also received advice about microphone technique and using PowerPoint presentations effectively. Visual presentations, Mr. Rennie explained, should support the speaker rather than becoming the center of attention. Speakers were also encouraged to have printed notes available in case technology failed.

He stressed the importance of truthful and positive language, respect for different audiences, and avoiding humor or expressions that could unnecessarily offend others.

Finding the Inner Voice

The practical communication training was followed by a guided meditation led by **Ms. Caroline Heward**, widely known as "The Harley Street Stress Expert." Ms. Heward invited participants to slow down, become aware of their breathing and listen more deeply to their inner voice.

Through relaxation and reflection, participants considered their personal values, relationships and connection with the wider community. The session highlighted the relationship between inner peace and outward confidence; before speaking effectively to others, leaders need to become comfortable listening to themselves.

The meditation encouraged participants to approach speaking with greater calmness, authenticity and courage.

One's Voice as a Leadership Tool

A second perspective was offered by **Dr. Susan Jumoke Fajana-Thomas**, who reflected on more than three decades of experience in communication, community activism and public leadership. Beginning her career as a television presenter before becoming deeply involved in community action and politics, Dr. Fajana-Thomas described how public speaking had become an important tool.

She spoke about establishing community and tenants' organizations, campaigning on local issues and serving for many years as a councilor in Hackney. Her central message was that leadership is demonstrated through action, influence and a willingness to speak on behalf of others. She encouraged the young people to recognize that their voices can influence decisions, challenge assumptions and inspire change.

She also emphasized that leadership requires listening as well as speaking. Effective leaders need to hear people whose experiences, backgrounds and opinions may be very different from their own. As participants gain influence, she encouraged them to use that influence to open doors and create opportunities for others.

Young People Share Their Visions

During the afternoon, participants had the opportunity to put the training into practice. They were invited to introduce themselves, explain what motivates them and then present their vision for the change they would like to see in the world. Their presentations covered issues including public health, women's

empowerment, community participation, youth leadership, social justice and peacebuilding.

Maisha, who is studying global public health at the University of Greenwich, reflected on overcoming challenges with confidence and developing leadership experience through community health work in Bangladesh, including projects connected with tuberculosis prevention.

A further presentation explored the importance of genuine community-led decision-making and co-production. Drawing on a background in philosophy and global development, the participant argued that lasting change requires local ownership, meaningful participation and education, particularly for young people.

Rufaro, drawing on her experience in pharmacy and business, shared her passion for leadership and supporting marginalized children. Her presentation explored the type of positive legacy she hopes to create through her work and service to others.

Juliana gave a personal reflection on her own leadership journey, including health challenges she had overcome and experiences through Scouts, church activities and other areas of community involvement. She described leadership as helping people to recognize their own potential, while listening carefully to different viewpoints. Her presentation connected these experiences with her interests in geography, community and peacebuilding.

Learning Through Feedback

An important feature of the session was that presentations were followed by constructive feedback. Participants received practical suggestions about slowing their delivery, allowing pauses, strengthening voice projection, varying tone, making purposeful use of gestures and avoiding dependence on a written script. They were encouraged to use simple bullet points, photographs and other visual prompts while maintaining eye contact and a direct relationship with the audience.

The supportive process demonstrated that public speaking is not simply a natural talent but a skill that can be developed through preparation, practice and feedback. Participants were encouraged to continue using their voices in everyday situations – within their families, workplaces, communities and future leadership roles.

The afternoon concluded with reflection, feedback and appreciation, together with an invitation to remain connected as the Youth Leadership and Peacebuilding Program 2026 moves towards its final session and concluding event in Parliament.

The message running throughout the program was simple but powerful: every young person has a voice, and when that voice is developed with confidence, compassion and purpose, it can become an important instrument for leadership and peace.