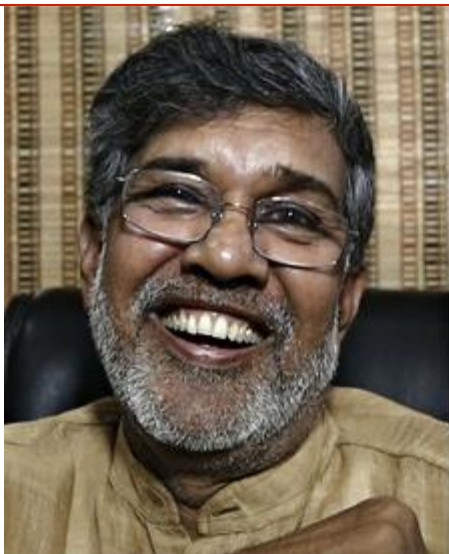


## Nobel peace prize winners: award is a boost for children's rights worldwide

Malala Yousafzai and Kailash Satyarthi say they hope joint prize helps Indian-Pakistani ties and that leaders will attend ceremony

- 
- [Jason Burke](#) in Delhi, Iftikhar Firdous in Peshawar, Saba Imtiaz in Karachi, and [Julian Borger](#)
  - 
  - [The Guardian](#), Friday 10 October 2014 13.55 EDT
- 



Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzai were picked as winners for their struggle against the oppression of children and their right to education. Photograph: Reuters  
The winners of the Nobel peace prize, the Pakistani teenage activist Malala Yousafzai and [Kailash Satyarthi](#), an Indian children's rights advocate, said the award represented a huge boost to the cause of children's rights around the world.

They also made it clear that they would seek to use the award to bring their two countries closer together and said they would invite their prime ministers, Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan and Narendra Modi of India, to the award ceremony in Oslo in December.

The joint award was welcomed by the two leaders, but the award to 17-year-old Malala also drew some [sceptical responses from Pakistani conservatives](#) suspicious of western motives. Since escaping death when she was shot in the head two years ago by a Taliban gunman for attending school in Pakistan's Swat valley, she has been living and studying in the UK.

Malala heard the news of her win during a chemistry lesson at school in Birmingham, while Satyarthi found out through Twitter before receiving the phone call from the Nobel committee in Oslo. The two later spoke by phone and, according to Malala, agreed to combine their campaigns for child protection and education, and to work to build stronger links between their two countries

"Today's world is fast moving because of the globalisation of the economy and it is high time that all of us take urgent steps to protect children and move towards a globalisation of compassion," Satyarthi, the 60-year-old son of a police constable in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, told the Guardian in an interview in his crowded south Delhi office.

The laureate's son, Bhawan, said: "He's a very down-to-earth man and so there were no tears or shouting or anything.

"This will be a big encouragement to the movement but the real victory will be when child trafficking is finished. This will send a strong signal to society not to employ child labourers and to the government to implement the existing laws."

Child labour is illegal in India but laws are rarely enforced. Convictions for offences such as child trafficking are extremely rare.

Speaking to the press in Birmingham, Malala said "I believe the committee didn't just give this award to me. It is for all the children whose voices are not being heard around the world.

"Through my story I want to tell children to speak for themselves, not to wait for someone else. I stand up with all the children and this award is especially for them. It will give them courage," she said.

On Friday night in Mingora city in the Swat valley, Malala's home region, people celebrated the award, distributing sweets in her honour in the central square where the Pakistani Taliban once roamed freely.

“All those who were opposed to Malala should review their opinion about her” said Neelum, a ninth-grade student and friend of Malala, who she described as one of the most talented girls she had ever met. “I imagine being her someday,” Neelum said. “ She is not just an inspiration for the women of Swat but for the world over.”

Ahmad Shah, a teacher in Swat, said Malala had “empowered the girls of Swat with her thoughts that education is important”.

“We’ve only read about Nobel laureates. Now we have one from our own village. It’s unbelievable and yet its true,” Shah added, his voice breaking with emotion. “She’s a flicker of hope in an age of darkness.”

The Nobel committee’s decision was deliberately aimed at striking a delicate balance at a time of tension in Indian-Pakistani relations. Malala is a young Muslim, while Satyarthi is a Hindu elder statesman of the child rights campaign. They will share the prize money of £690,000. But the split award also reflected the dire state of children’s rights in both countries.

Sharif was one of many politicians to offer congratulations to Malala. But there was no escaping the irony that Malala was almost killed for her work advocating education for children, and she is frequently accused by conservatives of selling out to the west.

Liaqat Baloch, a leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami, a rightwing religious-political party, said: “Malala is a Pakistani student and she is getting a lot of support and patronage abroad. On the surface this is not a bad thing and we welcome this, and there is no objection to the award, but the attack on Malala and then her support in the west creates a lot of suspicions.

“There are lots of girls in Pakistan who have been martyred in terrorist attacks, women who have been widowed, but no one gives them an award. So these ... activities are suspicious.”

In India, Tushar Gandhi, great-grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, the revered independence leader who became a proponent of non-violent protest, said that in recent years all Nobel prizes had been in the tradition of his famous forebear.

“Malala personifies non-violent resistance admirably and both she and Kailash Satyarthi also personify the commitment and solidarity that was the legacy of the work of all the illustrious leaders of [the Indian] independence movement,” Gandhi said.

“Until yesterday no politician was bothered or was interested in what he was doing and some were even irritated by him, now they will all sing his paeans. I think my great-grandfather, with his sense of humour, would have laughed ... He had long realised the hypocrisy of politicians.”

India’s home minister, Rajnath Singh, congratulated Satyarthi, tweeting: “Shri Kailash Satyarthi is a champion of child rights whose work is now recognised internationally. Congratulations to him once again.”

India’s defence and finance minister, Arun Jaitley, also used Twitter to congratulate Malala for the award “for promoting girl’s right to education in the face of the Taliban diktat”.

There was no word from either country’s leaders on whether they would accept the invitation to attend the award ceremony. Recent days have seen one of the worst outbreaks of violence on the border between India and Pakistan for a decade, with about 20 killed and tens of thousands displaced by artillery barrages. The exchanges of fire appeared to be easing on Friday night.