

girl who fought for education'. This is the cause to which I want to devote my life.

On my sixteenth birthday I was in New York to speak at the United Nations. Standing up to address an audience inside the vast hall where so many world leaders have spoken before was daunting, but I knew what I wanted to say. 'This is your chance Malala,' I said to myself. Only 400 people were sitting around me, but when I looked out, I imagined millions more. I did not write the speech only with the UN delegates in mind; I wrote it for every person around the world who could make a difference. I wanted to reach all people living in poverty, those children forced to work and those who suffer from terrorism or lack of education. Deep in my heart I hoped to reach every child who could take courage from my words and stand up for his or her rights.

I wore one of Benazir Bhutto's white shawls over my favourite pink shalwar kamiz and I called on the world's leaders to provide free education to every child in the world. 'Let us pick up our books and our pens,' I said. 'They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world.' I didn't know how my speech was received until the audience gave me a standing ovation. My mother was in tears and my father said I had become everybody's daughter.

Something else happened that day. My mother allowed herself to be publicly photographed for the first time. As she has lived her life in purdah and never unveiled her face on camera before, it was a great sacrifice and very difficult for her.

At breakfast the next day Atal said to me in the hotel, 'Malala, I don't understand why you are famous. What have you done?' All the time we were in New York he was more excited by the Statue of Liberty, Central Park and his favourite game Beyblade!

After the speech I received messages of support from all over the world, but there was mostly silence from my own country, except that on Twitter and Facebook we could see my own Pakistani brothers and sisters turning against me. They accused me of speaking out of 'a teen lust for fame'. One said, 'Forget the image of your country, forget about the school. She would eventually get what she was after, a life of luxury abroad.'

I don't mind. I know people say these things because they have seen leaders and politicians in our country who make promises they never keep. Instead things in Pakistan are getting worse every day. The endless terrorist attacks have left the whole nation in shock. People have lost trust in each other, but I would like everyone to know that I don't want support for myself, I want the support to be for my cause of peace and education.

The most surprising letter I got after my speech was from a Taliban commander who recently escaped from prison. His name was Adnan Rashid and he used to be in the Pakistan air force. He had been in jail since 2003 for attempting to assassinate President Musharraf. He said the Taliban had attacked me not for my campaign for education but because I tried to 'malign [their] efforts to establish the Islamic system'. He said he was writing to me because he was shocked by my shooting and wished he could have warned me beforehand. He wrote that they would forgive me if I came back to Pakistan, wore a burqa and went to a madrasa.

Journalists urged me to answer him, but I thought, *Who is this man to say that?* The Taliban are not our rulers. It's my life, how I live it is my choice. But Mohammed Hanif wrote an article pointing out that the good thing about the Taliban letter was that many people claim I wasn't shot yet here they were accepting responsibility.

I know I will go back to Pakistan, but whenever I tell my father I want to go home, he finds excuses.