

Interviewee has asked that only the transcript be made available to researchers.

### Youth Activist Interview - Ilina Kabra

Interviewer: Jessie Rievman

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Ilina Kabra is an 18-year-old international youth activist and student at the Queen Mary University of London. She approaches activism from a global perspective, as she has lived in India, the United States, Switzerland, and London throughout her lifetime. In 2019, she was first introduced to activism when she established Switzerland's first chapter of GirlUp, where she educated her classmates and began a trial of free menstrual products in the bathrooms in efforts to combat period poverty. She continues her feminist rhetoric, along with broader commentary on human rights, through writing. Writing and educating both herself and others are her two primary methods of activism. She has written articles such as "My Road to Advocacy" and "Human Rights: How Can We Combat Gender Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World?" to inspire and educate younger people. She has also participated in programs such as Girl Vasion, the GirlUp Leadership Summit, Civics Unplugged, and the Youth Forum Switzerland to strengthen her capabilities as a youth activist through education.

JESSIE RIEVMAN 0:00 - 0:34

Hi Ilina. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. On behalf of Duke University, I'm helping gather the critical narratives of youth activists to help create an archive on modern youth efforts in fighting for change. This interview should last around an hour, and I'm just hoping to get to know more about what you've done thus far as an activist, and what you hope to accomplish in the future. So just to begin, would you please tell me a little bit about yourself. Share whatever you're comfortable with sharing.

ILINA KABRA 0:34 - 1:58

First, thank you so much for having me. I'm Ilina Kabra, I'm 18 years old, and I'm currently in University in London. In terms of activism, I do consider myself a third culture kid, as I was born in India, then I moved to the US, then I moved to Switzerland, and now here. I think in terms of activism, that's given me a really global perspective, meaning I channel my activism on humans in general, instead of humans in a particular place. But, if something like what happened in Afghanistan occurs, then that'll be where I will channel my activism to a specific kind of group. But otherwise, mainly I have the motto of humans helping humans. I went to an international school for 12 years in Basel, Switzerland, which I think enhanced the way that I see the world as well, not just through activism but other means as well. It's really helped enhance my understanding about what youth activism is.

RIEVMAN 1:58 - 2:15

Thank you so much for sharing, and that's definitely a great motto to live by. I'm just wondering, would you be able to go into just a little bit more depth about which activist movements you're passionate about and what you've been involved with over the years?

KABRA 2:15 - 6:42

Of course. That question kind of starts with where I started as an activist, if you don't mind me sharing. So I read the book, *I am Malala*<sup>1</sup>, when I was 12, and that really kickstarted the entire thing. It was a really inspiring story, and what she's gone on to do has continually inspired me to keep going—keep helping as many people as I can. 2016 or 17: I was 15 years old, and I went to a diplomacy camp in Geneva that was hosted by the Geneva School of Diplomacy. I think that's really where I put youth activism together with diplomacy. It was in Geneva, so the camp worked like: in the morning, people from a certain institution, for example, the World Health, the World Trade, or the Red Cross, would come and talk to us about what they do, the instruments they use in their institutions, the mechanisms, rules, everything like that. Then, in the afternoon, we'd actually get to go on a little field trip to those places to see in more depth, firsthand, what they do. We were walking through the UN<sup>2</sup> one day—I promise this story has a point—and I saw a poster for an organization called Girl Up, which is an international organization that helps girls all around the world. So, that was my first introduction to the organization that kickstarted everything for me. Then, I additionally was talking to my mom and she found the organization as well. I did the IB, the International Baccalaureate<sup>3</sup>, and so as part of the service aspect, I was able to establish a Girl Up chapter at my school. So, that was the beginning of it. It was mainly Girl Up for a little while, but then I started to include my passion of writing into the equation. I wrote for an organization called *Voices of Gen Z*<sup>4</sup> for a little while, and then got one of my articles published in *BridgeUSA*<sup>5</sup>. Now, I'm just freelance writing about youth activism topics that are really interesting. I also was a part of the Civics Unplugged<sup>6</sup> 2021 Spring Fellowship, which definitely enhanced youth activism as what it is—what we need to do. Their motto “the kids will lead,” is all about youth activism. It's all about what you can do to make the world a better place. But I think that also, what I loved particularly about Civics Unplugged, is it didn't just teach me how to be a youth activist, it also taught me how to learn more about myself to ensure that I'm that I'm helping the most amount of people possible and that I'm being the most effective youth advocate. If you don't know yourself fully as a youth advocate, then people can see right through you. So, you need to have a grounding understanding of who you are as a person, your values, what you stand for, very specifically and very grounded, meaning that they may change over

<sup>1</sup> An autobiography detailing Malala Yousafzai's journey advocating for women to have access to an education in Pakistan. <https://www.littlebrown.com/titles/malala-yousafzai/i-am-malala/9780316322409/>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations

<sup>3</sup> An internationally used school curriculum “designed to develop well-rounded individuals who can respond to today's challenges with optimism and an open mind.” <https://www.ibo.org/about-the-ib/>

<sup>4</sup> Platform for youth—defined as those considered members of “Generation-Z”—to share creative work. <https://www.voicesofgenz.com/about>

<sup>5</sup> Student-led organization aimed to mitigate political divisions.

<sup>6</sup> 3-month fellowship training high school in leadership skills, so “they can build a brighter future for humanity.” <https://www.civicsunplugged.org/what-we-do>

time, but they won't take a 180 degree turn. Then, of course, Generation Ratify<sup>7</sup>. There are many more which I'm missing, but hopefully I will get to them later.

RIEVMAN 6:42 - 7:14

No worries. Over time, you'll probably remember the other things. But, so far, everything that you've told me sounds like great work that you've done. I just want to delve a little bit more into the work that you've done within these different organizations. So, you mentioned that you started a Girl Up organization within your school. Would you mind going into a little bit more detail about what you ended up doing within that organization, some change that you were able to make, and how that has affected you as an activist?

KABRA 7:14 - 10:55

Yeah, of course. I'm sorry, I was just looking at what my other projects were. In terms of Girl Up, it was a very slow start, because having started it in 2019, I do feel I was finding myself at that time as well. So, it was definitely a challenge. We were quite a small group: on a good day, maybe seven/eight people. We mainly did spend the first six months outlining issues we were engaged with, things going around our school, what we can improve in our local community before we go out into the general community of where we were living. But then, COVID hit. So, we had to shift our attention into multimedia advocacy—using presentations that would be shown. We had homeroom, which is like 10 minutes every morning: take the register, go through morning announcements, and stuff before class started. So, we had a couple of videos and presentations that would be shown in homerooms. I think we did maybe two videos and two presentations. Then, we started an Instagram page, which we were keeping going during the pandemic as we were not all in school. Then, when we got back from COVID, this is fall of 2020, nearer to the election in the US. We had always been interested in the issue of period poverty, so we finally decided to do something about it at our school. We managed to get a trial of free menstrual products in the bathrooms. To be honest, I'm not sure if that is still going on, because I did have to unfortunately hand over the club to the new president this March before I left for final exams and graduated. I guess I can't speak on what they're doing now, but I can speak on what we were doing when I was there. So we focused a lot on that, and then we also—as I said—did presentations and videos. We focused a lot in our school community as to establish something there, so that future Girl Up leaders in my school could elaborate on what we did and hopefully do more than what we did. But, I guess for founding it, I think we made a lot of progress.

RIEVMAN 10:55 - 11:13

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<sup>7</sup> “Youth-led movement to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment and advance gender equality in the United States of America.” <https://www.generationratify.org/about>

Just going off of what you were talking about how you had to switch to a more multimedia approach during COVID—how was it as a youth activist having to adjust to the confines of COVID and not necessarily being able to work with people in person?

KABRA 11:13 - 15:13

That has two answers. I think it was quite difficult, but at the same time, I sometimes believe that it is a blessing in disguise for youth activism. I'll start with the first one because it's shorter. I think it was very difficult because, obviously, when COVID was starting out, you were confined. It was lockdown, so you couldn't leave anywhere, so you couldn't see anybody. It was what we're doing—Zoom/Google Meet calls. It was not that difficult in the sense that you could still kind of communicate. You could still get a sense of ideas. You could still start a project. I think especially for Gen Z, we were already so accustomed to technology before we got into the COVID pandemic, that we were able to use technology to our advantage, meaning that possibly academically and in terms of youth activism, we had an easier time navigating new platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Google Meet, and other various platforms. In terms of multimedia advocacy and doing it from your home and COVID, I think that at first it hindered it because everyone was getting used to it, but I think as time went on, we found a flow for it. And then when we went back into school, we were able to combine the two. But, I also feel like it was a blessing in disguise, just generally for youth activism, because even though the world was in shambles and everything was falling at our feet, we almost had more to work with if you get what I mean. We almost had access to more people in a sense. Before COVID, even now, everyone's schedule is so busy and it's harder to reach people. Especially if you're me and you're living internationally from other people, it's very difficult to reach people, have them understand what you're, have them understand the message very clearly. But I think through what we had to do when COVID started, even though people's schedules were still busy, those first few months, everyone was still figuring this stuff out. That's kind of where Youth Activism started out, or at least we started out, as finding email addresses, shooting an email, and then waiting for a reply. I think more personally, it also gave me the ability to diversify what I was doing—to branch out and find more, see what else is out there. That's actually how I found the Hello World platform<sup>8</sup>, which is where I registered for Civics Unplugged. It was because of the accessibilities of advocacy platforms and organizations that were stepping up and doing stuff—you'd see this and then you'd be like, “Oh, how can I help with this?” It was easier to get involved with organizations like that to help more people in a time when people really needed help.

RIEVMAN 15:13 - 15:35

So in addition to finding that platform during the time of COVID, on sort of a more micro level, how do you think that you, through the different organizations you were a part of when you had

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<sup>8</sup> A platform designed to “notice, develop, and back underrepresented Gen Z talent who want to do good in the world.” <https://www.helloworldnetwork.org/>

those couple months in the beginning of COVID with more time, were able to adjust to that? And how were you able to benefit from that extra time?

KABRA 15:35 - 17:00

I was able to benefit from that extra time because I was able to solely focus on advocacy in that time. Before, it was trying to balance school and advocacy—being in the classroom for seven, eight hours a day, then going home having to do homework, and only then getting started on youth activism projects. I think during COVID—I mean, not to say that the workload changed. At first it did, but then as we got into the swing with it, it started becoming kind of normal. Because I was in Zoom classes—I'm guessing you were as well—I had the ability to get work done from a class that I had just exited before my other class started. Whereas when I was in school, I would be using that to physically get to my other class. So meaning, during that time I didn't just have to do schoolwork. Most of the time I didn't. It was branching out, looking for new opportunities. And so without those extra hours at my hands, I was able to do a lot more because of how I managed my time being at home versus being in school.

RIEVMAN 17:00 - 17:08

Yeah, that makes sense. I had a very similar experience with the extra hours on your hands—you could definitely divert your focus.

KABRA 17:08 - 19:21

Also, platforms like The Conversationalist<sup>9</sup> as well and also Generation Ratify started using platforms like—I'm not sure if Generation Ratify was actually on Slack before the pandemic—but, I know places like The Conversationalist, who are starting to use the Geneva Platform and Discord as well has become popular during COVID: the time when everyone was in isolation. It almost made it easier to connect, and it almost made it easier because on a platform like The Conversationalist, you have people not just from the US, but from everywhere. So, collaborating on one digital platform, you can message each other going: “Hey. This is going on here. This is going on there.” What I really liked about these platforms as well is during COVID, it wasn't just focused youth activism in the sense of helping people during the pandemic. It also gave youth activists a chance to help each other out, to connect with each other on a basis that we had never really thought of before in a sense—in terms of checking in on each other's mental health, keeping each other sane, checking in on how you're doing, how you're handling everything. There would always be someone if you need to talk to someone. Someone would always be up to help because it's international—so, multiple time zones. I also feel like going back to writing, it also gave me a chance to branch out more into that, because I'm additionally a generally shy person. So, I've started using writing as a medium to express my ideas without having to stand on a podium to do it. I felt like I was easily able to do that during COVID.

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<sup>9</sup> Platform for members of GenZ to communicate

RIEVMAN 19:21 - 19:42

Just going on a little bit about what you were talking about at the end there with your writing—how do you feel like even if you are a more shy person, how have you been able to make a difference through your writing? And what have you done with your writing, which you've been able to transform into being an activist?

KABRA 19:42 - 21:02

With my writing, surprisingly I haven't written that many pieces. But, I aim to use my pieces to publish them for people to read and to be inspired by. Throughout the pandemic, I've also tried to use my personal experiences as well to get people to go: "Okay, if you're stuck in a tough situation, it's not the end. There are ways to get out of it." Writing has always been a more micro level of activism, with organizations like Girl Up being macro, and then the educational side almost being macro: kind of in the middle. I feel like even though my writing may not have had the biggest impact, I think it still did have an impact. I heard this from somewhere: the smallest impact can make the biggest noise. I think that's what I'm trying to achieve with my writing is making that small impact, where then someone can have an idea and make the biggest noise.

RIEVMAN 21:02 - 21:22

That's a really great quote, and it definitely is very true. So, with your writing which definitely has made an impact, can you just give me some examples about the different things that you've written and the impact that you think or at least you hope that those pieces have made?

KABRA 21:22 - 21:48

My first article that I wrote was actually a speech for the Girl Up 2020 Leadership Summit called "My Road to Advocacy." It described my journey: how I became an advocate. I am just trying to pull it up here, if that's okay with you, so I can reference a couple points in it.

RIEVMAN 21:48 - 21:51

Of course. Feel free. Take your time.

KABRA 21:51 - 30:46

I think that article has to be one of my favorite articles that I've written not just because it's the most personal, but I think it will resonate with the most people just because of how personal it is. I just opened it. It doesn't just talk about youth activism, but it does talk about human rights in a sense. I have kind of a relationship with human rights in the sense that I was adopted from India. So, I've always had a very close eye on inequalities and I've always known that they exist, from the small inequalities of exclusion on the playground when you're really little to more severe human rights issues that we're seeing today. The main aspect of my articles I feel is the perspective that I'm coming from, which is a third culture kid, who identifies with youth

activism from a more human perspective as opposed to geographical. I outlined inexperience in my road to activism when I was ten on my fourth trip to Pune, where I was born, for the first time as a family. We visited a local internationally recognized orphanage there, and we were able to look at the facilities, which are all very relatively proper and well-kept. I was fortunate enough to get to play and interact with the children there, and that really opened my eyes to not just general inequalities, but more specifically, children's inequalities and inequalities for younger people. I had never heard that term youth activism, but I think I became aware that it existed at that point, even though it didn't really hit me until I was twelve—when I'm like: "Oh, I can actually do something about this." I don't have to just look at other people and go: "Oh, they're youth activists. This is amazing." I can do it myself as well—be inspired by those people, but I can take my own actions as well. After that experience, I began to question everything I knew about human rights. I began to ask myself the question "why?" more often, which is also something I'd like to say about my writing. I hope it's very thought provoking. I hope that gets people. Even if it doesn't result in direct action, I hope it'll at least drag people into the mindset of curiosity and wondering if I say inequalities happen, they're like: "Okay, so why do inequalities happen? What are the mechanisms? What are the steps to an inequality? What needs to be there for an inequality to happen? Then, in order to solve an inequality issue, how can it be deconstructed? Another article that I wrote that does have to do with youth activism was part of a competition. It's called "Human Rights: How Can We Combat Gender Equality In A Rapidly Changing World." I really focus on feminist advocacy here. As with my other articles, I approach it through the lens of being a global citizen. I tend to ask a lot of rhetorical questions just to get people thinking while they're reading the article, so it'll inspire them to create projects, create thoughts, start brainstorming on the issue, like: what can I as an individual do to help? Then hopefully, get more people on board. Then, I go into talking about being of an Indian origin in society in India. I mainly use personal examples. I say typically, Indian women from the early to mid 20th century would be expected to have married by 13 and 16, manage the household, bear children, and serve husbands and family. My grandmothers actually emigrated from India to the US. So, I contrast their stories a little bit. I'm not sure if I want to go too into it. I don't go that into it in the article. Then I say, the importance of helping to expand awareness in a society like India and in empowering young women and teaching young women to unlock their potential in patriarchal, male-dominated societies. I see here, my main goal is to set an example, meaning not everything that I'll do, not everything that I'll write, is right to many people. Sometimes, I'll look back at school assignments, and I go: "What was I thinking?" But, writing, again, is a form of expression. You don't necessarily have to agree with it. It's always been a coping mechanism for me—to get everything out there. Then recently, I've started turning those thoughts into articles by editing them and having a more rigorous thought-process and actually planning beforehand. Ever since I wrote the human rights article on gender equality, I've focused a lot on the lessons of tolerance and kindness. They seem like very simple things, but as you can see around the world, they're very complicated concepts once you begin to unpack them. As nothing's universal, no one's ever going to believe one thing. I think it's important through writing as well to get

different perspectives down, so that you can have an appreciation for different perspectives. Not necessarily turn them into your own, but just understanding what other people think that are different from you really goes a long way in youth activism, because it'll help you reach a wider audience: not just of your own age group, but maybe of people older, people younger. Particularly, I find that it helps reaching people who are older, because every human shares the concept of kindness, tolerance, and curiosity. So, I've always asked myself the question and others the question: if we share those concepts, then in issues that we're conflicting about with each other, I think that's the perfect opportunity to look at that issue not from a political standpoint, not from the "I'm an activist and you're not" standpoint, but we're all activists in a way, we're all human. Part of being a human is helping each other. I think that, to me, is what youth activism is all about. It's helping people. It's shining light on kindness, shining light on being tolerant of everybody. Some mistakes are harder to forgive than others. But, I think as a youth activist, if you start by forgiving mistakes, if you start by showing that you can be the bigger person, you can be kind—such simple terms, but they really go a long way.

RIEVMAN 30:46 - 31:28

I definitely agree, especially now as youth activists are at the forefront of change in our society in general, many do share that interest in kindness and helping others. That is definitely very important as youth activists are becoming more and more present. So, I was wondering, you mentioned how you were talking about feminist activism through that last article. I know you've done different work between Girl Up and Generation Ratify with feminist activism, so I was wondering if you could go into a little bit more detail about what you've done for women's rights and the different actions you've taken.

KABRA 31:28 - 39:20

Sure. For women's rights, articles are a big part of it. Being part of the work Girl Up does through their Leadership Summit is a massive part of it, because you get to hear from female activists like Malala, who was interviewed in this year's Girl Up Summit. You get to hear about advancements made to feminist equality that goes for females in stem, females in arts, females in sports—I know is a big one now with everything going on in sports, especially here in the UK, in terms of the connection that sports has with racism here. Recently, the Girls Can Play movement is going on, which is encouraging girls and young women to get into sports. Here, it's particularly football, as that's one of the main sports in the UK. But elsewhere, I'm sure in the US, it could be something like baseball, softball, or volleyball. I also had the honor of being a key part of a collaboration with students from San Ramon High School in California. It was called Girl Vasion. It was during COVID, so it was a zoom session, where we have different speakers in the terms of writing, stem, and entrepreneurship. I had the ability to take one of the writing workshops to emphasize how writing could be used to enhance activism. It could be used to not just make a difference, but also to help encourage others to make a difference. Because, we're always going to be helping, but at some point, the younger part of Gen Z is going to also



have to learn the ropes. So, if there are articles like mine, if there are articles like the articles that other people write that can guide them without you physically being next to them kind of walking them through it, I think it'll really help them. It'll also actually encourage people to read. Because I think the art of reading has become not a lost cause, but it's almost failing. My main thing is if I continue writing articles, I can hopefully keep the art of reading alive. I can hopefully keep reading and probably keep writing alive as well. I write most of my articles on my computer and publish them to electronic domains, but my dream one day is to write an article that is printed, so that the art of reading can still be kept alive because I think the art of reading is really important for youth activism. Websites and domains on the internet—that's not the only way that you can get perspectives, get ideas. Most of my ideas, most of my inspiration for articles, have actually come from books or maybe even an old fashioned newspaper once in a while. Also, most of my kind of inspirations and activism comes from actually talking to people. For example, my family and I went to Russia in 2018, just after the World Cup. I was so excited to go because I had learned about post World War One Russian history: Russia during World War One with Tsar Nicholas II and everything that went down with him—like Rasputin and everything like that. I was so excited to see the place that I learned so much about. But as it came closer to us going to Russia, I was following the news and the politics and everything. So, we had a local guide that took us around and was explaining the culture. I always like to get culture explained from a local person. I also think that it especially enhances youth activism, because you get a firsthand account of what people on the ground say—like the local people. You're not just getting secondhand information from news organizations and media journalism. I asked her “Okay, so I've seen these opinions about what local people think of Vladimir Putin and his government.” This is back in 2018, so things have for sure drastically changed. But, I asked her: “So what do local people really think about the trajectory of the country—like how is the government doing and everything?” She basically neutrally answered the question. She didn't say people absolutely despised him. She didn't admit people love him. She stayed in a neutral aspect, which I really liked. Because it gives both sides of a story, and I think in youth activism, it's very important to see both sides of the story. Because, if you go into youth activism with your own mindset, with your own: this is right and I'm here to convey the message that this is right and what others think is wrong, that's not going to advance ideas. That's just going to hinder ideas. As part of an idea, you almost need to have a solution for everyone. You almost need to have a solution that's on a more human level for everyone to agree with. For example, I wrote an article on gun control. I basically said in the article: we need to do something about this because nobody wants to die. We all want to live. We all want to live the best life. We all want to live the fullest life we can. If we don't eradicate this problem, we are basically giving the ok for people not to have this right. Especially in somewhere like the US—I think that's incredibly important. It all goes back to human rights, like gun control goes back to human rights. It goes back to the right to live, which is the most fundamental human right. With people having access to guns—I'm not against people having access to guns, I'm just against the accessibility of getting a gun. It's so easy, that it is threatening the human right to live. I know I kind of went off on a tangent with

travel and gun control, but it all links back to human rights, which all links back to youth activism. Because if you're doing youth activism from a human point of view, everything links back to it because everything runs back to humans.

RIEVMAN 39:20 - 39:50

Just touching on your commitment to human rights—you've mentioned a lot about the different influences that places you've traveled and just being a global citizen in general has had on you. So, I would just like to know more about as an international activist, how your experiences around the world have affected your approach to activism, and how you think that's giving you different opportunities to get involved in these different movements?

KABRA 39:50 - 40:12

I'm going to answer that question a three part. I'm going to answer that question as a female myself, then I'll also answer that question as an activist in general, and then I'm going to answer that question as an international citizen. Would you actually mind asking the question again?

RIEVMAN 40:12 - 40:33

Yes, of course. No worries. As an international activist, how do you think the different experiences you've had living in different places and traveling to these different places has had on your actions as an activist, your motivations, and just as a whole, your approach to activism?

KABRA 40:33 - 53:19

First of all, as a female, I think the approaches I've had on activism have been from personal experiences of being told: "No, you can't do this because you're a girl. No, you can't do this because people will treat you differently as a girl than if you were a guy." I've noticed a lot of those very subtly, kind of throughout my life. There was only one circumstance where I was told no, because you're a girl. That was in sixth grade, when I attempted to play rugby, which looking back wasn't such a good idea. But, experiences like that really stick with you. After that experience, I really started having an eye for where those things were happening, where that may have been the reason why people are hesitant to do things, particularly women. Especially now, in the UK, there's a massive increase in the amount of spiking that's going on in drinks. People are starting to do it via injection. It's becoming increasingly dangerous in the UK. So, experiences like that—just seeing society have experiences like that has really had an effect on the way that I do activism because it allows me to get more personal in the activism that I do because I am a girl. So I can relate even if I've never had those issues happen to me. I can relate in the fact that they may happen. In terms of spiking here, every girl is at risk. Whether it has happened to you before, whether it hasn't happened to you before—everybody's at risk. I know people who have had it happen are in a different boat than people who haven't, but I feel like as girls, I feel like society puts constraints on us. Like: "Oh, we want to see girls not happy with each other. Not working together but working against each other. But I think issues where the

community comes together are the most important, because it actually shows the community that look: if girls are working together instead of against each other, it'll advance so much more in society. The most successful government transformations, the most successful government policies, have all included women, especially post-conflict reformation. The most successful post-conflict reformation in a country has included women. If it hasn't included women, it's been proven to be unsuccessful. Women are key in making decisions, especially in lower economically developed countries' conflict reformation decisions. You know the old saying: "it takes a village to raise a child?" I've learned through activism that it takes women to raise a good society. It takes the values. I mean, not saying men don't, but I'm saying, it's more successful the more women you have. As an activist, I think my personal experiences have had a lot. I think also the experiences I've had as an activist have really enhanced it. For example, I attended the Youth Forum Switzerland.<sup>10</sup> I think it was in 2019 as part of my IB, HL politics course. There, I realized that activism doesn't just have to come out of politicians, government, and NGOs. That's when I started taking writing the most seriously in terms of activism, was when I met a person that I can now call a friend. He created a skit called *Fake News*. Let me just quickly fact check that—it's a one man theater show. It's the story of a budding young journalist who lands an internship at one of the biggest online news organizations. Then, he stumbles upon a story and against better judgment decides to hit publish. I met Osman Baig, who wrote the script for *Fake News* and who performs it. He performed it at the forum, and I was lucky enough to get to talk to him after that. I realized that it's not just activists, NGOs, governments that can enhance activism. It can be ordinary people, it can be journalism, it can be articles, it can be interviews, it can be media. No matter how much people sometimes disparage the media, they're such an important part of this. Journalism's an even bigger part of this—so is the media because they almost bring light, if you get what I mean, to the problems that activists make even bigger. Lastly, I want to bring up the answer to your question as an international student. As an international student, I think the experiences that I've had just seeing people come and go all the time from an international school—nobody stays forever. You're always gonna say goodbye to old friends. You're always gonna say hello to new friends. From the experiences not just at my international school, but for example, I did a music camp in Winchester when I was 13. Now, you might be saying that has to do with music, what does that have to do with youth activism? It actually has a lot to do with youth activism, I've realized, because just being around people from different places, people you don't know, people you've never met before, people who are from different walks of life: who are older than you, who are younger than you. Age also: you can learn so much from younger people. Especially now, kids who are younger than I know, I learned technology from them every single day because they know so much more. They know so many more tricks, they know so many more hats that maybe weren't there when I was their age—when we were their age. At the same time, you can get so much wisdom from older people as well. I remember meeting a—I'm not going to say his name—but, I remember meeting a guy who was

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<sup>10</sup> "A full-day symposium comprising panel discussions, talks, and interactive activities centered on youth engagement in prevalent issues." <https://www.youthforumswitzerland.ch/>

in his late teens, if not twenties, at that camp. He had such a big impact on my confidence level as a youth activist—just seeing him as a singer, having that stage presence. It really helped me find my own stage presence as a youth activist. Just seeing other people do that—like if they can do that in terms of music, then that can be brought over to other places where you need the same confidence, where you might be standing on the same stage but you might not be singing. You might just be giving an inspiring speech. You might be reading a text or something. Also, having gone to the Geneva School of Diplomacy course. Being with people who are like-minded in the sense that they love the subject matter, but they come from different places, so they interpret that subject matter differently. It really has enhanced and it has actually further motivated me to have more experiences like that just so I can help people whose culture I may not know, whose culture I may not understand, but really want to understand in terms of trying to help other people. It always brings a smile on my face when I can meet people who are different than me. Because I can take what they tell me back and I can use that in terms of coming up with solutions. I can use firsthand voices to come up with solutions. If they say: “Oh, I’ve tried this personally. This hasn’t worked. Will this work in the bigger picture?” That question can go miles. It doesn’t just have to be with the individual person. It can be like—hold on. If this doesn’t work locally, in a county office, who says this is going to work in terms of mayor? Who says this is going to work in terms of state representatives in the US? Who even says this is going to work on a national level? So a very simple question that is asked from someone with a different perspective can go such a long way. Lastly, I also want to pinpoint Civics Unplugged for that. Because we had over—correct me if I’m wrong, anyone listening to this—but I think we had over 400 International Fellows, if not even more. I was in a fellow, a ginto group, which is a small group that we met every Saturday. We had so many people from so many different cultures, different countries, different backgrounds, and we all had the mentality of a youth activist. But because of where we came from, because of our individual steps, we all took that differently. We all took the meaning of youth activism differently. We all interpreted the vocabulary, the jargon that comes with being a youth activist—we all took that differently, but we all understood the bigger picture that these issues need to be dealt with. No matter how we deal with them, they need to be dealt with. They need to be dealt with in a respectable human approach, but they need to be dealt with. They can’t just be dealt with by people from one background, who have lived in the same town for their entire lives. We need someone who lives in the same town for their entire life, we need an international student, we need someone who’s maybe from a military family who’s moved around a lot—we need a combination of experiences. We can’t just have one group of people. Because if we have one group of people, we’re basically predicting our own death. Because without experiences, without diversity, without kindness, without perspective change, we’re not going to get anywhere. Which is why I think my perspective of youth activism has changed from being “I am a youth activist,” to when I’m around other activists “We are youth activists.” Because even though we may seem to be under one umbrella, we’re not ultimately under the same umbrella. If you have a rainbow umbrella, for example, someone who’s under the green part of the umbrella and someone who was under the dark green part of the umbrella had the color green in common.

Let's just say they have nothing else in common, but they have the color green in common. I really hope that makes sense.

RIEVMAN 53:19 - 53:54

That definitely made sense, and thank you so much for that thorough answer. So you talked a little bit about this earlier, and I just want to see what your perspectives are for your future with activism. You were mentioning how your motivations have been changing as you've gotten to know these people from these different backgrounds, so how has that motivated you to pursue a certain path in the future? What do you hope to accomplish, either through writing or through other forms of activism in the upcoming years?

KABRA 53:54 - 59:53

I want to continue spreading kindness. I want to continue spreading youth activism as a simple message of kindness, but show that it has a deeper meaning. It almost has its own personality, which I'm not gonna say is a collective personality of all youth activists, but I'm going to say it is comprised of all youth activists. It's comprised of bubbles, which individually hold youth activists because everyone's different. We're all gonna overlap somewhere. But, in the sense of youth activism, we all have our individual. I doubt two people's reasons are going to be exactly the same. So, I want to continue spreading that message of kindness. I want to continue to raise awareness for issues under the umbrella of Youth Activism through writing. I want to inspire people through writing to continue writing, to also continue reading. I want to participate in more opportunities like the one I'm getting now with you. Just to shine light on what activism is and how activism relates to kindness. Most people just think activism relates to change. Activism relates to solving a problem, to finding a problem, to pressure, and then to change. Those are the main three things I've heard in terms of activism. Nowhere in those three terms have I ever heard the word kindness. And I think that's so important, because kindness is such a massive part of activism. If you don't have kindness when you start, you're not going to convey your message to people. You need to have a kind of human approach. You need to be relatable. I found that all these things, if you're relatable to other people, it goes such a long way, no matter how small the relatability is. I also want to do more policy work in terms—I got involved with the UN as well. So, I want to do more policy work in terms of diplomatic treaties with the UN, just to understand it from an umbrella of perspectives, instead of focusing on, for example, foreign policy and the US—specifically related to US interests. Or specifically in terms of the UK for UK interests. I think it's very important, and I love the fact that I'm doing a course in Politics and International Relations. Because that not only gives me the ability to investigate those countries under their own umbrella—so like solely focus on US foreign policy, then solely focus on the UK, then solely focus on maybe China, and then South Asia. It also gives you the ability to put all those together, and they look at similarities, look at differences in terms of government policies. Look at what is universal in all government policies—where it diverts based on the country's or the region's culture, language, diverse traditions, what they stand for as a country not impacted by

any other country. I think that kind of work is so important because especially having seen what happened at COP26<sup>11</sup>, I think it's so important to have not just a human perspective, but also an umbrella perspective and a good understanding of what the area that you're giving attention to needs. For example, if you're an athlete and your calf tenses up, you're not going to focus on your hamstring, because it's your calf that's tensing up. It's your calf that needs to be focused. The same can be applied in activism. If you're in a region and you're going to want to help the people of that region be more equipped to handle themselves—more equipped to handle fighting for themselves, fending for themselves—you're going to want to figure out those people first. You want to figure out the strengths and weaknesses of those people in order to come up with an effective game plan that is going to use the strengths of every single person you have and that is going to benefit every single person you have. It may not benefit them in the same way, but it should benefit them somehow. I think that's also the beauty of youth activism. It doesn't treat everybody the same in the sense of the outcome. You could help one person economically, whereas you could help one person politically, one person socially. Just because you're helping someone—I've heard this a lot—doesn't mean you're helping everyone. I've heard that you change your approach depending on where you are. But, the thing I like about the UN as an institution is that it's an umbrella of all that. You have to understand the individual components in order to piece the puzzle together. Does that make sense?

RIEVMAN 59:53 - 1:00:08

Yes. Thank you so much for those perspectives. Going back to what just mentioned about a course you're taking and how that correlates to the work you're doing. How has your—you're currently a college student? Correct?

KABRA 1:00:08 - 1:00:10

Yes. First year.

RIEVMAN 1:00:10 - 1:00:26

As a college student, how do you feel your education within college and your prior schooling has helped lead to the activism you've done and has helped translate to what you've been doing out in the fields versus in the classroom?

KABRA 1:00:26 - 1:00:39

I feel like the school I was in for the last 12 years before coming to college had such a big impact on activism—you're asking about the impact on activism right?

RIEVMAN 1:00:39 - 1:00:48

Yes and how what you've learned in the classroom has influenced and correlates to what you've done as an activist.

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<sup>11</sup> UN Climate Change Conference

KABRA 1:00:48 - 1:04:24

In my international school, up to tenth grade, it was mainly the international aspect of it. It was mainly the different perspectives. It was mainly the different choices that people made. It was seeing people around me and seeing that not every single person is the same. We're the same in that we're all human, but we divert from there. But I think after tenth grade, which is when I met my politics teacher, which is the teacher that had a huge impact on me and solidified my want to studying politics: Richard Green. He really solidified it into me the human perspective. He really solidified into me that what I had been thinking, has enhanced my activism. From the last 10 years being at that school, it was not just that. That was just one singular piece of it. It wasn't just that we were all international. It was that we were all different. It was that our minds all worked differently. It was some people took longer to learn things than others. It was the different languages we spoke. The different perspectives that we would bring to politics class—not just politics class, but science class, math, English, everything. The international-ness of the staff, of the teachers. The fact that like your science teacher may be English, but your other teacher may be American, your other teacher may be Spanish, and then your other teacher may be French. Even though the French and the Spanish teacher and—I took German, so I'll bring German into this as well—even though they're teaching German, they can teach you a lot through the language about other areas of subject matter that you're learning. For example, I was actually applying for citizenship at the same time that I was doing the IB Diploma Program. I think that really helped because I not only got to go to politics class almost every day and learn, get taught, so many wonderful things about what's going on around the world. Learn about the multitude of problems. How countries intertwine and overlap in terms of those problems. But, I also got to learn about where I was living in Switzerland. I think that really shaped me as well, as I pursued the last two years. My politics teacher Richard Greene was a massive part of that. I will forever be grateful to him because he solidified my love for the subject. He solidified why I wanted to do Girl Up. It was to be the kind of person that he is—to be the energetic person who always wants to teach someone something new, who always wants to help others.

RIEVMAN 1:04:24 - 1:04:35

Thank you so much for your perspectives there. I agree having that one influential person is so transformative in activism.

KABRA 1:04:35 - 1:05:06

I'd also like to say my family has been a huge influence as well. They have been so supportive, especially my parents and in youth activism—don't ask me how many late nights they've had to deal with hearing Zoom calls that are going on upstairs while they're trying to sleep downstairs and everything. They've had the same impact that Richard Greene has had.

RIEVMAN 1:05:06 - 1:05:22

Are there any other people who've had big impacts on your activism that you would like to add in as well? If not, don't worry about it.

KABRA 1:05:22 - 1:07:14

I feel like there are a lot of people here that have had a massive impact, especially in terms of sports because there's been a movement here where sports people can do so much more. I've gotten a lot of inspiration from what people who are in a different profession are doing—stepping out of their profession to help other people. I also feel like all of the frontline workers have also been a massive inspiration. The people that have been the nurses, the doctors, the people keeping our health institutions from crumbling, even if they're hanging on their last strand of hair. I feel like they have been so inspirational because they've kept people like me going. They've kept activists like me kind of going. When I felt at my lowest, I turned to them. I saw what they were doing, trying to have the weight of the entire world on their shoulders, trying to hold up these institutions. And I go: “Wait. If they can find that determination and willpower from somewhere, so can I.” So, I feel like my biggest inspirations are not just my family and my politics teacher, but it's also the people around me. It's also the people that I see doing good. It's also the people that I see making change—the smallest of change—but they're still making change, because they care. And they're still showing kindness. It's the people showing kindness all around me that have really kept me going.

RIEVMAN 1:07:14 - 1:07:27

I just want to give you the opportunity now as we're wrapping up: is there anything that you feel like we haven't touched on which you want to share or touch on a little bit?

KABRA 1:07:27 - 1:07:58

No, I think it's just the message of kindness. Kindness goes a long way. The smallest acts of kindness can go the longest way. It's really important to remember when you're starting out activism or when you're starting at the youngest age, helping other people. I think that's the most important thing is that the smallest acts of kindness can go the longest way.

RIEVMAN 1:07:58 - 1:08:45

That's a really important perspective, and honestly one I haven't necessarily heard many youth activists talk about. But, in the future, I will be remembering kindness is definitely one of the most important aspects and it's definitely something to remember in this world, where kindness isn't necessarily always the first priority. So, I want to thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to speak with me. I really enjoyed learning about all your different experiences, and I'm super excited to read some of the pieces that you've written that you have talked about, and I will definitely be looking into ways to access those. Thank you so much. Have a great day.

KABRA 1:08:45 - 1:08:46



You too.