

A Message to Youth

Haylee (Huilin) Piao

Kid, I saw you that day on the subway holding your cardboard with a drawing of the Earth on it; I spotted you near the Foley Square chanting for climate justice; I read about the historical moment that you have made; and I remember that I was there beside you, feeling both encouraged and ashamed, for what we have put you through.

You know, it always amazes me how openminded you are in adapting to the changing world, however far it is from what is supposed to be. You were there, at the General Assembly, brave and humble, confident and committed, telling the story of what climate change meant to you. You showed us how technologies could be used in favor of climate action and presented brilliant sustainable business ideas that are beneficial and promising. I applaud you, for having the first summit of your own, for holding the governors accountable for tackling the climate crises, and for making your voice heard by the world.

Please hold on to all the good qualities that you have, as many of us have failed to guard ours along the way. We became dishonest and started telling stories that are only in favor of our own interests. We became so selfish that we began to ignore and dehumanize people who are different from us. Our minds are closed and we are no longer listening to one another. For all of these things, I want to say – Sorry.

But kid, stealing your dreams was not our intention. Many things that do harm were not intended this way when they were created. We wanted you to have the most livelihoods to choose from, and we wanted you to have convenient cars to travel, comfortable home to live, good medical devices for the treatment ... But I do apologize for not stepping up for you when things went wrong. I am sorry for putting you on the spot at the largest crises of all. I'm sorry that we couldn't be a steppingstone for you, but instead, we hold you back by confusing you with contradicting information. I am sorry for not being able to provide you a clear narrative of the convoluted issue.





After all the things that we have done wrong, willingly or unwillingly, I would like to ask you for a few more things if I may. I ask you not to let uncertainty become an excuse for inaction. You don't have to believe in anything to do good deeds. If anyone tries to fool you with uncertainties and convince you to bid on the odds, let them be. But do what you believe is good and things that need to be done. The fact is, we are running short in time, and we need more action, not debate.

Question everything, but don't be cynical. Ask what it is that changes minds. What it is that changes behaviors. Then plan your strategy based upon your findings. I will tell you one thing I have found over the years – the thing that makes people move is individual interest. So, let's put that on the table and discuss what to do about it, shamelessly.

Don't worry if you think it's too crowded and your voice is drowning. You might find it harder and harder to have your own voice. Every one of us is new to the challenges that we have today, and we are all trying to find a way. So, don't be afraid when things seem hectic. Build your tolerance for crowds, but do not shift from your ground to things that are not ethical.

Always take those left behind with you. Building empathy is harder than you think. But remember one thing, dignity is granted to us at birth based on the resources that we have access to. For many people on this planet, however, dignity needs to be earned in a hard way. So always prepare a seat at the table for whom climate change is coming in the most damaging way.

Kid, take me as your ally. I promise you that I will do my best to build a better political structure and environment for you to push climate action further. I will point you to people who you need to convince to turn the climate conversation to climate action. I will do my best to increase the transparency in business and governance, so you can see where problems lie. I will paint you a better picture of where the resistances and the opportunities are, so you can go ahead and move the needle strategically. I will present my data in a more responsible way, so that they are not used for anyone's purpose but to tell the true story of the Earth. And finally, I promise you, I will stop promising you anything, but will show you in action.