YOU FOUNDED THE GREEN HOPE FOUNDATION IN 2012, WHEN YOU WERE ONLY 12 YEARS OLD. HOW DID YOU DO THAT AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE?

I have always believed that age is just a number. Any goal is achievable if one has the passion. I founded Green Hope with a handful of friends to provide a platform of engagement and grassroots-level action for children like me. I faced a lot of challenges, mainly from adults who looked at my work with cynicism and doubted the capabilities of young people like me. The turning point came in 2013, when I was elected as the youngest ever Global Coordinator for United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)’s Major Groups for Children and Youth, making me the only minor, ever, to hold this position.

During my tenure, I successfully enhanced the engagement of young people in the UNEP stakeholder processes, thereby proving that age has no relation to capability. I have not looked back since and Green Hope has gone from strength to strength, directly empowering over 25,000 children and youth through our advocacy and capacity building programmes.

WHERE AND WHY DID YOU SET GREEN HOPE UP?

In 2012, I was one of the youngest international delegates to attend Rio+20, also known as the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There were over 50,000 delegates at this summit, from heads of state, policy makers to civil society influencers, but only a handful of children like me. They were deciding on policies that would affect my future, yet we – children – had absolutely no involvement or say in the process. I thought this was unfair and on my return from Rio, I established Green Hope with a handful of my friends.

Our journey began in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates and, in a short seven years, we now have 1,062 youth members working in 14 country chapters across the Americas, Middle East, Africa and Asia.

WHAT KIND OF FUTURE ARE YOU HOPING FOR?

There is too much inequality in our world. On the one hand, technological advancements are breaching new frontiers while millions of children continue to die from disease and malnutrition. One in five children go to bed hungry, while millions of tonnes of food get wasted elsewhere. I want this to change and the first step is to empower the marginalised sections of civil society through education, so that they are aware of their rights and can demand the same. I am working to achieve a future that is just and equitable, and one that can sustain not only the current but future generations as well.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WANT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT, BUT DON’T FEEL THEY HAVE THE SKILLS OR POWER TO START UP MOVEMENTS LIKE GREEN HOPE?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2018 report has ominously stated that mitigation of climate change is possible only with the engagement of every individual and all sections of civil society. Creating a sustainable future is every person’s responsibility. Therefore, it is imperative for each one of us to start taking actions within our zones of influence. Every action, however small, counts. It can be a simple step like reducing one’s waste by half, or planting one tree, or stopping using plastic. The options are numerous – it is important to take action rather than just talk about it. That is the message I convey during our “Environment Academies”, whether it is in a school in Canada or in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh.

FUTURUM’S AIM IS TO INSPIRE YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE YOU INTO STEM (SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATHS) CAREERS. WHICH SUBJECTS DID YOU STUDY AT SCHOOL, COLLEGE AND OR UNIVERSITY?

STEM and the environment have a natural connection and I actively explain its usage and implications at our advocacy workshops. We use innovative modes of communication – art, music, dance, sport and drama – to spread awareness, and these tools help us to surmount language and social barriers, too.

I studied English, French, maths and science in school, and I am currently a second-year student at the University of Toronto, majoring in Environmental Studies.

FINALLY, WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU WANT TO RELAX?

Music and reading help me to relax. I play the piano, guitar and drums and I also sing. However, my greatest relaxation is being with my Green Hope team doing what I love the most – empowering young people in the sustainable development process.