



Meet Kehkashan Basu

Kehkashan, 16 years old, is a girl with a mission. Her goal: to safeguard the future of our planet. Her organization, Green Hope, reaches out to thousands of children every year, bringing them together to save the environment, a crucial factor in children's rights. Green Hope is active in more than ten countries and inspires over a thousand young members internationally to make the earth a better place.

A born campaigner

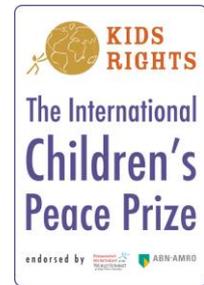
On 5 June, World Environment Day, Kehkashan was born to Indian parents in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). By the age of eight, she was already telling all who would listen about the urgency of environmental action. Soon she would plant her first tree and bring together young people locally to collect and recycle waste. Her efforts would not go unnoticed; at just 11 years old, Kehkashan was invited to address the TUNZA Children and Youth Conference in Indonesia. The following year she became the youngest delegate to address a press conference at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), and spoke passionately about the contribution children can make to a sustainable future.

Returning to Dubai full of energy and inspiration, the **12-year-old Kehkashan founded her own organization, Green Hope**, to work towards a sustainable future and climate justice. The organization runs a host of activities for children and young people, including waste recycling, beaches and mangrove cleanups, tree planting and awareness campaigns. Green Hope communicates through many art forms, such as poetry, sing and dance. Its environmental academies and conferences have reached over 3,000 school and university students to date.

What started as one young girl's initiative is now a sizeable organization with 350 active members in the UAE alone. The management team is comprised entirely of children, who even use their own pocket money to fund their environmental activities.

A healthy environment for children's rights

Environmental degradation is a real threat to children and their rights. Every year more than three million children under five years old die due to environmental causes, and the lives of millions more are ruined. Climate change brings with it floods, droughts and hurricanes, destroying infrastructure, food, water supplies and housing, causing families to flee their homes. Heavy rainfall and changes in temperature have increased the incidence of diseases caused by water contamination and poor sanitation. Young children are the first to get sick: 6,000 children die every day from illnesses such as diarrhea and malaria. There is no doubt: a healthy environment is a precondition for the fulfillment of children's rights.



Global reach

Green Hope acts locally, in the most direct way, to combat environmental degradation and climate change. But Kehkashan wants to make an impact on a larger scale too. Since Rio+20, she has spoken at numerous national and international conferences about the sustainability of our planet. At age 12, Kehkashan became the youngest ever Global Coordinator for the Major Group for Children and Youth of the United Nations Environmental Programme.

“Children are the future of the planet and we have the fundamental right to a life of dignity. Do not underestimate our potential. Give us respect and equal opportunities so that each of us can blossom.”

Green Hope has grown into a truly international organization with over 1,000 youth worldwide engaged in its activities. Inspired by Kehkashan’s international advocacy, ten chapters and partner organizations of Green Hope have been established by children in Nepal, India, Colombia, Canada, Sri Lanka, France, USA, Mexico, Oman and Bahrain.

The girl who plants trees

Kehkashan uses every way she can to teach children about the need to protect the environment and to empower them to take action. Alongside her practical activities and international advocacy, she has also written a book called “The Tree of Hope”, in which a young girl turns a desert landscape into an oasis by planting trees and persuading her friends to join in.

Kehkashan is that girl; Green Hope has planted over 5,000 trees worldwide to date. *“Planting trees is the simplest yet most effective way to diminish climate change and land degradation”*, says Kehkashan. Alongside tree planting, she encourages children and adults to make a personal pledge to the tree of hope. What will you do to create a more sustainable future? *“Take that extra step,”* she says, *“walk that extra mile to get the future we want. Time is not on our side – we have to act now, or we will have polar bears under palm trees.”*

Kehkashan was nominated by her father, Maushum Basu.