

Pupils off to UN debate

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A PHOENIX school debating team has secured a top spot in a world championship, qualifying to participate in the United Nations Foundation Youth Leadership Summit in New York.

Renita Balgobind, 17, Justina Chetty, 17, Tiffany Chetty, 16, and Jolene Duleep, 17, of Solvista Secondary school will join their debating coach Shakila Kooblal and teacher Karunithree Naidu in representing the country at the summit.

The summit will bring together student activists from all over the world. They will tour the United Nations headquarters, and meet UN officials.

Solvista Secondary debated as part of the United Nations Foundation's The People Speak Global Debate Series, which challenges high school pupils from around the world to think critically about current global topics, Kooblal said.

The debate consisted of a two-part series focused on addressing the controversial global issues of climate change and water rights.

Solvista Secondary was one of more than 600 high schools from 70 countries debating these issues.

Action

"We decided to identify a school in our circuit that does not have access to water. We visited Ekukhanyeni Primary and liaised with the stakeholders to provide them with a water tank. The United Nations Foundation was impressed that we did not just talk about water poverty in South Africa but that we took positive action that would improve the lives of the pupils of this school," Kooblal said.

She said the United Nations Foundation campaign, The People Speak (TPS), educates and engages young people on global issues that will shape their future.

"By engaging them on issues of poverty reduction, global health, climate change and more, TPS is inspiring young people to be a positive force for change in the world," Kooblal said.

Tiffany Chetty said, "It has been an incredible experience debating in a new format called the Public Forum that is used in American schools. We debated two very controversial issues on carbon emissions and water nationalisation. We invited many of our local politicians and government officials to be part of our audience."

A lack of resources was not an obstacle for this highly motivated team.

"Despite not having access to internet, we worked very hard to gather research material for preparation. Our coaches motivated us and the support we received from stakeholders like Umgeni Water and Siza was just so encouraging," Balgobind said.

The summit will be held between 15 and 22 July.

