



**Keynote Speech**  
**by Ms. Jiarong Yan**  
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**on behalf of the Secretary General**  
**of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)**  
**to the Secondary Schools' United Nations Symposium**

*(Sheraton Hotel, Montréal, 14 November 2019)*

1. Good evening everyone! It's a great pleasure to address you on behalf of the Secretary General of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which is the only UN specialized agency headquartered in Canada.
2. This is a very important year for ICAO, and indeed for the United Nations system as a whole. ICAO is celebrating the 75th anniversary of our creation by the 1944 Convention on International Civil Aviation. Meanwhile, celebrations have begun to highlight the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Charter, which of course is the document that brings us together today.
3. It is an excellent occasion to reflect on the timelessness of the values and objectives of these treaties. It is perhaps more importantly a key opportunity to reflect on how we can ramp up the efforts to achieve these objectives, especially in light of the fact that only a decade remains to realize Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.
4. Timelessness is also very unfortunately reflected in the fact that so many conflicts and humanitarian crises remain unresolved, from Afghanistan to Yemen and beyond. As we speak, four million have fled Venezuela, which is one of the largest displacements in the world. We are facing the alarming prospect of armed conflict in the Gulf.
5. Let us not be fooled into thinking that there is no progress to be achieved in countries with advanced economies, where the widening inequality gap, as elsewhere, is threatening social stability and having a real and direct effect on human wellbeing and rights.

6. So let's face the reality. Our world is faced with a myriad of tests: a climate crisis; protracted conflicts; unsustainable levels of youth unemployment; growing disparities between rich and poor; a clampdown on dissent; and strong opposition to the UN march for gender equality. Unless we face our social, economic and environmental challenges head-on, we will not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the world will not be better.
7. Each of these challenges has one common denominator: -- the need for those in power to live up to their responsibilities; to do what is right for the people and planet alike.
8. This is why it reassures me that dedicated and committed youth like you still look to the UN as a source of positive and truly global change.
9. Indeed, in an ever more divided world, we need a strong United Nations. It is vital that the world has strong and effective multilateral institutions and international relations are based on international law. The spirit of multilateralism and cooperation cannot be overemphasized. Together, we will face the various challenges and risks confronting humanity and together, we will deliver win-win outcomes.
10. Today's global youth demographic comprises almost two billion people. Your generation is highly equipped, not just with knowledge and passion, but also with the technical skills and awareness which will be so important in the years ahead to putting our planet and its diverse societies on a truly sustainable and prosperous path. The UN and the international community need your ideas, your energy, and your dedication. It is my firm belief that young people in our world today are a lightning rod for change.
11. Your presence here tonight symbolizes your interest in multilateralism. It illustrates the awareness of the threats to your future, your livelihoods, your security, and your environment. Youth today do not and must not take no for an answer, much in the same way that Greta Thunberg's recent demonstration right here in Montréal did.

12. In the whole UN system, we are pushing for prevention, mediation, and a surge in diplomacy to address the crises we face, and we are calling for the intensification of investments. This is illustrated by the fact that fully half of all international relief aid is channeled through the United Nations – ensuring that millions receive protection, food, medicine, shelter, water and other life-saving forms of assistance.
13. I would like to underscore that the UN's work requires a deeply personal investment, sometimes at the ultimate cost. In brutal attacks, the UN has lost at least 80 peacekeepers, humanitarians and others this year alone, all of whom gave their lives serving the United Nations and trying to better the lives of others. Throughout your discussions, I encourage you to have a thought for them.
14. You may be wondering at this point what ICAO has to do with all this. As a UN specialized agency, ICAO is an international standards-making body. We develop international Standards and Recommended Practices that govern civil aviation. We call these SARPs. Thanks to over 12,000 SARPs adopted as well as ICAO's programmes and capacity-building efforts, today's global air transport network is able to operate over 100,000 daily flights, safely, efficiently and securely in every region of the world.
15. Our international civil aviation network plays a key role in international connectivity and helps to promote global security, peace, and prosperity, on a sustainable basis.
16. ICAO just wrapped up its 40th Assembly where 2400 delegates from 184 Member States came to our Montreal Headquarters to endorse a new three-year work programme for ICAO, and to establish the new global consensus on the priorities civil aviation will pursue.
17. Today, civil aviation is making unique and critical contributions to States' attainment of no fewer than 15 of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.
18. However, we also face some hurdles in keeping up the positive momentum towards them. Climate change, and more specifically the unique technological challenges aviation faces in addressing its energy and emission requirements, is perhaps one of the biggest hurdle.

19. ICAO is making every effort to seek to meaningfully address the sustainability of international flight. In the past century the modern aircraft had become some 80% more fuel efficient than the first jets to enter operation. We know very well that innovation remains the key to aviation's sustainable future. While international flight today accounts for 1.3% of annual man-made greenhouse gas emissions, this number will only grow unless we can realize new progress through new technologies, stronger targets and broader coalitions.
20. Against a backdrop of unprecedented temperatures, unrelenting storms, and undeniable science, the world is starting to move – not yet fast enough but in the right direction –towards the opportunities of a green economy. The UN Climate Summit highlighted some of the solutions we need to scale up in order to dramatically reduce emissions, keep temperature rise to 1.5 degrees and reach carbon neutrality by 2050.

*Young leaders of tomorrow,*

21. The United Nations has proven, at various stages of its history, that it is capable of rising to new challenges.
22. However, the support of young people has never been more crucial to how successfully it does so. Young people around the world are striving for peace, justice, inclusion, gender equality and human rights.
23. Your voices and your energy can help highlight the UNs' successes, and its constraints, and you can be important catalysts for change by creating social networks in support of our work. You are also critical to efforts to address hate speech and promote intercultural and interfaith understanding and tolerance.
24. As the world's future leaders, we need you to mobilize. We need you to engage. We need you to be the agents of change.
25. Now I'm ready to take questions you may have on the role of the UN and ICAO.
26. Thank you.