



**Graduation speech at the Bonn International School
Bonn, Germany, 27 May 2011**

**By Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

Good evening, and congratulations to the Bonn International School Class of 2011!

Graduating from high school is a real high point, and if I remember my graduation correctly, the best part is no more homework and classes, no more school rules, no more getting up at really awful times in the morning. Ah! What a relief!

But each graduation class is a high point not just for each of you individually. It is also a high point for the WORLD.

Why?

Because it's the point where millions of young people like you, all over the planet, start to make new choices about the next chapter of your lives. It is the point where the values and the principles that have shaped who you are today, as an individual and as a generation, begin to be transformed into the dreams and the ambitions you have for tomorrow.

Although I did graduate from high school, I actually don't think I progressed beyond kindergarten because I still think in pictures. So I invite you to think of yourself at this moment in your life as being one of several hundred million fresh drops of energy and adventure feeding into a great, new river of endeavour that will redefine the future as it unfolds. You're stepping across a threshold into what will become YOUR world, because you are going to make that world.

Even in the most stable and predictable of times, we need that fresh effort, those fresh perspectives pouring in constantly to keep humankind moving forward.

But times are changing faster than ever, and the global challenges we face - from war, to food and shelter for everyone, to global climate change itself - are greater than ever.

So much so in fact, that most of the answers of the past are most certainly not the answers of the future. I am sure many of you mastered the advanced science of "copy and paste" for some of your school assignments, and congratulations for that, but I assure you there is no "copy and paste" solution to most of the challenges out there.

Yes, Google has been your best friend, and Mr. Google knows everything, but he

does not know what is really important: how do we solve climate change? How do we feed the rapidly increasing population of the world? How do we achieve peace?

It sounds a bit scary, and it is a bit scary.

But it is also grand, because it's not often that a generation gets the chance to make a new world that will shape the success of many generations to come.

How great is it, then, that this IS one of those times? How great is it, that this is your time to define the world ?

My generation led the information revolution. I remember how astounded I was the first time I received a fax. Do any of you know what a fax is?? But the information technology revolution that has occurred over the last 20 years is not impressive to you. You all learned how to communicate with a friend on the other side of the world before you ever learned how to walk. You just expect information flow to be instantaneous and omnipresent, because you are benefitting from the results of that revolution.

Well, there is another revolution from which you will also benefit, but only if you ensure that it happens. I am talking about the clean energy revolution. It has started, timidly. Ten years ago, the clean energy revolution was not much more than an untested vision in the eyes of a few pioneers.

Now it is beginning to enter the mainstream. We have some efficient light bulbs, some hybrid cars on the road, a certain amount of wind power being turned into electricity. But we are far from where we should be. To give you the comparison, today we are with energy where we were with telecommunications when I was in kindergarten: big black phone on the wall, with rotating handle to call the operator and ask to be connected.

It is your generation that will have to ensure that we move to the ipad3 version of energy. That means a technological revolution. The vehicles you will drive will likely not have to be refuelled, ever. The planes you will fly could well be powered by the sun. The homes in which you will live and the buildings in which you will work will quite probably not only self produce all the electricity they need, but actually produce excess power for use by others. If you think any of this is impossible, I need to cite Mr Nelson Mandela who said that something always seems impossible until it's done. I know you will get the job done.

I know you will get it done because you belong to the very privileged population of this world.

- You didn't have to look at a blackboard under a tree because you didn't have a classroom;
- You didn't have to do your homework by candlelight because you didn't have electricity; and
- You didn't have to listen to your teachers on an empty stomach because you didn't have enough food.

Your basic needs are more than covered, and that gives you the freedom and the

obligation to imagine, to discuss with your friends about what you're going to study and at which university, to make choices about your future that can transform the world.

Think big. Dream of things you think may be unreachable, and then make them happen.

Your school and my office are located on the street named after Martin Luther King, who in the midst of deep racial divisions had a dream that the United States would become a country where people were blind to the colour of another person's skin. It took 50 years, but today Barack Obama is sitting in the White House. Do not compromise your thoughts or your dreams. They are the very power that will move the world forward.

Marlin has already give you her two pieces of advice. So here are my two:

First, never, ever, ever take an early morning class in college. Believe me, you will never make it to that class.

Second, always believe in yourself and your abilities.

You don't have too little of this, or too much of that, or not enough of the other. You are perfect the way you are, with your unique abilities.

I don't profess to know all Lady Gaga's songs! But "Born this Way" has a great message in it - "I'm beautiful in my way, 'cause God makes no mistakes, I'm on the right track, baby, I was born this way."

Enjoy the journey and God bless.

- - - - -