

## 2019 Opening Speech

Thank you, Deputy Secretary General Tavares

MUNs are often seen as exercises where you learn and practice leadership skills so that you know how to lead when you have the authority to do so.

I agree that you learn and practice leadership skills during MUN.

I disagree that you need to wait until you have a “proper” position from which to lead.

Leadership is not about a position of power in a government or company or other organization.

Leadership, in essence, is influence. You do not “learn to be a leader” and then wait for the right position to exercise leadership.

Each person leads—intentionally or unintentionally—with the influence he or she has on others. Your day-to-day actions or inactions, your words or your silence show who you are, what you believe in, what you stand for. Those we think of as leaders do have a “reach” to their influence wider than those around them. But the concept of leadership as influence is the same.

Wernher von Braun was chief scientist and engineer for NASA, when President Kennedy made his announcement in 1962 that the USA would put a man on the moon by the end of the decade.

Von Braun was the leader of the initiative, he was in charge, he was responsible, everyone looked to him to achieve the goal Kennedy had set.

But there was an engineer, Dr. John Houbolt, who worked for NASA as one of many engineers on the project. His responsibility was to do the work he was assigned to do, basically to do what he was told.

He had come to the conclusion that the way to land men on the moon and bring them back safely was a “lunar orbit rendezvous.” This was not part of his job, he had no authority to pursue this line of thinking. NASA leadership was not considering this approach.

However, Dr. Houbolt believed that a “lunar orbit rendezvous” was the solution. He came to this conclusion only after gathering data, thoroughly analysing it, looking at the challenge from many perspectives and consulting colleagues. Once he was convinced, he took his ideas directly to NASA headquarters and convinced them. He bypassed the “chain of command” and took his analysis directly to the project leaders. In his 9-page letter he called himself a “voice in the wilderness.” His solution was adopted, and he is credited by NASA as one of the most significant contributors to the successful lunar landing.

Knowing you are a leader, what kind of leader will you be? History is full of leaders who set human progress back, whose leadership took decades or even centuries to overcome. Who used their leadership skills to mislead or confuse? Or even for hostile or divisive or selfish reasons\_

I am confident there is no one in this room who sees themselves as that kind of leader—but the temptation will always be present—to influence others to do that which is selfish or harmful because it is often easier or sometimes because we don’t recognize what we are doing.

My generation was passionate about social change. When I was in college, we were leading the anti-war effort, and were determined to bring about social justice and civil rights. My generation made huge strides in health care, science and technology, global education.

We are called the “boomer generation” because of the “baby boom” shortly after WWII.

However, if we did so much so well, why is there still so much left to be done? Are you living in a world where each person is confident of having civil rights, where science is used to ensure humane treatment, peace, and ultimately survival?

There is a lot of irritation—and sometimes anger—from those of your generation toward mine. How could we possibly be leaving you a world with so many problems?

Does anyone in the room know the phrase “ok boomer.” Raise your hand if you have heard it. The “ok boomer” phrase has gone viral especially since a 25-year-old member of the New Zealand Parliament used it in the middle of her speech. She was speaking on the need for laws about climate change and an older member of Parliament shouted out to her his disagreement. Without ever losing her poise or her train of thought, she said, “ok boomer” and continued.

As the internet and social media are inclined to do, the post went viral and drew a lot of criticism toward her (disrespectful, rude, arrogant) and praise (focused, determined, not distracted from her cause).

But this episode shows the frustration of your generation with the challenges you have in front of you and your righteous and rightful anger at those older who, you believe, could have and should have solved the problems by now.

There is no denying that my generation made great advances but also no denying that they were not enough and that many of them are being lost and many are being used in damaging ways.

So, now it is your turn. Gen Z, as the social scientists call you, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest generation, after the Boomers. The Boomers had an impact at least partly because we were so large a cohort that we could not be ignored. You are in the same situation.

It is over to you to lead by your influence large or small and by being leaders and by choosing leaders who will make the positive changes urgently required.

To do this you have to think critically without being critical. This sounds contradictory but it is not. Thinking critically means analysing situations, separating facts from opinion and gossip and rumor, seeking out and respecting and listening to the opinions of others (even the boomer generation) but not automatically accepting them as your own. It means being able to separate the emotional and sometimes the hysterical manner in which an argument is presented and identify the facts in the argument and analyse those.

Thinking critically requires learning how to discuss and debate without criticizing those with whom you disagree. It is being able to disagree without being disagreeable, to be persuasive and passionate about presenting your own opinions but without insulting those with other opinions. It is being the best thought-out and articulated voice in the room—not the loudest voice in the room.

A Model United Nations does not imitate the United Nations. The word “model” can mean imitation but that is not the definition we use here. The goal of the “Model” United Nations is to set the example of how the United Nations should be—to be the model for the future.

MUN is an opportunity to exercise leadership which moves us in a positive direction, brings people together who really might prefer to stay apart. It means reaching out to people “on the other side” with respect even when disagreements are extreme.

As Director of the Carlucci American International School of Lisbon and as a member of the Advisory Board of The Hague International MUN, I welcome you to the 25th annual IMUN and look forward to two days of positive and thoughtful debate.

I yield the floor to the Chair.