

# 2019 Commencement Speech - Bahcesehir University (BAU)

28 June 2019  
Istanbul, Turkey

## TALKING POINTS (1540 words)

- **Good morning. Selamun aleyküm to all of you – students, faculty, administrators, parents. This is a proud moment for all.**
- **Thank you, President Şenay Yalçın and Chairman Enver Yücel for inviting me to Bahcesehir University. This is one of the most spectacular locations in the world. At the shores of the Bosphorus. Between Asia and Europe. A place rooted in history. A bridge between cultures, civilization and religions. A place poised to contribute to peace, security development through academic excellence.**
- **While the size and global reach is formidable, the presence of over 1,000 foreign students makes this university truly international. It is a place to forge solidarity and global citizenship. To foster long term friendships beyond borders and UN values which are coming under increasing threat in our troubled world.**

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- **As you step into your working lives you are one step closer to fulfilling your dreams and hopes. And the dreams and hopes of your parents and families. You are the agents of a better world. A future world of empathy, concern and solidarity. You are the people who will help end inequalities, remove prejudice and work for empowering women and girls, take care of the older persons and create a life of dignity for all. That is the value of your education in this wonderful university.**
  - **I am heading the UN's training organization. We train 85000 public policy officials. Adult learning is very close to education and awareness. We find it a challenge to change habits and attitudes especially in our constantly changing world. My message to all of you is that change is the only constant in our lives. Those who adapt will prosper. Those who want only the status quo will fail. So keep your minds open and be ready for life long learning and technology awareness.**
  - **I want to talk today about good global citizenship. A concept which has its roots in the UN Charter, and which has its strongest reflection in the Sustainable Development Goals agreed in 2015.**
  - **The UN will celebrate its 75<sup>th</sup> birthday next year. It was founded in 1945 at a time the world was reeling from the impact of the World Wars which took a toll of almost 100 million lives. The bloodshed and devastation were**

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**horrendous. We were created to end wars, to ensure prosperity and a life of dignity for all human beings.**

- **That is why our founding Charter, our constitution, opens with these words: “We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind...”. The focus was on “we the peoples...” not “we the Governments...”. Implementation of the UN charter belongs to all of us especially young people.**
- **Ladies and gentlemen, dear graduates,**
- **We know peace is based on fundamental principles: democracy, equality, freedom of thought, speech and religion, and respect for human rights and human dignity. The absence of peace is incubated in a petri dish of hate, inequality and injustice.**
- **Much of the United Nations’ energy is devoted to preventing conflict, by supporting sustainable development and promoting human rights.**
- **Ladies and gentlemen, dear graduates,**
- **My path in the UN started as a diplomat from India. I worked on sustainable development. For peace, prosperity and our planet. I helped develop the Sustainable Development Goals – or SDGs. I helped bring 170 Presidents and Prime Ministers to New York to sign on the 2030 Agenda – the best promise for a sustainable world.**

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- **The 2030 Agenda is based on 17 Sustainable Development Goals and is our best effort to create the conditions for peace over the next 11 years.**
  - **And let's face it, our world is facing many extremely challenging and intractable situations. The climate crisis is upon us and its impacts are becoming more widespread and severe; conflicts are dragging on for years and even decades; we have record numbers of people on the move to escape violence.**
  - **Inequality is growing both within and between countries, and the global economy and trading regime are unbalanced. Youth unemployment is at alarming levels, and intolerance, extremism, nationalism and xenophobia are on the rise.**
  - **Every day, around the world, we are saving lives, helping to lift people out of poverty, fighting climate change, providing food, education and shelter to the most vulnerable, and promoting the rights of girls and women.**
  - **For me we must first achieve “ending poverty in all its forms everywhere”. We must locate and take special action for the poor and most vulnerable including those living in remote mountain and forest areas, children, the disabled and other vulnerable groups.**
  - **Ladies and gentlemen, dear graduates,**

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- **Let me give you some examples of how the United Nations is working to create a more peaceful and prosperous world.**
  - **First, human rights – our most powerful tool to prevent and end conflict and ensure lives of security and dignity.**
  - **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights sets out norms and standards against which we measure governments and institutions. But rights are not just abstract ideas or aspirations. They call for extremely specific and concrete actions.**
  - **This is why the United Nations puts inclusivity, diversity and respect for the rule of law at the heart of all our work. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is based on fulfilling the rights of all to adequate housing, clean water, health care, education and food, as well as their right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.**
  - **Second, climate change. The science is there, and it is time to act.**
  - **Climate change is a global threat, and a massive multiplier of other threats – poverty, humanitarian needs, and conflict.**
  - **And climate change is moving faster than we are. Concentrations of green house gases in the atmosphere are higher than they have been for 800,000 years.**

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- **The good news is that technology is on our side. Clean, green energy is more affordable than ever.**
  - **And around the world, cities, regions, states and private corporations are taking climate action and setting their own ambitious targets. But it needs to go further.**
  - **That's what we need, if we are to safeguard our precious planet and its resources for future generations.**
  
  - **My third example involves you – young people. You are the leaders our world so desperately needs. You know that we need to embrace green and sustainable production and consumption. The United Nations is totally committed to working with you to safeguard your future.**
  - **Last year, the UN launched a new strategy, Youth 2030, to engage with young people and bring you into our decision-making processes. It includes programmes on climate action, education and health.**
  - **Young people are under unprecedented pressure, due to globalization, new technologies, displacement, changing labour markets and climate impacts.**
  - **Around the world, more than one-fifth of young people are not in employment, education or training; a quarter are affected by**

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**violence or armed conflict; and your voices are often ignored in the decisions that affect you.**

- **But young people are a vast source of innovation, ideas and solutions.**
- **The United Nations has always worked for young people. The difference is that we are now working with you.**
- **We hope young people everywhere will join us in working for a safer, more peaceful and prosperous world.**
- **There are so many ways to contribute. And this is what I mean by good global citizenship.**
- **The engineers among you can help to build climate-resilient infrastructure based on renewable energy. The academics and researchers can choose projects that improve people's lives while safeguarding resources. We need business people who understand that unless we invest in the green economy, we will have a grey future.**
- **Whether you go to work for the private sector, a think-tank, a non-profit, the government, academia or a multilateral organization like the United Nations, I hope you find a way to make our world a little better.**
- **There are many ways to make a difference: from giving your time and energy to causes that matter to you, to advocating and standing up for what you know is right.**

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- **Social media offers opportunities to reach across borders and to join our efforts through campaigns and online communities. The United Nations is there with you, on all the social platforms.**
  - **In our connected world, the United Nations is the virtual Town Hall: a safe space where we look for solutions and reach a better understanding of each other.**
  - **But too often, people retreat into their safe zones, rather than reaching out to others. Too often, people dehumanize their enemies when they could be building bridges.**
  - **Finding solutions to the global challenges we face requires us to find common ground. That means looking for similarities, not differences. It means looking for solutions, not problems.**
  - **Learn to work with science and scientific evidence. Understand the interconnection between issues. Do not get paralysed by inertia or historical momentum. Learn to use and develop new technologies for the public good.**
  - **As you leave the university gates, I hope you will think of this as the first day of the rest of your lives.**
  - **What's your role? How will you contribute? What kind of world is coming around the corner?**

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- **Are people going to become closed off from each other? Or are they going to work together for peace, prosperity and justice on a healthy planet?**
  - **The United Nations offers hope for a better future.**
  - **Please join us in working for humanity.**
  - **I am pleased to announce that we are opening affiliated institution with BAU. We will share content and hope to transmit UN values and goals through the affiliated training centre. Thank you BAU.**