Good morning.

It’s great to have the opportunity to address this conference.

Before I begin, can I just thank Lord Robertson for his kind introduction.

I want to pay tribute to him and his organisation – the FIA Foundation – for organising this event and for doing so much to champion the cause of sustainable transport.

To those of you who have travelled to be here today - welcome to City Hall. And welcome to London.

It’s a pleasure to be in such distinguished company.

And it’s also a huge honour to be joined by Zoleka Mandela – the granddaughter of one of my all-time political heroes – the great Nelson Mandela.

Zoleka – as many of you will know – is the Ambassador for the Global Initiative for Child Health and Mobility, a passionate advocate for road safety, and a seasoned campaigner and activist.

I’m delighted she could be with us today and that Jean Todt – the UN Special Envoy for Road Safety and the President of the FIA could also be here.

Not to mention another very special guest – the Mayor of Accra, Mohammed Adjei Sowah.

Mohammed, just so you know, I can be very competitive when it comes to laying claim to the title of being the Mayor of the best city in the world.

But I’ll concede Accra probably has the edge when it comes to the weather.

Seriously though, it’s great to have you here.

And last, but certainly by no means least, I want to give a quick shout out to the Year 6 students from Townsend Primary School in Bermondsey, who will be performing an air quality rap for us all later.

Ladies and gentleman, if you think the likes of Drake, Rita Ora and Stormzy have got it, just wait until you’ve seen this lot in action!

No pressure guys...

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It’s absolutely right that this conference is focusing on – and hearing from - our young people.
Because it’s children who are bearing the brunt of our air quality crisis.

Today, children in London are growing up with underdeveloped lungs – something that will affect them for the rest of their lives.

Many of the children hit by this health crisis also live in some of the most deprived parts of our city.

This means that poverty and pollution are combining in the most pernicious fashion to limit the life chances of young Londoners.

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Thousands of people die prematurely in our city every year as a direct consequence of our air. 

Air so dirty it repeatedly breaches legal limits.

But even that appalling statistic fails to capture the full scale of the problem.

Or how this scourge blights the lives of so many Londoners.

Because in addition to reduced life expectancy – air pollution has also been linked to asthma, strokes, heart disease and dementia.

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The severity of the situation is further underlined today – in the starkest possible terms – by new research we’re publishing.

It shows that every borough in London exceeds WHO limits for PM2.5.

And to be clear, when I talk about PM2.5 – I’m talking about tiny toxic air particles so small that they can be ingested deep into the lungs, causing respiratory and cardiovascular diseases as well as cancer.

The data reveals that every resident of London – all 8.6 million of us – are living in areas which break these limits.

And that 7.9 million Londoners – roughly 94 per cent of the population – live in areas which exceed the WHO guidelines by 50 per cent or more.

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This is not just unacceptable – it’s shameful.

As the Mayor of this city, I’m not prepared to stand idly by and let the situation deteriorate further.

I feel I have a responsibility – a moral duty - to act.
An obligation to our young people and to future generations.

That’s why I’ve unveiled the boldest and most ambitious plans anywhere in the world to tackle air pollution and to turn things around.

From next month, we’ll be introducing the T-Charge.

A £10 levy on the oldest polluting vehicles entering central London.

This is due to start on 23rd October and it will be the toughest emission standard enforced by any major city.

And is a significant step towards implementing an Ultra-Low Emission Zone with even tougher standards.

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But that’s not all we’re doing.

My administration is also pioneering a ‘Healthy Streets’ initiative.

This is a programme designed to rid our streets of pollution.

And to encourage more people to walk, cycling and the greater use of public transport.

We know that just asking people to walk, cycle and use transport more doesn’t work.

The way to do it is to make it the easy, convenient, affordable and safe option for people to take.

Streets make up 80 per cent of London’s public space.

So transforming them into Healthy Streets has the potential to dramatically improve the experience of living, working and spending time in our city.

To make this vision a reality we’ll be investing record sums in public transport.

Making walking and cycling safer and easier for Londoners.

And phasing out dirty diesel buses, replacing them with brand new lower and zero emission models.

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I’m also delighted to announce today that London will be joining the WHO’s campaign to bring air pollution down to safe levels by 2030.

By signing up to be part of this coalition of cities, we’re committing not just to meeting legal limits.

But to going much further.
And to meeting the WHO standards for PM2.5 particles which are necessary for truly safeguarding human health.

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I’m proud that London is taking action.

And that we’re putting ourselves at the forefront of an international movement dedicated to cleaning up our air, protecting our climate and ensuring the health of our children.

Because the simple truth is that no one city can achieve these goals alone.

Air pollution and climate change transcend national borders and city boundaries.

In this interconnected world, the fates of cities like London and Accra are intertwined.

And the only way to respond to these global problems is with global solutions.

So I’m grateful for the opportunity to work with and learn from other cities around the world.

Together – by sharing best practice, pooling our expertise, and co-ordinating our efforts – I know we can make a meaningful and lasting difference.

A difference that has a profound impact on three of our most precious resources.

Our planet.

Our air.

And the health of our children.

Together - let’s act now to save lives.

Let’s act now so that we can look back with pride in a few decades’ time.

And let’s act now so that future generations – and millions of people – can take for granted what should be a universal human right – the right to breathe clean air.

Thank you very much.