

How Tereshkova Reached the Stars

By [Yury Fedotov](#)

July 03, 2013

The  Moscow Times

Fifty years ago, Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova was launched aboard the Vostok 6. She orbited the earth 48 times, and in the course of that historic, 70.8-hour flight she became the first woman in space.

A keen parachute jumper from an early age, Tereshkova was among just five women chosen for the Soviet Union's woman-in-space program. She was the only one to achieve her dream of going to space.

Much has been accomplished in the 50 years since that first pioneering flight. Nearly 60 women have followed Tereshkova and gone to space. In fact, Wang Yaping from China was just launched aboard the Shenzhou-10 on June 11.

Humanity has maintained a continuous presence in outer space for more than a decade with the International Space Station, where women and men from around the world work together to conduct groundbreaking research in what is one of the most remarkable examples of international cooperation.

Reaping the benefits of space requires not only cooperation between states but the equal participation of women and men. But the sad fact is that women remain underrepresented in fields of study such as mathematics and the sciences across the world, and the science and technology professions remain overwhelmingly dominated by men.

Trailblazers like Tereshkova are powerful role models for the young women and girls who also aspire to explore uncharted areas of space and knowledge.

Space exploration not only captures our imaginations. Space technology and science have helped to improve the lives of millions of people on Earth.

From communication, navigation, meteorology and education to health, agriculture and resource management, research undertaken in space-related fields has had a profound impact on our world today. Satellites help us to monitor climate change and react rapidly to natural disasters, saving countless lives. Modern telecommunications would be unthinkable without space technologies.

If we want to continue to strengthen excellence, spur innovation and work together towards a better world in the 21st century, we cannot afford to waste the talents of half the population.

The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, based in Vienna, supports states in cooperating and harnessing the potential of space for sustainable development and the benefit of all.

Mazlan Othman, the director of the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs, is herself a good example of what can be achieved if you push past boundaries. She was the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in physics at the university she attended in New Zealand. After graduation, she returned to her home country of Malaysia as the country's first-ever astrophysicist and was later made the director general of the national space agency, which she founded.

This year, the UN is celebrating "women and space" in honor of Tereshkova and other women pioneers in space.

Equality between women and men is a worthy goal in and of itself, but it is also practical. Empowering women makes our economies more productive and encourages growth. We must do more to encourage young women to pursue their dreams and interests and ensure that they have equal access to opportunities.

Tereshkova and the many brave women who followed in her footsteps — astronauts, cosmonauts, scientists and many other innovators — teach us an important lesson: to always reach for the stars, even here on Earth.

Yury Fedotov is the executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the director-general of the UN in Vienna, one of the four major UN office hubs along with New York, Geneva and Nairobi.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/07/03/how-tereshkova-reached-the-stars-a25509>