

Statement by Mr. Jean Todt

United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety

at

**Opening of the 82nd UNECE Inland Transport Committee Meeting
Palais des Nations, 10:00-10:30**

Thank you, Chair,
Executive Secretary, dear Olga,
Excellencies,
Dear Friends,

It is an honour for me to join you at the UNECE Inland Transport Committee (ITC) Meeting. Every year, since the start of my mandate, I have marked the annual session on my calendar as a reunion, not to be missed.

I thank the UNECE and its Member States for paving a strong way forward for our collective vision for sustainable transport and mobility. Most of all, for extending its success for improvements around the world. In particular, the legal instruments that are administered by the Committee, related to road safety. As you know, I promote the accession to and better implementation of the conventions on road traffic and signs and signals, vehicle regulations, transport of dangerous goods and others.

The theme of this year's ITC Meeting is focused on climate change and the environmental impact of inland transport. Let's make no mistake. Extreme weather events caused by climate change, as well as slower-onset of climate change impact will continue to affect every aspect of our daily lives: transport infrastructure and road safety are no exception.

I will therefore use the opportunity before you today to remind you of the other emergency that has been borne out of our currently imperfect transport systems. I am calling it the "global road safety emergency". There can be no other word for it: millions more will die if we do not act.

Today, before this distinguished audience of global leaders, I therefore wish to reflect briefly on the Third Ministerial Meeting on Road Safety, which took place in Stockholm last week. I congratulate the Swedish government and all partners for the achievement.

The death and injury toll from road crashes has not fallen in 20 years. The demands in Stockholm, especially from the youth, is that the current state of play is not acceptable. I could not agree more. Indeed, a new approach is needed for us to deliver on our promises toward significantly decreasing road crashes. Our target to halve the number of deaths has been extended to 2030.

What must we do differently, so we do not fall short again? And indeed, do so in a physical environment that may increase the complexity of the task at hand?

We wouldn't travel by air or by sea if a million people died every year on planes and boats. Safety and the need to avoid casualties are core principles in other modes of transport. Less than 10,000 deaths happen each year in aviation, maritime and rail, combined.

There is a lot of evidence showing the effectiveness in risk management and building systems that work with human error: allowing for it, rather than trying to confront it. If we can successfully engineer this cultural shift, the world will be able to follow the example of Sweden and other countries who are now working towards a model aimed at ensuring there are zero deaths on the roads.

This means thinking in terms of a safe system approach and looking more broadly at mobility and how we manage it.

We need to ensure that safety is a measurable indicator and outcome in building our transport systems; in the vehicles, infrastructure and related technologies that are developed and introduced to markets. If we continue to flood our transport systems with unworthy elements, which bring devastation to our citizens, we will not achieve our vision of safe and sustainable transport for all.

This means placing safety as a value so non-negotiable that – as in the aviation industry – it becomes an asset of our road transport system.

If we can reshuffle the values that currently overpower our road transport systems (short-term cost-benefits, speed, personal choice, and so on) for one that prioritizes safety, then we have a real chance to make a change. When safety as a value becomes the guiding principle for our road transport systems, with help of the UN Conventions, they will evolve, regardless of location or a country's income level.

I count on all private, public and civil society stakeholders to take ownership of their respective responsibilities – putting safety at the forefront of your actions, investments and products. Safety determines quality and value, in transport.

I would be pleased to see these sentiments included in the ITC Recommendations for Enhancing National Road Safety Systems expected to be adopted by the committee this week.

One phrase in the Ministerial Declaration that you will endorse later today caught my eye: “Aware that all the changes that need to be implemented to address the challenges resulting from climate change, including developing more resilient and safe transport systems, require global commitment”. How much truth can be found in this statement and how much urgency.

With this united call for global commitment and action, I thank you all for the invaluable contribution towards our collective belief, that no person should die because of a road crash, compromised infrastructure or unclean air. I would be pleased to welcome you this afternoon at our side-event to discuss more on post-Stockholm.

Thank you.