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**A GLOBAL ROLE FOR UNECE WORKING PARTY ON
ROAD TRAFFIC SAFETY (WP.1)**

Submitted by the FIA Foundation

Introduction

The rising toll of death and injury on the road has recently gained much wider international recognition as a significant public health problem for nearly all UN Member States, but especially for developing countries and countries in transition. In 2003, two resolutions concerned with road safety were adopted by the UN General Assembly¹ and the World Health Organization decided to dedicate World Health Day 2004 to road traffic injury prevention. This very welcome international attention for road safety issues has also given rise to discussion about how the UN system can respond best to the major challenge of reducing the numbers of people killed and injured on the roads today.

In the report of the UN Secretary General 'Global Road Safety Crisis' (document A/58/228) it is recommended that "a coordinating body be identified within the United Nations system" to assist with this important task. More recently in an interview on 7 January 2004 with the FIA Foundation, UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, confirmed his support for increased involvement by the UN in road safety, expressed concern over the lack of a single agency with responsibility for road safety, and stated that he would raise the issue with the heads of UN agencies. (See interview text in annex).

¹ Resolutions on the Global Road Safety Crisis 57/309 of 22 May 2003 and 58/9 of 5 November 2003.

The FIA Foundation is very active in promoting road safety issues at a global level and has been carefully considering the options for a single agency within the UN system. A Foundation paper ² on this subject setting out options was submitted to the UN last July. After further reflection and based on our experience within the UN system, we believe that giving a global role to the UNECE Working Party on Traffic Safety (WP.1) will be the most immediately efficient and effective way to fulfil this important task. This paper provides some important arguments in favour of this conclusion.

The Case for a Global Role for UNECE WP.1

The most promising strategy for preventing road traffic deaths and injuries is the adoption of a ‘systems’ approach to road safety management. This consists of developing well researched and cost effective countermeasures that can be applied to the road user, the road infrastructure and the motor vehicle. The strategy will be most effective when it is applied by a broad range of stakeholders involving public authorities, private sector and civil society in a common effort to promote road safety.

The UNECE, through the work of its various Working Parties on Road Safety (WP.1), on Transport Statistics (WP.6) and on Vehicle Standards (WP.29), have demonstrated many of the capabilities required to encourage the systems approach at an international level. The range of subject matter under consideration, from data collection to driver behaviour, vehicle construction standards and traffic regulations are all key ingredients of a successful strategy to promote road safety. The UNECE Working Parties have also demonstrated a strong willingness to involve relevant stakeholders in a transparent and interactive dialogue.

The UNECE also offers the potential to strengthen and share road safety cooperation among the other UN Regional Economic Commissions. Around the world, the range of specific road safety issues can differ quite substantially from country to country depending on factors such as the composition of the vehicle fleet and levels of motorization. For this reason, there is a strong argument in developing regional road safety action plans that reflect more closely the road traffic conditions of the countries involved. Given that all the Regional Commissions are involved in transport issues and a framework of cooperation between them is already being developed, it is natural to expect road safety to become a key area of common activity. Since UNECE has the most developed structure of road safety actions it would be the obvious candidate to lead coordination among the structure of regional Commissions.

A further important feature of the UNECE work has been the evolution of WP.29 on vehicle construction standards into the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations. The 1998 Agreement to create the World Forum has resulted in a significant increase in the number of non-UNECE Member States participating in its work. This is an important precedent that supports a similarly extended role for WP.1. Furthermore, it offers the prospect of positive synergy between the work of WP.1 and WP.29 at a global level. This is important since the interaction between road traffic rules and driver behaviour on the one hand, and vehicle technologies for active and passive safety on the other, should be closely related in the ‘systems’ approach to road safety.

² TRANS/WP.1/2003/14: How the United Nations can contribute to road safety.

An alternative option to a global role for WP.1 could be an Inter-Agency Task Force for which there are also a number of precedents from other sectors. However, usually one UN agency takes the lead in managing such a task force. In considering which part of the UN system would be the best to provide such leadership, one is inevitably drawn back to the work of WP.1. By comparison with the UNECE, other candidates - such as the World Health Organization or the United Nations Development Programme - lack structure, resources and sufficient experience in road safety issues.

For these reasons, the FIA Foundation believes that the UNECE WP.1 is the most attractive candidate as a focal point for global road safety within the UN system.

The Global Role of UNECE WP.1

Assuming that WP.1 did assume such a global role, how would its work need to change? To a significant extent WP.1's current work would be continued unchanged. It is clearly important not to risk diluting the core task of maintaining the basic legal instruments and resolutions (the Vienna Conventions, Agreements and Consolidated Resolutions etc.). It should also continue to collect information about road safety legal provisions and campaigns. Building on this platform, the more global tasks for WP.1 that the FIA Foundation would welcome are as follows:

- Encourage best practice through the formation of issue expert groups that can tackle the most prominent road safety issues – such as speed control, drink-driving, seat belt use and helmet wearing for users of two-wheeled vehicles. The initiative of the US Government last September to propose working groups on seat belts and motor cycle safety are a positive example of this kind of approach.
- Promote the existing Road Safety Week to a global level (perhaps with a shorter interval of two years and linked closely to the most important issue subjects as described above).
- Support the worldwide collection of accident statistics in order to improve country capacity to design effective countermeasures. Clearly WP.1 would need to work closely with WP.6 to extend its existing data collection activities.
- Work in close cooperation with the other Regional Commissions (ESCAP, ECA, ESCWA and ECLAC) and UN agencies (WHO, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank etc) by encouraging their regular participation in a global WP.1, and in the issue groups and data collection activities mentioned above.
- Encourage participation of non-UNECE Member States in these activities (perhaps in conjunction with the Regional Commissions) to ensure that developing country experience and requirements are reflected in the global work of WP.1.
- Encourage active support for global road safety actions and campaigns from among a wide range of stakeholders, including public authorities, the private sector and civil society.

Clearly these additional activities would have some resource implications that would be significant for the UNECE secretariat and also for the Member States that would participate in a global WP.1. However, these extra costs are very modest when compared with the magnitude of

the road safety problem and the potential benefits that will flow from a better performance in preventing global road traffic injuries. It is also important to recognise that by building on the existing UNECE structure, it will be possible for the UN system as a whole to benefit from the creation of a focal point for road safety at very low additional cost.

Conclusion: WP.1 - the World Forum for Road Traffic Safety

The FIA Foundation strongly supports the extension of the mandate of UNECE WP.1 to embrace a global role as described above. This increased role should not dilute the existing activities of WP.1. However, some additional resources will be required to assist the secretariat in this new work. With these changes WP.1 can meet the need for a new focal point for road safety within the UN system as a whole. Finally we would also recommend that WP.1's name be changed to the World Forum for Road Traffic Safety.

Annex

Interview with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan was interviewed on behalf of the FIA Foundation by Richard Stanley at UN Headquarters, New York, on 7 January 2004. The following is an edited transcript of the interview:

Question: *Will you talk about your concern on the impact that road accidents are having on the world community?*

Kofi Annan: I think it is a major problem, but I am not sure that people are aware that annually 1.2 million people are killed by road accidents and between 20 and 50 million more are disabled by them. I think this is a major problem that we all need to focus on.

Q: *Why do you feel the problem is so low on the international agenda and does not receive the attention that those figures suggest it should?*

KA: These accidents often occur one by one and it is sort of a personal and individual tragedy, I'm not sure if people are aware of the kind of numbers that I discussed with you and if they were to look at in those terms it will have an impact and it will raise awareness. Perhaps we shouldn't use the word accident and really talk about crashes, collisions, major disasters, because if it is an accident people tend to be fatalistic about it: "What could I have done. An accident is an accident." We should perhaps even change our language and of course education.

Q: *Road traffic injuries also have a disproportionate effect on the developing world, I wonder if you would address both the terrible personal tragedies to individuals and also the major economic impact?*

KA: I think that 90% of the people killed are between the ages of fifteen and forty, which are the most productive years in most countries. Apart from the personal tragedies for the families it has a real economic impact and it is also affecting children disproportionately. About 96% of the 180,000 children killed a year are in the South and quite apart from that we need to take steps to protect innocent people who use these roads who get killed. It's usually the bicycle riders, motor-bicycle riders, mopeds or pedestrians. So we have to take precautionary measures to ensure that they can use the roads without being at risk.

Q: *What do you think can be done to raise this on the political agenda? What needs to be done with key decision makers and politicians?*

KA: I think first of all they need to recognize that there is a problem at the national level and also to understand that it is not an issue for the Ministry of Transport alone and it does effect the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, Education, Justice and the police. They also should come up with a national plan to declare road casualties and governments have done this. France did this very recently with President Chirac himself leading the process and I would urge other leaders to see this as a major problem and to play their leadership role. I believe at the

international level also we need to do certain things better. Today we don't have a single agency that has a responsibility for road safety and perhaps we need to identify one individual unit that will come up with an action plan which will be useful not only at an international level but for individual national Governments that will find it extremely useful where they don't have the capacity or don't know how to develop one on their own.

Q: *Would you address the question of the United Nation's role, particularly in relation to World Health Day.*

KA: I think the World Health Day is an occasion for us to highlight the problem and also to get across the impact of these 'accidents' and here I use quotation marks.

I think the UN has to get Governments to acknowledge that this is a real problem and I think we can use the World Health Day to highlight the impact and also to underscore the fact that these are avoidable, they are not just accidents, they are human errors which with proper governmental policy can be dealt with and I hope we can also use that day to reflect on what each individual Government and each of us in leadership, what role we can play. And I think the UN has a voice, it has a convenient power and I think this is an area where we should do much more and I intend to work on this with the World Health Organization and the other agencies. You know twice a year we meet, all the heads of UN agencies, and this is an issue that I will raise with them to see how collectively we can pool our efforts to have an impact.

Q: *Can I ask you to talk about the issue of involving the private sector and civil society and the need for agencies and organizations to work together?*

KA: I am one of those who believes firmly in working in partnership. Let me start with the private sector and the car manufacturers, I think they have a role to play. They have a role to play in ensuring that cars that do not meet standards in the North should not be sold in the South either and the same safety requirements are needed in the South. I think apart from what Governments can do NGOs and civil organizations can become involved in the whole education campaign, in educating the youth, not just the youth but people not to just jump behind the wheel and drive because it is much more likely to lead to a crash. I think by bringing the whole society together to participate, you can take much faster strides in containing this epidemic, if I may say, because it is likely to go on unless we take effective action.

Q: *The FIA Foundation in particular is working with Governments to highlight the use of seatbelts as a major thrust of their campaign. I wonder if you were able to acknowledge the work that the FIA Foundation and Governments are doing together on this crucial issue?*

KA: I support that. I think that we should press on, on individuals and Governments to introduce legislation that will require that cars should have seatbelts and that people should wear them, you may even go further and talk about seats for children, since quite a lot of the crashes lead to the deaths of young people. So I do support that effort and if there is anything that I can personally do to support them, I will be prepared to do that.

Q: *Looking to the future and the serious implications of growing car ownership increasing the urgency of this issue. Will you address the dangers of what will happen unless action is taken?*

KA: You have the question of the number of cars on the road and the ways the roads are constructed. Some, particularly in the developing world, sometimes without any safety consideration. So you need to ensure that the cars have the safety requirements, the proper brakes and are properly inspected and also to ensure that the roads are built with safety in mind, because if they do not do that the kinds of figures that we see now could increase by about sixty percent and nobody would want to see that. And therefore we need to really take these safety measures, co-operate with education, to ensure that we reduce crashes and collisions.

Q: The problem of these big statistics is that people lose sight of the individual tragedies and there is a real need for people to recognize the appalling suffering that this causes.

KA: I think it is extremely important that we put the individual at the centre of this and whether it's someone we know or not, that personal and human tragedy should affect us and should make us much more sensitive. This is a real problem. There is a tendency sometimes to think one person died in this crash, but for that one death the impact and implications for that family and society is quite large. We need to really focus on that because if you give them the big numbers they tend to throw out their arms: "Millions. What can I do about this?" So we have to start with the individual and respond to their tragedy and the tragedies of their families and do whatever we can to avoid seeing individuals in those situations.

Q: This interview will be included as part of the publicity for World Health Day. Will you include your message as to why this day is of such significance?

KA: I think World Health Day should offer all of us an opportunity to reflect on our lives, the way we live, what we eat, what we drink, how we protect ourselves and our children and the messages we should take to make our societies a healthier one. And to work with our Governments to ensure that we have the right mechanisms and legislation to protect future generations, not just in the area of car safety but all across the board. We are tackling the issue of the HIV epidemic, we all need to come on board and it requires the complete mobilization of society from the head of state down to the street organizations, women's organizations and there are many other areas of health where we can all contribute. But there is good news, we are about to eliminate polio, added to the elimination of smallpox and I think this is very good news, but there are other diseases where with cooperation between Governments, NGO's and individuals and international organizations we are making good progress on containing and eliminating them and there are major challenges ahead from malaria to tuberculosis that we all need to come together. I would like to make one final appeal for the Global Fund for AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, we need help, we need billions to be able to carry on our fight and whatever can be done by Governments, by foundations, by corporations and by individuals, every bit of contribution helps, your health is important, mine is important, everyone's health is important. So we are in this together.

Q: Do you welcome the fact that road safety has been included in the World Health Day as the main focus?

KA: Absolutely. I think it is long overdue.

Q: I wonder if you would address your feeling about the FIA Foundation and their initiatives?

KA: I think we must be grateful to the FIA Foundation for its role in the initiative it has taken and helping us contain and combat this problem and I would want to be able to do whatever I can to support their effort and I also applaud their leadership and the initiative they have taken here.
