

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

**MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION
OF THE FIRST UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL ROAD SAFETY WEEK
23-29 April 2007**

This First United Nations Global Road Safety Week -- dedicated to young road users -- is a platform for improving safety for the hundreds of millions of young people who travel the world's roads every day.

Since World Health Day 2004, and subsequent discussions in the United Nations General Assembly, Governments and their partners have paid increased attention to road safety. But there is still much progress to be made. Road traffic collisions kill nearly 1.2 million people worldwide every year, and injure millions more. They are the leading cause of death for people aged 10 to 24 years, with devastating impact on families and communities.

Road traffic deaths and injuries also place an enormous strain on a country's health care system, and on the national economy in general. In regions where young people constitute a major part of the population, the problem is even more acute. On average, road traffic injuries cost low- and middle-income countries between more than one per cent of Gross National Product. For all these reasons, road traffic injuries are an important obstacle to development.

Fortunately, there is a growing recognition that road traffic injuries can be prevented. A number of countries have shown that by taking action on drink-driving, speeding, use of helmets and seat-belts, and increasing the visibility of pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists, a significant number of lives can be saved and resources spared, even as motorization continues to rise. The United Nations Road Safety Collaboration has addressed these issues as priorities.

Because prevention measures require political will and financial investments in efforts targeting young people, decisions to improve road safety need to be made at the highest levels of Government. Beyond government ministries of transport, health and education, many others have a role to play: parents and guardians, educators, community and business leaders, automobile associations, insurers and vehicle manufacturers, celebrities and the media, survivors of road traffic crashes and their families.

Road safety will not happen by accident. Through the World Youth Assembly for Road Safety -- the key global event of the First United Nations Global Road Safety Week -- and hundreds of other events being hosted around the world, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Regional Commissions and their partners are giving a voice to young people. Let us listen to their advice. And let us improve safety on the world's road, for their sake and for ours.

Ban Ki-moon