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United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Press Release ECE/TRANS/07/P04
Geneva, 23 April 2007

**Statement by Mr. Marek Belka,
Executive Secretary
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

Delivered at the Opening Ceremony of the

World Youth Assembly for Road Safety

**23 April 2007, 10.30 hours
Assembly Hall, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

Dear Director General, Dear Dr. Chan, Dear Mr. Barrot, Dear Ms. Ghossaini,
Dear young delegates to the World Youth Assembly for Road Safety,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this World Youth Assembly and I am particularly proud that it takes place here in the Palais des Nations, which is the European headquarters of the United Nations and the headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which I have the honour to head.

It is an added honour for me to welcome you also on behalf of my colleagues the Executive Secretaries of the other UN Regional Commissions, which have also contributed to this event.

I understand that this is a "youth" assembly. Being over fifty now, I ask for your indulgence in taking the floor. But be assured, I will not be long.

Let me just say a few words to tell you that the UNECE is a pioneering organization in promoting road safety. It started exactly 60 years ago and over this period it has developed the applicable international rules for the safety of the main components of road traffic. The UNECE rules for safe roads, for safe vehicles and for the safety of road users are enshrined in international Agreements and Conventions, which are applied not only in Europe but also in many other countries of the world.

But, as everyone here knows, rules are necessary, but not sufficient. They have to be implemented.

This is relatively easy in the case of roads and vehicles. But it is more difficult with human beings. And it happens that, according to studies, incorrect human behaviour is considered to be the main cause of the majority of road accidents.

Changing this behaviour is a difficult challenge for all countries. It can be achieved by increased surveillance and enforcement. But again this is not sufficient. Education, training and increased understanding and awareness of the issues involved through road safety campaigns are also indispensable.

In this respect, the UNECE is also a pioneering organization. It has since 1990 organized four road safety campaigns, known as "Road Safety Weeks" with a common theme and a common slogan for all its member countries.

With increasing motorization, road accidents today affect all countries, particularly low and middle income countries. In order to make these countries aware of the serious economic and social consequences of road accidents, the UN General Assembly welcomed the proposal made by the UNECE to hold the First United Nations Global Road Safety Week. I am obviously very proud of this.

The General Assembly also invited the UN Regional Commissions and the World Health Organization to jointly organize this Week, and I am pleased to acknowledge the exemplary collaboration established between the UNECE and the WHO, for which I am grateful to the WHO.

In addition, the General Assembly recommended that the Week serve as a springboard for global, regional, national and local activities. I am grateful to Vice-President Barrot, not only for the generous support of the European Commission to the Week, but also for selecting a day of the Week, 27 April, to celebrate the European Road Safety Day.

The choice of young road users as the target of the Week is a sound choice. In the UNECE region alone more than 29,000 between the ages of 0-24 years are killed every year on the roads. Young people from 18-24 years represent about 10% of the population but 25% of those killed in road accidents around the world. And road accidents are a leading cause of death for young people aged 5-25 years.

At the beginning of this World Youth Assembly, I express my hope that you, youth of the world, will contribute to a shift in behaviour among your peers with regard to road safety. I am also confident that you will identify specific actions to be taken by governments, civil society, the private sector, the media and young people themselves to prevent road traffic injuries in your countries.

I wish every success to this Assembly and thank you for your attention.

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For further information see: www.unece.org/trans/globalroadsafetyweek or contact:

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