

UNECE – Road Safety week

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Aggressive driving conference

Address by Margie Peden

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Honourable guests, Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the World Health Organization I would also like to welcome you to this UNECE seminar on aggressive driving which marks the start of the fourth UNECE road safety week.

In parallel to this, this week we also celebrate World Health Day, which for the first time in WHO's history will be dedicated to road safety. On Wednesday we will hold the global event in Paris, France with President Jacques Chirac and a number of Ministers of Health and Transport from around the world. At the same time, hundreds of road safety awareness events will take place around the world in more than 100 countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, every day more than 15 000 people are injured or disabled on the world's roads – up to 3000 more are killed in these crashes leaving shattered friends and family behind. But not everyone is equally

affected by the lack of road safety. In high-income countries most victims are vehicle occupants. While, in low and middle-income countries, where up to 90% of these traffic deaths occur, vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists are usually involved.

This need not be the case. Most of these deaths, injuries and economic losses can be prevented. In many high-income countries, an established set of interventions has contributed to significant reductions in the incidence and impact of road traffic injuries. The lessons learned in these countries need to be adapted and implemented in low and middle-income countries where the burden is the greatest.

World Health Day and this UNECE road safety week provide opportunities to focus the world's attention on this very critical and rapidly growing public health problem. For World Health Day we have chosen the slogan "Road safety is no accident". This slogan tells an important truth, one that gives reason for hope – that road traffic injuries can be prevented if they are recognised as a serious public health problem and if governments and other stakeholders take the necessary actions to prevention them.

On World Health Day on Wednesday we will also launch the *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention*. This joint WHO/World Bank report presents a comprehensive overview of what is known about the magnitude, risk factors and impact of road traffic injuries, and about ways to prevent and reduce the impact of road crashes.

The report describes the causes linked to human behaviour, the road and vehicle design as well as a variety of approaches that can be taken to address some of these causes, including those involving better legislation, enforcement and information. The report which makes six important recommendations will be available in full from WHO's website on Wednesday the 7th April and will also be available in hardcopy from WHO's bookstores.

Ladies and gentlemen, every sector is important in road safety – transport, education, health, law enforcement, politicians. We all have to work together to reduce the carnage on our roads.

The start of this UNECE road safety week and World Health Day are just a beginning. In two weeks time there will be a resolution on the road safety crisis discussed at the United Nations general assembly, and in May the World Health Assembly is expected to adopt a resolution calling

for Ministers of Health to look at ways of improving their road safety. In June, 1500 experts will gather in Vienna for the World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion.

Improving road safety is crucial to ensuring that our hard-earned public health and development gains are not undermined by these preventable deaths and injuries.

Ladies and gentlemen, any road system is highly complex and potentially hazardous to human health. Making a road system less hazardous requires a systems approach – that is understanding the system as a whole and the interaction between the road user, vehicles and the road. It requires recognition that the human body is vulnerable to injury and that humans make mistakes. A safe road system is one that accommodates and compensates for human vulnerabilities and fallibilities.

At the start of this important week I wish you good luck with your deliberations today on aggressive driving and speeding on our roads and I look forward to hearing the outcome of these discussions.

Thank you