



Statement by Mr. Jan Kubis

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Ministerial Conference on Road Safety

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H.E. Mr. D.Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation,
H.E. Mr. V.Putin, Prime-Minister of the Russian Federation,
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address the First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in my capacity as Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) as well as on behalf of all five United Nations Regional Commissions.

The United Nations General Assembly called for a Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in Resolution 62/244 of March 2008. I should like to express our sincere gratitude to the Russian Federation for supporting that initiative by hosting this important event – the first of its kind.

It comes at a critical time.

We all know the numbers by now: 1.3 million die and at least 50 million are injured every year. Unless trends are reversed, 20 years from now road traffic crashes will kill the same amount of people as armed conflicts have done since II WW.

The problem is not only the horrific - and growing - number of deaths and lasting injuries. It is also a formidable economic burden which translates into between 1.5 to 2.5 % of most countries' annual GDP. This makes road traffic crashes a significant development and social issue.

Low- and middle-income countries and transition economies now bear the brunt of this burden. And with the forecasting trends suggesting a dramatic deterioration of the situation, these countries can expect road traffic fatalities to increase by almost 90% in the next decade.

In the United Nations Regional Commissions we believe road safety begins with collaboration. Through various initiatives and projects we work with the major global road safety partners, and with them, we attempt to lead the way to safe roads. Together we try to prevent and mitigate the extent of the damage.

The regional commissions organize events all over the world to implement United Nations General Assembly resolutions on road safety, to share knowledge and find solutions.

Through seminars and conferences, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Asia and the Pacific, in Africa, Europe and Western Asia have all adopted declarations on road safety and thereby raised the profile of this important issue in their region.

- the first Latin America and Caribbean road safety stakeholders forum, in September 2006, in San José, in which the Declaration of San José was adopted and which calls for a regional committee to help the countries of the region collaborate on road safety;
- the ministerial conference on transport in November 2006 in Busan, Republic of Korea, in which ministers adopted a Declaration on Improving Road Safety in Asia and the Pacific;
- the African road safety conference, in February 2007 wherein participating ministers adopted the Accra Declaration to stop the growing epidemic of death and injuries on African roads;
- a number of regional road safety meetings have taken place in the Eastern Mediterranean region organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

We must do more however.

But what should the target be?

Over the last two years, the United Nations regional commissions have jointly implemented a UN Development Account funded project on setting regional and national road traffic casualty reduction targets.

In 1994, an OECD report concluded that targets and targeted road safety programmes increases the likelihood that safety policies will be implemented. A 2006 review of the road safety performance of 14 OECD countries showed that countries with targets did indeed perform better than those without. Overall countries which set targets had 17% lower fatalities than countries without.

The regional commissions' project on setting targets aims to assist low- and middle-income countries in developing regional and national road traffic casualty reduction targets that can be monitored and to provide them with examples of good road safety practices that will help achieve the targets by 2015.

Governments are thus invited to develop action plans and strategies for road safety and to identify ambitious, measurable targets. They are also invited to continue strengthening intersectoral dialogue on road traffic injury prevention and to support efforts to increase intersectoral collaboration on road safety initiatives.

It is sometimes not known, but most of the rules and standards that apply in road traffic and that have global use come from the Vienna Conventions, that have been developed and operate under the UNECE umbrella. It is in UNECE that countries in cooperation with other partners negotiate, adopt and amend technical regulations and recommendations in the area of transport, including those that are safety-related. The Conventions are regularly revised and updated to introduce stricter safety requirements and technological developments. The Conventions on Road Traffic and on Road Signs and Signals of 1968, and other related legal instruments address the main factors of road crashes i.e. the road user behaviour, the vehicle and the infrastructure and are real contributors to improving road safety. They are also factors promoting global action in a systemic and proactive way. Moreover, parties of the conventions are not only UNECE member states, but countries from all over the globe, although much more work and participation is needed to make the conventions truly universal. Similarly, the two agreements on vehicle regulations (1958 and 1998 agreements) have 53 contracting parties from five regions and these countries oversee the manufacture of more than four-fifths of vehicles worldwide.

I should therefore like to invite Member States that have not yet done so to adhere to the Conventions on Road Traffic and on Road Signs and Signals of 1968 as well as other conventions, and to implement them.

The UN ECE Road Traffic Safety Forum (WP.1) and the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP.29) are the most relevant UNECE working parties engaged in road safety-related activities. They are entrusted to carry on work on internationally agreed road traffic rules and signs, uniform safety requirements and globally harmonized regulations and standards concerning road infrastructure, vehicles, tyres, brakes, safety belts and other vehicle parts as the most effective tools to improve vehicle safety.

It is particularly young people, notably young males, who are affected by traffic crashes. We must therefore target the young and promote road safety to them in a relevant and interesting way.

With this in mind, we cooperated with the international basketball community - the Hellenic Basketball Federation, FIBA and FIBA Europe - to send a message for road safety through basketball players to young people. Two different basketball declarations were signed: One by the Greek National team on “Team Work and Fair Play” and the other during the FIBA Eurobasket 2009 on “Respect of the rules”. We believe this kind of partnership can have a positive impact on the behaviour of young drivers. We will continue our cooperation with FIBA and hopefully extend it to next year’s World Basketball Championship in Turkey to reach a global audience.

Improving road safety should be seen as a social contract in which participants from both public and private sectors are accountable for their respective actions and failures. Governments have a primary role to play in creating safe road traffic conditions through safe infrastructure, legislation, enforcement and education. They also have a responsibility to optimize expenditures – especially at this time of economic crisis – and reducing the number of road casualties will lower costs for their societies.

Visible political commitment is **key** to safe roads.

And visible political commitment will mobilize public support.

The five United Nations regional commissions have made road safety a priority area for cooperation. We support the Draft declaration of the First Ministerial Conference on Road Safety and the invitation to the General Assembly contained in it to declare 2011-2020 as the “Decade of Action for Road Safety”. Within our resources, expertise, mandate and competencies, and through enhanced collaboration amongst us and between us and other major global regional and national stakeholders, we will spare no efforts to continue and further strengthen our contribution in making the roads safer.

Thank you for your kind attention.