

UNECE International Seminar:
Aggressive Behaviour on the Road, Can it be Changed?
Geneva, 5 April 2004

Statement by M. José Capel Ferrer, Director, UNECE Transport Division

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mrs. Schmögnerová has already set the tone for the Seminar. I will therefore limit myself to developing in greater detail two points which she raised.

The Fourth Road Safety Week is a natural complement to a whole series of regulatory activities which our member States carry out within the framework of the UNECE on all the factors which have an influence on road safety : the infrastructure, the vehicle, the rules of the road and the individual.

Concerning the infrastructure, I would like to note that, in establishing the network of « E » roads, the AGR Agreement also lays down the technical parameters to which these roads should be constructed in order to ensure good conditions for safety. These parameters include the design speed as well as all the geometrical characteristics of the road linked to that speed : horizontal and vertical alignment, radius, maximum gradient, etc. but also the safety rules for equipment and maintenance.

As regards the vehicle, the so-called 1958 Agreement establishes the norms for safety and protection of the environment which have to be followed in the construction of road vehicles. These norms are constantly modified to incorporate advanced technologies, improve the active and passive safety of vehicles and reduce their emissions. This work is carried out by the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP.29), which has concluded a new Global Agreement, known as the 1998 Agreement, for the development of truly global norms, which, I hope, will make road vehicles even safer.

As for the rules of the road, these are laid out in the Vienna Convention on Road Traffic of 1968, which is global in scope. This Convention constitutes for more than 60 countries the technical and legal reference framework, on which they have based their national highway codes. Of course we periodically update this Convention as

well as the European Agreement which supplements it. In fact these legal instruments have just been modified to introduce new provisions. Amongst those, are notably the prohibition for a driver to use a mobile phone while driving as well as the lowering of the maximum level of alcohol permitted in the blood from 0.8 to 0.5 g/l. Another UNECE Convention, the Vienna Convention on Road Signs and Signals has established more than 200 road signs that are used in many countries around the world.

Last but not least, the human factor greatly influences road accidents. It is widely admitted that incorrect human behaviour is the main cause of more than 90% of all road accidents. The Vienna Convention establishes clearly the rules that drivers must comply with. However, drivers are human and they do not always respect the rules. This is why it is necessary to make them aware of the importance of respecting the rules. This is the role of road safety campaigns. Here also, as a natural complement to its regulatory work, the UNECE has been active. Since 1990, we have organized 4 Road Safety Weeks in the UNECE region, the fourth starting today, with the aim of influencing driver behaviour and raising awareness to the importance of avoiding accidents. Road safety weeks provide an opportunity and a framework to organize national road safety campaigns around a common theme, a common slogan and a common logo.

Both this regulatory and awareness-raising effort of the UNECE have contributed to the progressive reduction in the number of accidents and victims registered on UNECE roads in the past decades, despite the sharp increase registered in the number of vehicles and in traffic.

However, according to the data we have, still more than 150, 000 people lost their lives and almost 5.5 million were injured on the roads of our 55 Member countries in 2001.

Mrs. Schmögnerová has referred to the seriousness of the situation in developing and transition countries. Let me illustrate this statement with some figures. The number of persons killed on the roads of the various UNECE groupings of countries is as follows: in USA and Canada, more than 45 000; in EU+EFTA, 40 000; in the countries acceding to the EU in May 2004, about 10 500; in the countries of South Eastern Europe, about 10 400; and in the CIS, about 44 000. However, the most illustrative indicators are those relating the number of persons killed to the vehicle fleet of the

countries. The number of persons killed per million vehicles is for the same sub-regions of the UNECE the following: in USA and Canada: 160; in the EU+EFTA countries, 166; in the countries acceding to the EU in May 2004, 372, therefore, more than double than in the previous groupings; in South Eastern Europe, 608, i.e. almost four times the EU+EFTA rate; and finally in the CIS, 1080, therefore, almost seven times the EU+EFTA rate.

In view of these figures, we cannot allow ourselves the least complacency. Achieving a drastic reduction of these figures remains a veritable and major challenge for Governments and for international organizations like the UNECE and for non-governmental organizations.

This Seminar is not only an opportunity for all of us to learn more about the phenomenon of aggressive driving, but also the first event of a week extremely rich in activities in favour of road safety.

The secretariat has prepared several documents for the Seminar and for the 4th Road Safety Week, including a brochure and Newsletters that inform you of activities undertaken by countries and organizations. Other letters will follow with the information that will be transmitted to us.

To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to the FIA Foundation for its generous contribution, which has allowed the organization of the Seminar.

Needless to say, I wish every success to this Seminar and thank you for your attention.

I am now pleased to give the floor to Dr. Margie Peden of the World Health Organization.