



Chairman: Rt. Hon. Lord Robertson of Port Ellen KT. GCMG

Speech by Rt. Hon. Lord Robertson of Port Ellen

Make Roads Safe report launch, Rome, 5th May 2009

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It is my great pleasure to welcome you to our launch today. I would like to thank President Gelpi of the Automobile Club of Italy for his support, and our Patron, His Royal Highness Prince Michael of Kent, for his consistent and tireless support for road safety and for our Commission.

I warmly welcome Minister Altero Matteoli of Italy, Minister John Nasasira of Uganda, Associate Administrator Brian McLoughlin of the United States and Jamal Saghir, Transport Director of the World Bank. I am grateful to Vassily Nebenzia, of the Russian Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva, who has stepped in on behalf of General Kiryanov who unfortunately cannot be with us. I particularly welcome our Global Ambassador, Michelle Yeoh, who has literally travelled the world for this cause over the past year; and Felipe Massa, who has generously given his time today to add his voice and profile to the campaign for global road safety.

Today I am proud to present the new report of the Commission for Global Road Safety.

Our first report resulted in the forthcoming Moscow Ministerial Conference on road safety. Our second report sets out a blueprint for action that we believe should be adopted by Ministers when they meet there.

Our headline recommendation is for the Moscow Ministerial to support, and the United Nations to adopt, a Decade of Action for Road Safety. The Decade of Action should be launched next year and should have as its goal a reduction of 50% in the forecast level of road fatalities by 2020.

Achieving this goal would mean that, instead of our roads killing nearly two million people a year by 2020, annual fatalities would fall below one million and we will have set the world on a sustainable path to lower casualties and safer roads.

In simple human terms achieving this goal would mean saving 5 million lives, and preventing 50 million serious injuries, over the next ten years. The economic value of these saved lives would represent some 3 trillion US dollars.

Why a Decade of Action? There is a clear precedent for international cooperation of this kind. Ten years ago the world community rightly agreed to work together to combat the scourge of malaria. The UN Decade to Roll Back Malaria was launched, and with it many regional and national initiatives funded with hundreds of millions of dollars of international aid.

When we look at the statistics and see that road injury is a bigger global killer than malaria, who can argue that a Decade of Action for road safety is not also justified?

When we look at the projections for the years ahead we see that by 2015 road crashes are set to become the leading burden of premature death and disability for children above the age of five in the developing world. We know that this year 260,000 children will be killed on the world's roads. Faced with these facts, how can we not act?

Some will say that our proposed target is too ambitious and is unachievable.

I would reply that we cannot afford not to be ambitious.

And this wonderful goal – to save the lives of five million people - can be achieved.

We have the tools and the knowledge to achieve it. We know that we can cut road deaths through attention to safe road design and speed management; legislating for and enforcing the use of helmets and seat belts; tackling drink driving and improving vehicle design; and ensuring that vulnerable road users are treated as equal partners in the road space we all share. We know the importance of putting in place effective data and management systems and delivering these policies as part of a holistic safe systems approach.

We know this. We have the benefit of many examples and experiences of road safety improvement across both the developed and developing world.

We have the vaccines to combat this epidemic.

What we need now is to see the political will necessary to deliver these vaccines to the people who so desperately need them. And our report today sets out recommendations that we believe the international community must adopt if they are to demonstrate serious political commitment to this issue.

We re-state our call for a 300 million dollar international action plan over the Decade to catalyse traffic injury prevention and re-focus national road safety policies and budgets. For an investment of 30 million dollars a year the leading donor nations and major public health philanthropies could transform the way road safety is understood and managed across the developing world.

We urge international donors and the development banks to lead by example, and to fulfil the high standards they have set themselves in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, by ensuring that road investment is designed with the safety of local communities as its first priority. Both international institutions and individual countries are increasingly recognising the important role that road assessment and subsequent safe road design can play in reducing casualties across the road network. This must become a programmatic priority.

We encourage national governments, and those with responsibility for road safety at regional and local level, to adopt ambitious strategies to improve and enforce road user behaviour. For example, ministers meeting in Moscow could together commit to work for universal seat belt and helmet wearing by 2020. This can best be achieved with the support of highly motivated and trained police forces which are trusted by their public, and so we are encouraged by the World Bank's launch of a new Road Traffic Police Network. I warmly welcome the board members of this new global Police Network who are with us here today.

So we submit our report to governments ahead of the Moscow Conference and challenge them to be ambitious.

The official theme of the Moscow Conference is 'Time for Action'. Not 'Time for yet more talk and empty promises'; but 'Time for Action'. And Moscow can be the turning point, the fork in the road where we choose to take a new direction for road injury prevention.

Five million lives are at stake: five million people whose potential can be realised, and not wasted. Five million families who need never know the sudden shock and lifelong grief that comes from losing a loved one in a road crash.

So let us commit today to work together for a Decade of Action that could save five million lives and start to make roads safe for us all.