

Call for a Decade of Action for Road Safety
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Conclusions and Closing remarks

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I would like to make my closing remarks to this conference in the form of five questions and my observations and thoughts accompanying them. It is my personal summary of this conference and my remarks represent nothing other than my own thoughts.

I. Is a further decrease of road safety, as has been forecast, not simply inevitable and a consequence of economic growth and increases in mobility and motorized traffic?

Many highly motorized countries show that a growing population, economic growth, and a growing number of motorized vehicles do not necessarily need to result in a more road traffic casualties. There already are dozens of countries all over the world where this is demonstrated and there is no need to think that developing countries should not experience a similar development consisting of decreasing numbers of casualties at a growing 'exposure to risk'.

There are different ways to make clear that road safety is an extremely serious social problem. In the first place in comparison with other social problems, and more specifically in comparison with problems in the field of public health. The road safety community has a strong case here and must attempt to consistently bring it to the attention. However, in doing so, we must realise that promoting road safety can turn out to be a very complicated matter that seems to be more complicated than fighting malaria, the prevention of tuberculosis, or reducing smoking. But this is no reason not to join forces in trying to reduce the lack of road safety.

The international road safety community is presently formulating high ambitions; ambitions that may be too high when measured now by their sense of reality. While the prognosis is made that the annual number of road deaths worldwide will increase from 1,2 million to 1,9 million in 2020, the ambition is formulated to have decreased the number of road deaths by 50% in 2020: no more than 900,000 road deaths in 2020. That, in my view, is indeed an ambitious target; more so because it is as yet unknown which efforts are required to achieve this target. No plan has been devised yet, and in my opinion such a plan should be drawn up. Such a plan will make clear that, apart from a number of 'quick fixes', promoting road safety will be a matter of many (small) steps that are made over a long period of time. These steps must be at scale and systematic. Fragmented and partial responses turned out to be not very effective so far.

These many small steps can be made without them being made a matter of the highest 'political' priority. This has been successful in almost every country worldwide. Declaring road safety a matter of the highest priority, as was done in France by president Chirac, is exceptional. A very positive exception, for that matter, considering the decrease of the number of casualties that was realised in France. But also without such a high political profile considerable progress can be made, as many countries have shown. However, effective road safety 'champions' is a prerequisite.

It is easier to promote road safety when a clear, quantitative target has been formulated. It should be encouraged to embed road safety targets in policy that can be communicated to society and to stakeholders in clear, and sometimes simple messages. Furthermore it should be based on thorough analyses of road safety, include evidence-based interventions and on well-aimed and determined actions by all identified stakeholders. The three criteria identified by the WorldBank for effective interventions make sense to me: **sustainable** (longer period of time), **integrated** (with key development goals) and **inclusive** (all road users and citizens).

II. How can emotions about the consequences of road traffic crashes lead to effective road safety policy?

There are many different grounds, arguments, developments, causes that make countries decide they want to improve road safety. Sometimes the decision is based on the hard facts (e.g. negative

developments of the numbers of road crash casualties or a large and very serious road crash), but sometimes it is emotion that makes such an impression that it causes steps to be taken: the casualty's family or relations, people who are severely/permanently injured, representatives of organizations for road crash casualties, people/organizations who are confronted with traffic injury and human suffering (medics, churches etc.) may all be an important voice. These voices can be made louder by the media. But here it is important to translate this emotion into a higher priority for road safety improvement and to an effective road crash prevention policy. This translation is of the highest importance and, in my view, the road safety community would be wise to develop effective ways to achieve this. I encourage countries to learn from one another.

It all comes down to facts and/or emotions that motivate politicians to pay more attention to the road safety issue. Three notions are very important for raising the awareness:

- to a considerable extent road traffic crashes are predictable and also avoidable;
- often something can be done to prevent road traffic crashes;
- very rarely only one party is responsible; it usually is a matter of shared responsibility. Being aware of that fact is sometimes a comfort, but is quite frequently used as an excuse: "it is not just my responsibility, but also that of...". The joint responsibility requires cooperation and agreement and parties must be prepared to do this voluntarily or they must be forced to work together.

Assuming this notion of joint responsibility to be correct, there is every reason to strictly define the responsibilities and those responsible, followed by making clear what these responsibilities involve. This provides a basis to judge those responsible on their achievements.

Good road safety policy is more than just a summing up of possible effective interventions. Good road safety policy is characterized by the way the policy is put into practice, especially how the responsibilities have been defined. This will be different in each country; no blueprint is available, and no such blueprint will ever be available. Custom-made is the device, made-to-measure for each individual country. The international community, however, can make a contribution by providing certain components.

III What are the essential components that need to be included in the declaration that is to be agreed on in the First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety (Moscow, 19-20 November 2009)?

International conferences accept resolutions and the Moscow conference will be no exception. I would like to formulate two requirements for the resolution that will be put to the vote: 1) a resolution that defines the targets and a plan of action based on these targets which indicates how the targets will be reached and which financial means will be made available for this, and 2) a resolution that includes a good monitoring system to measure the progress made, and, if necessary, to adjust the plan of action. Good examples of such mechanisms are available in the international community (Kyoto). They could serve as an example for road safety.

The first initial requirement is for the resolution to define a 'common framework' for the 'Decade of Action'; a general point of departure, a widely supported paradigm. In my view, a second important point is the invitation to all possible parties to be concrete in their contributions to worldwide road safety improvement during the years to come. Recommendations in the resolution should be formulated in such a way that the commitments of the EU member states, international organizations, NGOs, and the private sector, can be assessed and that they can be held accountable.

I recommend deciding in Moscow to set up an international organization that will be occupied with the coordination of all commitments that have been made and that will also monitor progress on a regular basis. Then a conference like the Moscow conference should be held again within five years. It can then be established whether the intended trend breach (Turning point, see V) is indeed achieved. I therefore wish to recommend a regular progress report.

IV. What policy will absolutely need to be developed to allow the rising trend in road crash casualties worldwide to be converted into a decreasing trend?

What should be done to achieve a trend breach is an interesting question which has no simple answer. The general answer would be the following: sufficient effective road safety programmes would

need to be executed, and, in addition, the road safety issue is included in all important decisions that are of importance for road safety. In other words: the six recommendations in the World report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention of the WHO/World Bank must be seriously carried out by many, if not all, countries. From this perspective the so-called status report that will be published by the WHO in 2010 is of great importance. Even more so if this assessment is repeated in a number of years to allow us to monitor progress and enable us to use the results to somewhat encourage countries whose performance is not sufficiently adequate.

But even now some developments can be indicated that are of the greatest importance and require improvement. I will mention a few:

the FIA Foundation advocates using for road safety a certain percentage (10%) of the investments in roads by the World Bank and regional development banks investments in roads. Whether this input percentage must be used or a different measure is chosen is not the most relevant issue. The underlying idea seems to be fair and it would be good if the international financing organizations used 'harmonized policies' **to transparently and explicitly include road safety in their investments decisions;**

Traffic enforcement is an important part of road safety policy in all countries other than developing countries. No good, well-documented examples of effective (effective in terms of leading to behavioural changes and crash reduction) are really available from developing countries. The World Bank initiative (GRSF) to establish a RoadPol organization which will be responsible for the development of effective strategies deserves our support.

There is a growing interest in the **safe system approach**. Being proactive is one of the distinguishing characteristics of this approach. This approach manifests itself by the attention it has for road safety in urban planning and traffic planning. Attention for these issues is of the utmost importance in developing countries, but so far it has been largely ignored. The importance can, among other things, be explained by large-scale migration to urban agglomerations, by urbanisation, by informal growth of urban areas, and by the lack of attention for the consequences these developments have for road safety and particularly for the vulnerable road user I recommend making this a core issue for policy.

Within the United Nations, the **public health sector** (WHO) has been given an important coordinating role in improving road safety worldwide. However, I still find it insufficiently clear which role this sector can play in the prevention of road traffic crashes. Their role in the treatment of road crash casualties is evident. Sometime there are signals that this sector does not conceive a role for itself in the prevention of road traffic crashes. It is recommendable that this sector itself indicates the role it wishes to play

Many examples have been given, also during this conference, of promising, small-scale activities to improve road safety. For me the question remains if the effects that are claimed will also stand up to 'scientific scrutiny' and I recommend to carry out scientific studies on a regular basis with this purpose. But there is a second question: how can incidental, small-scale and effective plans be successfully **scaling-up** to a level where they can be expected to actually make a contribution to accomplishing a trend breach? Attention for this problem of scaling-up is recommended.

The final topic that must be brought forward is **road safety data**. Reliable data is of vital interest to determine whether a trend breach has occurred and whether the policy that was conducted contributed to such a trend breach. Certain developments in relation with road safety data can be observed (WHO, OECD/IRTAD) and in my opinion these developments must be strengthened. Furthermore, the development of data systems can make a contribution to 'capacity building' in developing countries and to the construction of an infrastructure for research. Road safety data and a research infrastructure could turn out to be a driving, but unnoticeable force behind positive developments.

V. When can we speak about a Turning point?

The film that was made to support the '*Make roads safe*' campaign was given the title: 'Turning point' with 'A journey on the world's killer roads' as a subtitle. Has a turning point been reached yet? On the one hand, I see that a number of important international organizations have explicitly designated road safety as an important issue. This is, for example, illustrated by the resolutions that have been adopted in the United Nations. We may consider this ground for optimism and there is no doubt in my mind about the opportunities lying ahead as a result of this. On the other hand, however, this in itself is no guarantee that there will indeed be a 'Turning point'. I interpret a 'Turning point' as the point in time

at which a trend breach has visibly occurred: not an increase of the number of road deaths, but a decrease. Or, if this is too ambitious for the short term: clear examples of a 'Turning point' from several developing countries'.

The fact that many different organizations join forces to reach a 'Turning point', can in itself be considered a 'Turning point'. I myself would speak of a 'Turning point' if the intentions have been turned into concrete Action Plans. An other definition of a 'Turning point' would be a considerable number of countries in the developed world deciding to effectively include road safety in their 'development goals' and see the first, prudent positive effects in terms of casualty reduction.

The outcome of the process of finding international organizations, philanthropies, financing organizations such as development banks and individual countries prepared to seriously tackle the lack of road safety in developing countries is now clearly visible. And this in itself is indeed a 'Turning point'. The FIA Foundation, visibly and invisibly, has played an important part. This conference is very noticeable demonstration and I would like to congratulate the FIA Foundation on this. There is no doubt in my mind that the FIA Foundation takes an important role in placing road safety on the international agenda. But the real answer to whether we have already achieved a 'Turning point' can only be given in some years time; namely when we determine a trend breach in the increase of the number of road crash casualties. But do not be mistaken: success depends to a large extent on our efforts during the years ahead. I incite you to make these efforts and I wish us the best of success in doing so.