

Closing Plenary on the Decade of Action

Speech by David Ward, Director General of the FIA Foundation

Minister Nurgaliev, General Kiryanov, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My colleagues Etienne Krug and Tony Bliss have given a very clear outline of the proposed Decade of Action, so I will be brief. I would like to highlight the ten years of work that has brought us together here today.

In 1999, the International Red Cross first warned of an epidemic on the roads in its World Disasters Report published that year. In the same year the World Bank, through its Business Partners for Development programme launched the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP) with a strong emphasis on multi-sector collaboration.

Then in 2003 the United Nations General Assembly passed the first in a series of resolutions on road safety sponsored principally by the Sultanate of Oman.

In 2004, on the initiative of its former Director General Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, the World Health Organisation made road safety the theme of its annual World Health Day, the first time the issue had gained such global recognition. In the same year the WHO and the World Bank published the World Report on Road Injury Prevention which was the first global assessment of the scale of road traffic death and injury occurring especially in developing countries. And also the UN General Assembly had its first major debate on road safety and authorised the creation of the UN Road Safety Collaboration which began work on developing best practice in reducing the main road safety risk factors, such as non use of helmets and seat belts, drink driving and speeding.

In 2005, the World Bank established its Global Road Safety Facility as the first dedicated funding mechanism for road injury prevention.

In 2006, the FIA Foundation launched the Commission for Global Road Safety, chaired by Lord Robertson and which called for a global Ministerial Conference.

In 2007 the first ever global road safety week was organised by the UN Road Safety Collaboration and featured a global youth assembly held in the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

In 2008, the UN General Assembly unanimously supported a further resolution that mandated the first ever global Ministerial conference and accepted the generous offer of the government of the Russian Federation to host the event in Moscow.

Finally in 2009, the Commission for Global Road Safety met in Rome and launched a new Make Roads Safe report calling for a Decade of Action, and now, here we are in Moscow at the Ministerial conference discussing this proposal.

It has been quite a long journey over the last ten years with a considerable effort by a number of people, countries and organisations. I would especially like to mention the Russian Federation, Minister Nurgaliev and Colonel General Kiryanov for their huge contribution in hosting this Ministerial Conference. Of great importance also has been the support of the Sultanate of Oman, and especially the diplomatic skills of their Ambassador to the United Nations in New York, HE Fuad

Mubarak Al Hinai. Naturally I wish to recognise the tireless work of Lord Robertson for the Commission for Global Road Safety, and Michelle Yeoh for her fantastic contribution as the ambassador for the Make Roads Safe campaign. I would also like to thank Dr Etienne Krug and his team at the WHO, Tony Bliss and his team at the World Bank Global Road Safety Facility, and, of course, my own very dedicated team at the FIA Foundation. All have played a crucial role in ensuring the success of this Ministerial Conference.

This ten year effort means that the Decade of Action has been very well prepared. We have the necessary institutional structure, the policy recommendations, and a mandate from the UN. We know what works in road injury prevention and we are sure that the Decade of Action will bring positive results.

What is particularly significant about this Conference is that compared to many other difficult global issues we are united. In Copenhagen in a few weeks a climate change summit will be held and we know that, perhaps not surprisingly, countries remain divided and there are some major issues to resolve. But here in Moscow we do not have such problems. There is a consensus about what needs to be done. And what better issue for us to work together than saving lives? We have the chance to make road safety an example of international co-operation at its best, and the United Nations at its best.

What we need most and the point I want to highlight the most is political will. Road safety works best when there is clear political support from leaders in government. That is why this Ministerial is so important as a gathering of leaders. The Moscow Conference is a political event and the Moscow Declaration a political statement of intent.

I would like to highlight the role of political leadership on a more personal note. I am myself a kind of road safety success story. When I was eighteen I was a passenger in a Mini that was involved in a very bad head on collision. I survived the crash because I was wearing a seat belt. I wore my belt for two reasons. In the late 1960s the UK Minister of Transport, Barbara Castle, a predecessor of Minister Paul Clarke who is here on our panel today, promoted the 1967 Road Traffic Act. This required fitting of seat belts in cars for the first time. Barbara Castle had to fight for the legislation against opposition from some members of the Cabinet who felt seat belt laws would threaten our civil liberties! But she fought her point and won and that's why there were seat belts in the Mini I was travelling in. And the second reason I wore my belt was a very effective awareness campaign called 'clunk click every trip'. It was these two actions, seat belt laws and an awareness campaign that that made me use the belt which saved my life. It was political leadership that helped me survive and enabled me to be here today and also my daughter who is working on the Make Road Safe stand outside this hall.

My experience is just one example of how political leadership can save the lives of literally millions of people that we will never know. You, the Ministers here today have the opportunity to take decisions that will benefit those millions of your fellow citizens. You can take action that will prevent the disastrous impact that road crashes have on millions of families. You can help avoid the tragic loss of life, and lifelong disability. That is the opportunity of the Decade of Action. Let's work together to make it happen. Thank you very much.