

Check against delivery

Speech by Lord Robertson of Port Ellen

'A World Free of High Risk Roads' conference, London, 15th September 2015

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to open this conference. As well as being an important and ground-breaking event in its own right, this morning's event is also a curtain raiser for the FIA Mobility Conference which will be taking place for the rest of this week. The FIA's conference brings together automobile clubs from across the world. As one of its trustees, I know the FIA Foundation has contributed a lot of the financial fuel that keeps IRAP running. But it is the national FIA clubs that are the real engine of the programme: advocating for safer roads to their governments and the public, building the coalitions, working at the technical sharp end of the RAP programme.

And as partners in the Make Roads Safe campaign, for almost a decade, the auto clubs have promoted the petitions, written the letters and mobilised the support that resulted in the Moscow Ministerial Conference, the Decade of Action for Road Safety and, now, the inclusion of road safety targets in the Sustainable Development Goals.

At the end of next week world leaders will gather at the United Nations to formally adopt these Global Goals. The result of three years of intergovernmental negotiations, the Goals are a serious attempt to unite for a vision of how the world should be in 2030. And, thanks to the efforts of many in this room, road safety and sustainable transport are part of that vision.

In 2010 the UN agreed a goal for the Decade of Action for Road Safety – to stabilise and begin to reduce road deaths to around a million people a year by 2020. In the context of a world in which road injuries are still increasing in many developing countries, we recognised that this was an ambitious objective. But it is one worth reaching for, and we have all made efforts over the past five years to encourage and support new initiatives and new legislation and to make governments recognise the scale of the problem and act accordingly.

But now the world's governments have decided the Decade target wasn't strong enough. They want to go further, faster. So the new road safety target, included in the Sustainable Development Goals, is not only to stabilise road deaths by 2020, but to halve the absolute number; to go from around 1.2 million now to 600,000 within five years. The target is universal, every country is involved and every country, rich and poor alike, has a role to play. There are 169 targets in the Global Goals. Almost all have a deadline of 2030. Only a handful have been prioritised to be achieved early. One of the very few targets which has been set for 2020 is road safety.

So this is a huge challenge. To get close to the target that world leaders have agreed will require those same leaders to engage with road safety at a level that only a handful have done before. It will require unprecedented effort by all stakeholders. I know that Jean Todt, in his new and timely role as the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy, will be working hard to build that momentum and partnership, and I look forward to doing what I can to support his efforts. But it will require all of us to re-imagine what we can do to deliver the casualty reductions that are needed.

It will require new ambition.

Ambition from car manufacturers, who can and must ensure that all new cars meet minimum UN vehicle safety standards by 2020;

Ambition from governments, who can and must legislate for and enforce one hundred per cent seat belt and motorcycle helmet use by 2020;

Ambition from city mayors, who can and must lower speed limits when necessary, and provide mass transit, walking and cycling facilities, and a safe route to school for every child;

And ambition from road authorities and their investors, whether finance ministries, private concessionaires or international donors, who can and must ensure a minimum safety performance on all major roads, beginning - by 2020 - with the ten per cent highest risk roads.

In November ministers from every continent will meet in Brasilia for the second Global High Level Conference on Road Safety. This Ministerial can provide a powerful platform for implementation of the 2020 target.

But we don't have to wait until November to get started.

The theme of today's conference is action.

We will hear this morning how the top performing countries - including Britain, Sweden, the Netherlands and Australia - are setting goals that aim to move road deaths towards zero within a generation. All are using star rating as a measurement tool.

Until recently, a key weakness in managing safety performance has been the lack of a method of measurement for infrastructure safety. And what is not measured cannot be managed. But today, we will hear results from scores of countries which have had their infrastructure measured on the same basis, using IRAP's star rating assessments.

Now we have the tools we must use them. If we are serious about achieving the SDG target we must make the case for systemically changing 1 and 2 star roads into 3 and 4 star roads. We can begin with the ten per cent of high volume, high risk roads where half the deaths and serious injuries occur. IRAP has shown that this strategy can be cost effective. But it is more than just good economics. It is a real, far-reaching investment in the health, environmental security and human happiness of this and future generations.

So let us use this morning to commit to building the alliances and overcoming the obstacles that stand in the way of progress. Let us commit to this objective of raising ten per cent of the world's one and two star roads to a minimum three star level by 2020. The prize, if we can reach it, is up to 40 million serious injuries and three and a half million deaths prevented over the next twenty years.

That's millions of families that do not have to hear the knock from the policeman at the door.

Millions of families that do not have to stand grieving at the graveside.

Millions of people who will not fill hospital trauma wards, or spend years in painful rehabilitation, but can instead pursue their lives, contribute to their societies and achieve their dreams.

This is the prize we are working for. This is why we are here today.

We have our SDG target. We have the tools to deliver it. Let's get to work.