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**DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL**

**MESSAGE TO THE FIRST GLOBAL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE  
ON ROAD SAFETY  
Moscow, 19 and 20 November 2009**

Your Excellency President Medvedev, Honourable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

While I am of course pleased to be here, I must confess, I have mixed emotions about this Conference. I am happy, sad, hopeful and apprehensive all at the same time.

I am happy because this Conference is taking place in Moscow.

I am happy because we are making history. For the first time ever, we are having a Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety.

I am sad, because this is the first time we are having a Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety. This Conference is many years too late, because every year almost 1.2 million people die on the world's roads, and as many as 50 million are injured and sometimes disabled for life.

I am sad because over 90% of these deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, which have less than half of the world's registered vehicles.

I am sad because nearly half of those who die are pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists - a sign that we are not protecting the most vulnerable in society.

But I am hopeful because there are indications that awareness of this global public health and development problem is growing.

In many countries, simple measures such as the mandatory use of seatbelts, requiring cyclists and motorcyclists to wear helmets, passing and enforcing laws against "drinking and driving" are drastically reducing road deaths.

This is my second visit to Moscow in ten years, and I cannot help noticing the substantial increase in seatbelt wearing. This is clearly the result of strong political commitment by the Government of the Russian Federation. The presence of the President, here in our midst, is concrete proof of the political support. Mr President, we salute you.

This Conference in a way is a celebration of the efforts of many individuals, groups, organizations, companies and countries.

For us at the World Health Organization, the fact that today we have Ministers from different sectors present in the room, reaffirms our conviction that every Minister is a Health Minister.

With all these positive developments, why am I worried?

I am worried because the positive developments we are seeing are not mirrored in all countries. Whilst the risk factors are well known, speeding, alcohol, non-use of helmets, seatbelts, poor road design, poor enforcement of road safety regulations, unsafe vehicle design, poor emergency health services, only a handful of countries have comprehensive approaches to road safety.

I am worried, because we know that even when there are laws, the laws in the books are not the same as laws on the street.

- I am worried because in my short life, I have attended many Global Conferences that have not led to concrete global and local actions.
- What is right to do, is not always easy to do.
- I am worried because we live in a world of competing priorities.
- It is therefore my Prayer that this historic Ministerial Conference be remembered as the Conference that made the global movement towards road safety irreversible.

Thank you.