

**Statement of Rochelle Sobel, ASIRT President, on behalf of  
NGOs Advocating for Road Safety and Road Victims**

**First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety**

On May 3, 1995, my 25 year old son, Aron, was killed, along with 22 other passengers, in a bus crash in Turkey. Aron was a senior medical student at the University of Maryland in the United States and was completing his final medical rotation by volunteering in a hospital abroad. He decided to tour Turkey for four days before returning home to graduate.

According to the police report, the driver was speeding recklessly down the wrong lane of a narrow, winding, deteriorated two-lane road with no guard rail. The bus collided head-on with oncoming traffic, careened, then plunged down a deep ravine, landing on its side. The narrow road with its "death curve" had been the site of many previous crashes. Emergency medical care which might have saved some of the injured, arrived on the scene too late, due to road congestion and an inadequate number of ambulances. Nearby villagers frantically attempting to help, pulled the victims out of the wreckage and dragged them up the steep ravine onto the side of the road..

The other victims of the bus crash were people of all ages and all walks of life. Most were Turkish citizens, but there were also a number of passengers from several other countries who had come on holiday or for business. There were many students and a soon to be bride-to-be whose blood splattered wedding invitations were strewn about the bus..

Aron's graduation was to have taken place two weeks from the day he was killed. His diploma, which was delivered to our home, by the Dean of the Medical School, lies unused, tucked away in the top drawer of his dresser

ASIRT, the Association for Safe International Road Travel was established in response to Aron's death and the death of the other passengers on the bus. ASIRT is proud to be one of a large and growing number of road safety advocacy NGOs. Collectively, we possess many years of expertise and tireless efforts, in local, regional, national, and international arenas. We have influenced policy and developed and instituted many vital life saving initiatives. We hold an independent, sustained commitment to improving road safety. We have first-hand knowledge of the issues and of community needs and resources.

We, the NGO community, embrace the concept of a Decade of Action for Road Safety. We have long recognized our global interconnectedness in the problems of and solutions to the road crash crisis and the need to intensify international efforts.

Last May, over 100 representatives of 70 NGOs from 40 countries, representing road victims and road users, met in Brussels to attend a groundbreaking meeting hosted by the World Health Organization. Together we compiled the “NGO Brussels Declaration”. This Declaration includes key recommendations to governments for further actions in order to achieve a “Decade of Action”. Our recommendations stem from our expertise and our unique perspective. Many of our constituents, have experienced injury, loss and bereavement as a result of a road crash. We are deeply committed to preventing other individuals, other families, other communities, from experiencing our anguish.

We have become the voice of those whose voices were forever silenced by a road crash. .

**We are the voice of advocacy.**

We call upon governments to recognize the tremendous economic, emotional, social and medical cost of road crashes and to assume a leadership role in their prevention. We urge you to address traffic related injuries as a serious and growing public health issue. We encourage you to assess road infrastructures and construct or redesign roads and traffic systems with safety as a primary objective. We ask that you manage risks and adopt the proven low cost casualty reduction measures and key risk factor interventions identified by the World Report. We appeal to you to establish a sustainable financing mechanism for road safety, so that life saving improvements can be both implemented and actively maintained.

**We are the voice of equity.**

We call upon governments to recognize that roads are not only a public health issue, they are a human rights issue as well. Roads are public spaces, to be shared by all road users. We urge you to mandate that roads are designed and infrastructure improved, so that the needs of the more vulnerable users (pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, public transport users, children, the elderly and people with special disabilities) and the needs of motorized traffic be equitably balanced.

**We are the voice of action.**

We call upon governments to develop and institute National Road Safety Action Plans and to adopt high standard international road safety targets and benchmarks. We encourage you to adopt global standards for vehicle safety, enforcement, licensing and driver training. We urge you to improve post crash response and establish more effective emergency services to minimize road trauma and death. We ask that you fund potentially life saving research and establish national training institutions for road safety specialists.

**We are the voice of justice.**

We call upon governments to recognize that road crashes are not “accidents”, and to conduct thorough investigations in order to identify all preventable causes.

We ask that you ensure justice for victims and guarantee national standards of legal, medical and social care to injured victims and bereaved families. We ask you to enact and apply effective, proportionate and deterrent legal responses to traffic law violations that result in death and injury. We urge you to recognize and respond to the profound and often long term social, psychological, economic and rehabilitative needs of the injured and their families as well as the needs of those who have lost loved ones and the main, and often the only source of their family's income.

**We are the voice of collaboration.**

We believe that only through coalition building and multisectoral cooperation will we dramatically reduce the world's toll of road crash and mitigate its devastating effects. We recommend that governments involve road safety practitioners, road victims and NGOs as equal partners in government consultations and decision making on road safety and victim related issues. We urge that NGOs are ensured the funding necessary to sustain and strengthen their invaluable efforts. We strongly promote international sharing of knowledge, experience and best practices. We recommend that a Global Road Safety Day or Week be established and become an ongoing opportunity to increase awareness of the consequences of road risks and to institute new or highlight existing legislation, policies, and initiatives.

We, the NGO community, in turn, pledge to cooperate with each other to establish a powerful advocacy network and an International Coalition Against Road Trauma.

**We are the voice of memory.**

Behind each dispassionate statistic, there is a face and a story. There are fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sister, grandchildren, colleagues, and friends whose lives were cruelly transformed in an instant by a road crash. We ask governments to ensure that those faces and those stories are not forgotten.

To that end, we ask that the World day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of November and adopted by the United Nations, be officially recognized by all governments and observed in every country. World Day of Remembrance affords the opportunity to honor the memory of those who have perished and to highlight the impact of road death and injuries on families and communities. Moving and powerful World Day of Remembrance services, commemorations, programs and activities were observed all over the world November 15 this past Sunday.

We ask you also to participate with us in the establishment of a national memorial to road victims in the capital city of every country, to honor their memories and to strengthen our resolve.

**We are the voice of hope.**

Honorable Ministers and representatives of nations around the world, distinguished members of the United Nations and its agencies, road safety champions, and our tireless WHO leadership, we applaud your presence here, your dedicated service, your passion and your many contributions to road safety. We ask to join our voices with yours, so that the poignant and powerful message behind the voices that have been silenced, will be heard, will resound.

Let us work together so that young dreams are not shattered on the road to tomorrow. Let us work together to realize our shared vision of a world without road deaths. Let us work together so that journeys the world over will end with a safe return home.