

Opening Session

Ján Kubiš, UNECE Executive Secretary

First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety

Ján Kubiš, UNECE Executive Secretary, urged Governments around the world to commit to road safety in an opening address delivered at the First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in Moscow this week.

In his message, Mr. Kubiš said: “Improving road safety should be seen as a social contract in which participants from both public and private sectors are accountable for their respective actions and failures. Governments have a primary role to play in creating safe road traffic conditions through safe infrastructure, legislation, enforcement and education. They also have a responsibility to optimize expenditures – especially at this time of economic crisis – and reducing the number of road casualties will lower costs for their societies. Visible political commitment is key to safe roads, and visible political commitment will mobilize public support.”

Road traffic casualties are a mounting problem worldwide. Low- and middle-income countries now bear the brunt of this burden with more than 90% of road traffic deaths occurring in these countries, which have less than half of the world’s vehicles. The challenge has gone beyond tragic impact on human lives, through death or disability, to become a significant development and social issue. Estimates place the economic cost of road traffic crashes to between 1% and 3% of the world’s gross national product.

On behalf of the five UN regional commissions, Mr. Kubiš supported an initiative to have 2011-2020 declared the “Decade of Action for Road Safety” by ministers participating in the Conference. He invited governments to implement existing agreements and conventions which provide the framework for safe roads, such as the Conventions on Road Traffic and on Road Signs and Signals of 1968, as well as the agreements on vehicle regulations which provide safer and cleaner cars.

But good road safety policies may not be enough. The Executive Secretary stressed the importance of setting measurable targets to reduce fatalities and injuries. The implementation of these targets must in turn be monitored. A joint project between the five United Nations regional commissions which provides technical assistance on working with road safety targets found that:

- Setting targets communicates the importance of road safety
- Targets motivate stakeholders and increase accountability in achieving results
- Targets convey the message that the Government is serious about reducing road casualties
- Sub-national targets widen the sense of ownership by creating greater accountability, establishing more partnerships, and generating more action.

Targets raise media and public awareness and motivate politicians to support policy changes and provide resources.

Furthermore, Mr. Kubis pointed out that young people are the most vulnerable group when it comes to road traffic crashes and special attention to their needs is thus imperative.

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