

Opening Session
Steven Allen, UNICEF Regional Director for CEE/CIS,
On behalf of Ann M. Veneman, UNICEF Executive Director

First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety

Excellencies, Ministers, Distinguished Guests and Colleagues, Friends,

I am delighted and honoured to be here in Moscow to address the First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety on behalf of Ms. Ann Veneman, UNICEF Executive Director, whose commitments for the 20th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child tomorrow prevent her from being here today. The conference is indeed a momentous occasion, and at the outset, I would like to thank and congratulate the Government of the Russian Federation for leading this agenda and organising this milestone event.

Today it is worth reminding ourselves that with rising motorisation and urbanisation, the world, and in particular the developing world, faces a new global challenge of road death and injury. This challenge is reaching epidemic proportions that particularly affect children and young people. Here are some of the facts drawn from recent joint UNICEF-WHO research:

- across the world, road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death among 15-19 year-olds and the second leading cause among 5-14 year-olds
- every two minutes a child or teenager dies in a car crash, and another thirty-eight are injured
- an estimated 10 million children annually are injured or disabled on the road
- traffic injuries are the leading cause of disability for children
- significant variations exist between rich and poorer nations: 93 per cent of child road deaths occur in low-income and middle-income countries

This gruesome account shows that children and young people are indeed among the most vulnerable road users. A child is more susceptible to road traffic injuries because of his or her smaller height and other less developed physical characteristics. Young children may unknowingly take risks on the road because they lack appropriate skills to act safely. Adolescents may indulge in risk-taking behaviour, often exacerbated by peer pressure.

These characteristics of children and their specific needs are known but they are continuously overlooked when the road environment is developed. Achieving safety on the road for all is a multi-sectoral challenge and needs a systems approach to bring together all key elements, including policies, safety of vehicles and road environments, educational measures, emergency medical care and rehabilitation services.

Such an approach is of particular value in child road safety. It moves away from the idea that children should adapt their behaviour to cope with traffic. Rather it recognizes that children's needs should be addressed in the design and management of the whole road system.

This would require a number of child specific interventions to be prioritised and systematically implemented by national authorities in partnership with private sector, car manufacturers and civil society. To name just a few examples:

- **Speed limits and engineering measures** that calm traffic create a safer environment for children to play or cycle. Such measures should be given priority and not treated as an afterthought, after space for motorised traffic has been designed.
- **Safe routes to school**, including busing children to school or school safety zones that include car-free areas, and adult supervision to cross roads safely. These measures can significantly reduce traffic related risks for children.
- **Installing child restraints in cars**, such as infant and child seats and booster seats, would save children's lives, reducing the death rates in car crashes by estimated 70 per cent among infants and by 54 per cent among young children. Studies show lower rates of traffic-related deaths and injuries among children where child restraint laws are mandatory and enforced.
- **Wearing a seat belt** properly means that a child is 40 per cent less likely to be injured in a crash.
- **Wearing a helmet** is the single most effective way of reducing head injuries and fatalities from motorcycle and bicycle crashes.
- **Retro-reflective clothing** improves visibility of children on the road.

Clearly, the road is a dangerous place for children and young people. However, proven and effective measures can reduce children's risks to a minimum. They are widely used

in wealthier nations and they should be adapted to the context of low-income and middle-income countries where children are at considerably higher risk.

Children themselves can play a key role in bringing about a positive change to the traffic environment. Beyond traffic education, which is of paramount importance and should start at the earliest age – in kindergarten and pre-school – they can become role models for their parents and other adults. Many countries have positive experience working with children and parents in city planning and safer-community projects.

This conference is an important step towards giving road safety the global political profile that it deserves. Its recommendations will be addressed to the UN General Assembly for consideration and appropriate action. The slogan of this conference is “time for action” and indeed the time for action is now. The UN Road Safety Collaboration, led by WHO, and the new Global Road Safety Facility, hosted by the World Bank, provide sound institutional frameworks for effective and enhanced international collaboration and action.

Distinguished participants,

As I mentioned at the outset, tomorrow marks the 20th Anniversary of the entry in force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Over the years the Convention has driven substantial and measurable advances in child survival and development, raised awareness of and expanded solutions in child protection and promoted child participation as a fundamental right of children. The Convention serves as an inspiration for every person to make a ‘first call for children’ in all matters: road safety should be no exception. I hope that this Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety will be equally inspired to rise to the challenge of making our roads safe for the children of the world, now and for the future.

Thank you.