

Mr. President,

Since we discussed road safety in this Hall last April 2004, another 1.2 million people have been killed on our roads worldwide and another 20 to 50 million have been injured or disabled. These are startling figures. Yet, they have not made headlines like, say, a plane crash would. The global road safety crisis is a modern epidemic of extraordinary proportions. These numbers are rapidly getting worse and the World Health Organization (WHO) has predicted that by 2020, road traffic injuries and deaths will exceed HIV-AIDS as a burden of death and disability.

What is most alarming is that this crisis is predictable and preventable. The deaths and injuries are predictable because they rise as the numbers of cars on the road increase. They are preventable because we have the tools and the knowledge to prevent these deaths.

What is most frightening is that few recognize that this is an epidemic in the making and that it can be prevented. Fatalism is our biggest problem causing individuals to look at road traffic injuries as just “accidents”, acts that are unpredictable and, therefore, unpreventable.

2004 was a year of much activity as the United Nations and the international community tried to raise awareness of this problem. The WHO dedicated World Health Day to road safety and together with the World Bank launched the World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention. The General Assembly adopted resolution 58/289 which invited the WHO to act as coordinator for road safety issues within the United Nations system. WHO, with the support of the United Nations regional commissions and a number of stakeholders held a series of meetings, a result of which is their excellent input in the Secretary-General's report (A/60/181).

With the active participation and support of the United Nations regional commissions in this process, countries and organizations are pushing forward towards greater international cooperation. Regional efforts are underway in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America.

We have come a long way since the road safety item was included in the agenda of the General Assembly in 2003. There is still much more that can be done:

1) We need to set our goals and monitor our performance.

While we speak of the “Global road safety crisis” and the predicted near doubling of road traffic deaths by the year 2020, we can also see this as an opportunity to turn the rising numbers around. If we can keep the death toll from rising to predicted levels over the next 15 years, we can save more than 5 million lives;

2) We need to collect meaningful data and strengthen information systems that will help governments view road safety as an important investment;

3) We need to build the capacity to manage road safety systems, with a focus on prevention of injuries, treatment of injuries and rehabilitation of the injured;

4) We need to pass and enforce legislation that will help make vehicles, roadways and drivers safer;

5) We need to support research that illuminates both the causes and consequences of road traffic injuries in low and middle-income countries and to share this information we generate;

6) Most important, we need to generate political will. Road safety is no accident. It requires commitment at the highest levels of leadership.

Mr. President,

Oman, under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan, has, in the last thirty-five years, seen its road network grow from 10 kilometers in 1970 to thousands of kilometers, connecting all regions from the north to the south, and from the east to west. Inevitably, with the increase in the number of vehicles on our roads so did collisions and crashes leading to deaths and injuries. Improving safety on our roads became a top priority for the Government of Oman. Legislation was enacted and a national road safety agency was established whose task was to update comprehensive regulations and to create a registry to obtain detailed information on the causes of collisions and crashes with the aim of minimizing the crisis. A year ago, the State Council held a forum on road safety. The two-day forum was also attended by members of the Shura Council and the Royal Oman Police which is responsible for implementing road safety regulations and the prevention of road traffic injuries.

Oman's initiative to raise global awareness about road safety is based on its own experience and realization that the problem could only get worse if nothing was done about it. We need to intensify our efforts to raise worldwide awareness of the road safety crisis and its consequences.

Mr. President,

My delegation has, throughout this process, worked very closely with other delegations as well as with a number of other organizations. From the time it accepted the General Assembly's invitation to act as coordinator on road safety issues within the United Nations system, WHO, together with the United Nations regional commissions, has been a reliable and dedicated partner. WHO has hosted meetings of the United Nations Road Safety collaboration whose outcomes are contained in the report of the Secretary-General. Other important players in this

endeavor are the Global Road Safety Steering Committee under the Secretariat of the Task Force for Child Survival and Development, the FIA Foundation for the Automobile and Society and the World Bank who have all given me invaluable support and encouragement.

In this context, I am pleased to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.8 on which my delegation has held a number of informal consultations with other Member States to arrive at a consensus. The draft resolution builds on the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/60/181) and in the WHO's World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention whose main points are as follows:

First, it expresses its concern at the increase in traffic fatalities and injuries worldwide and reaffirms the importance of addressing global safety issues through international cooperation;

Secondly, it encourages Member States to adhere to relevant United Nations conventions of 1949 and 1968 and recognizes the work being undertaken by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in the elaboration of a substantial package of amendments to the 1968 convention;

Thirdly, it invites Member States to implement the recommendations of the World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention and to establish a national agency to develop a national action plan to reduce road traffic injuries;

Fourthly, my Government welcomes the decision by the WHO and the regional commissions to jointly organize the First United Nations Global Road Safety Week that would serve as a platform for raising awareness globally about road safety issues;

Lastly, it is unfortunate that traffic road deaths and injuries are not treated as seriously as other disasters and, sadly, the victims do not receive the same respect and compassion as other victims of violence. They end up being statistics and data. But behind those numbers are real people – sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, parents and friends. Let me give you just a few examples:

Faisal - A young physician who had just completed his post-graduate studies, sustained serious injuries in a road crash and. after seven months on a respirator, had to learn how to speak, walk and eat. Sadly, he will never again practice medicine.

Nauf – She was 4 when she was hit by a car while crossing the street and was paralyzed from the neck down. She was brought to a hospital and put on a respirator to help her breathe. 10 years later, she remains dependent on the respirator. Besides her mother tongue, Nauf speaks two or three other languages mainly from communicating with the medical personnel.

Aron – He was an aspiring physician who had just completed his final year of medical school. He was riding a bus on a winding road when, due to over-speeding, the bus careened and overturned. Aron and 22 others died that day.

Lyndon – While on vacation with his family, his car crashed and he died from his injuries a month later. His family survived but will need to learn to live without their main source of support.

Mansoor – A 26-year old, who was riding a motorbike through an intersection when he was hit head-on by a van whose driver had run through several red lights. He was killed instantly. The court imposed a small fine on the driver. Mansoor was not even mentioned in the judgment.

The idea of a World Day of Remembrance was initiated about 11 years ago by a number of non-governmental organizations and has since been embraced by organizations in different parts of the world. It is a day when we remember all those killed and injured in road crashes as well as give thanks to the emergency services who are always the first to arrive at a road crash, the medical personnel whose task it is to revive, treat and rehabilitate the injured and the families who go through grief because of the loss of a loved one and for the love and care they unselfishly give to their injured.

World Day of Remembrance is a chance to remember people like Faisal, Nauf, Aron, Lyndon, Mansoor and thousand others, and to recognize the way their deaths and injuries have impacted individuals, families and communities. Operative paragraph 10 invites Member States to recognize the 3rd Sunday in November of every year as the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims.

The sponsors of the draft resolution are:

Mr. President, I commend draft resolution A/60/L.8 for adoption by the General Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. President.