

STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON AGENDA ITEM
46: GLOBAL ROAD SAFETY CRISIS AT THE 62ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON MARCH 31, 2008

Mr. President,

We thank the Secretary-General for his note transmitting the comprehensive and useful Report prepared by the World Health Organization [WHO] on the Global Road Safety Crisis in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/5 of 26 October 2005. We would also like to express our appreciation to the delegation of Oman for their continuous efforts in support of this agenda item.

Mr. President,

India attaches great importance to addressing the problem of road traffic safety. India has one of the largest road networks in the world, spanning more than 3.3 million km. Road traffic has been increasing at more than 10% per annum since the turn of the century. In addition, the share of road traffic in total traffic has also been growing steadily – currently, 65% of freight and 86% of passenger traffic is carried by the roads. Compounding the problem is the fact that while our National Highways constitute only about 2% of the road network, they carry 40% of the total road traffic, resulting in heavy traffic density. All these factors contribute to a situation where more than 90,000 Indians die every year from road traffic injuries.

India is also conscious of the serious development and national health impact of road accidents. India has been working actively to enhance road safety and to reduce the adverse consequences of traffic accidents. As the WHO report recommends, India already has a lead agency on road safety issues. The Department of Road Transport and Highways has been entrusted with the responsibility for formulating policies for road safety in India. It evolves road safety standards in the form of a National Policy on Road Safety, and by preparing and implementing the Annual Road Safety Plan. Further, it collects, compiles and analyses road accident statistics and takes steps for developing a Road Safety Culture in the country by organising various awareness campaigns in collaboration with civil society.

India believes that there are three aspects of road safety - Engineering, Enforcement and Education or three Es, and is taking action on all three aspects. A special committee on road safety and traffic management was set up and its report is being examined. India has joined the 1998 Agreement of the World Forum for harmonization of vehicles regulations in order to adopt international best practices in safety regulations of motor vehicles. Smart card based driving licenses and vehicle registration certificates are being issued in many parts of the country. Old laws and regulations are being reviewed and updated. Extensive public awareness campaigns, involving NGOs and other stakeholders, are organised periodically. Annual Road Safety weeks are organised, with the 19th Road Safety Week being held recently from 1-7 January 2008 under the theme "Drive to care! Not to dare!". Awards are given every year to institutions and individuals who have done commendable work in the field of road safety.

Mr. President,

While many of the issues relating to enhancement of road safety and efforts to reduce road safety injuries are best tackled by national and local authorities, the WHO report correctly highlights the importance of facilitating international cooperation in this regard. Developing countries are the worst affected by the impact of road accidents and the imperative for increasing international cooperation to assist developing countries to effectively address issues of road safety cannot be overemphasized. Issues of capacity building, technical assistance, exchange of best practices, advocacy and awareness-raising are some of the areas where greater cooperation is required, taking into account needs of developing countries. In this regard, we commend the efforts of WHO and the UN regional commissions, particularly the Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific.

Mobilization of financial resources to assist efforts of developing countries is also crucial. While the WHO report identifies some funding facilities, these are far from commensurate with the magnitude of the problem and need to be scaled up urgently, particularly with regard to country programme support. We also need to be cognizant that it is not always feasible to universalize standards that may have been developed in one region, and specific circumstances in various parts of the world must be taken into account.

Given this scenario, we strongly support calls for an international Conference on Global Road Safety under UN auspices in order to enhance international cooperation in this important field. We warmly welcome and thank the Government of the Russian Federation for its initiative in hosting and financing the First Global High-Level (Ministerial) Conference on Road Safety in 2009. We hope that this will provide the necessary impetus towards the holding of a UN Conference on Global Road Safety in future.

Before concluding, Mr. President, I would like to express satisfaction that the UN Road Safety Collaboration is 'walking the talk' by improving the fleet safety within the organisations that are participants in this Collaboration, including the United Nations. This is an innovative approach that could perhaps be extended to other large corporations.

Thank You, Mr. President.

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