

The Opportunity of the 2009 Moscow Conference

**CIS International Road Safety Congress, Tavrisheskiy Palace, St Petersburg,
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Speech by Rt. Hon. Lord Robertson of Port Ellen
Chairman, Commission for Global Road Safety

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Chairman Mironov, Your Royal Highness, Ministers, Parliamentarians and delegates. Thank you for this opportunity to address the Road Safety Congress of the Confederation of Independent States. I congratulate you on convening such an impressive conference. It is a testament to the importance and high priority you are giving to improving road safety in your countries.

It is fitting that the title of your Congress this year is 'Road Safety for Life'. Roads should provide for life. They should be a safe conduit for economic development; for healthcare and education, and for leisure. Roads should not be the cause of death, or economic loss; or unnecessary health costs from avoidable injuries. They should not destroy families or prevent progress.

Yet sadly this is what is happening. Here in the Russian Federation, 90 families lose a member to a road crash every day. That is like one tragic air crash every day, every week, every month. Around the world, more than 3,500 families are bereaved in this way every day. Many thousands more families experience the grief, cost and upheaval of a family member being seriously injured, every day. The economic cost of all this human suffering, to developing countries alone, is estimated at up to 100 billion US dollars a year.

This epidemic has long been ignored, or assumed to be an inevitable by-product of our mobility. This attitude is now changing. In March this year the United Nations General Assembly decided that the scale of the road injury problem could no longer be ignored. It approved the first ministerial level UN Conference on global road safety, a key recommendation of the Commission for Global Road Safety which I lead and which met here yesterday in St Petersburg.

This achievement could not have happened without the support and leadership of the Russian Federation. Your generous offer to host the Conference was the crucial factor in persuading many countries to support such a meeting. I would like to pay tribute to Victor Kiryanov, the Russian member of the Commission for Global Road Safety, for his tireless efforts to win support for the Conference, and to UN Ambassador Fuad Al Hinai of Oman, another member of our Commission here today, who co-sponsored the draft resolution with Russia and whose negotiating skills secured a strong final resolution.

Now that the UN has agreed that the Russian Federation will host the Ministerial Conference in Moscow in November next year, we must work together to ensure that the meeting is an historic success, a real breakthrough for international efforts to cooperate on improving road safety.

Key to the success of the Ministerial Conference will be strong political commitment and participation of everyone. Today's CIS Congress, bringing together Ministers from across government, and involving cooperation across borders, serves as a good model for the international, multi-sectoral approach we need to effectively tackle road deaths and injuries.

Yesterday, here in this historic Tavricheskiy Palace, the Commission for Global Road Safety met to discuss the next steps in our campaign to make roads safe.

We have agreed that we will continue to argue for greater political and financial commitments from donor countries and multilateral lending banks for a ten year global Action Plan to improve road safety.

The solutions to road traffic injuries, and there are solutions, are almost always the same, regardless of social differences between countries or regions. First, securing political recognition of the problem, and building the capacity within a country to deal with it. This would be the objective of the Action Plan. We know the remedies, Minister N has outlined some of them, ensuring seat belt and helmet use; fairly and justly enforcing laws on speeding and drink driving; working to improve driver training and enforcing it through an effective licensing and penalty system. Designing and building safe vehicles and roads; providing pedestrians, and especially children, with roads that are safe.

In July we organised a conference at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development which focused on the safe road infrastructure agenda. The World Bank, the regional development banks and the European Commission were represented, and I was delighted that General Kiryanov participated on behalf of the Russian Federation. The conference showed that there is a broad consensus for action to make safety assessment and safe road design the central priority for road building and upgrading programmes. Taking this approach can make highway infrastructure part of the road safety solution, delivering impressive economic returns against investment and it will save many lives.

Finally, looking ahead to the Moscow Ministerial and beyond, the Commission for Global Road Safety agreed that it is vital that the international community resolves to tackle road deaths with the same single minded determination that it is working to eliminate Malaria and to curb the rise of HIV/AIDS.

We would like to see a sustained effort, between now and 2020, to work together, to invest and to share knowledge, so that we can master this man-made disaster and reclaim the roads for life.

This, then, is the opportunity presented by the Moscow Conference. Together with my fellow members of the Commission for Global Road Safety, I look forward to doing everything we can to support the Russian Federation, and the nations represented here , in preparing for this important meeting and making it a real milestone in our profound duty to stop the tidal wave of death and injury on the world's roads.