

Background Rationale for the Regional Committee

Road traffic injuries constitute a major but neglected public health problem that claims 1.2 million victims a year, equivalent to the disease burden of tuberculosis or malaria, with considerable social and economic costs of up to 1.5% of GDP, or more than (US) \$20 billion for the region. The tremendous burden of death and disability resulting from road traffic crashes falls primarily on low- and middle-income countries.

Latin America and the Caribbean Region (LAC) had the highest average deaths per capita in the world for the year 2000 (26 deaths/100,000 people) and the highest projected rate for the year 2020 (31 deaths/100,000 people), in the absence of any further action. This suggests that by 2020 the projected deaths per capita in LAC could be up to 6 times higher than the current rate in the countries with the best rates in the world (UK, Sweden, and The Netherlands).

An effective regional response requires a coordinated and multi-sectoral approach, from all relevant parts of government (including transportation, health, law enforcement, education, finance, and urban planning), civil society (including advocacy organizations, academia, foundations, automobile clubs, and professional organizations), and the private sector (including road builders and road maintenance organizations, automobile manufacturers, motor vehicle product manufacturers, insurance companies, and commercial road users). The response must also mobilize all the relevant sectors to cover all three phases of road traffic injury control: prevention of crashes and injuries in the first place; provision of prompt and high-quality acute care to those injured in traffic crashes; and the provision of rehabilitation and long-term care to those who have been injured in order to minimize disabilities.

President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica is the Honorary Chairman of the Transitional Commission for Road Safety in Latin America and the Caribbean (TC). The task of the Transitional Commission is to design a plan for a Regional Committee for Road Safety in Latin America and the Caribbean (RC). The impetus for this Commission came from the participants at the First Latin American and Caribbean Road Safety Stakeholders Forum, held in San Jose, Costa Rica on September 12-14, 2006.

In their rationale for organizing this collaborative effort they argued that it is both important and urgent that all the nations of the Latin American and Caribbean region work together to stop the growing epidemic of deaths and injuries on our roads. But in this region there is no mechanism to promote multi-sectoral collaboration and manage joint projects in road traffic safety. Therefore they proposed to work together to develop a regional coordinating mechanism that will draw upon all relevant sectors of government, civil society, and the private sector to promote a region-wide approach to road safety. They committed by consensus to establish this entity to promote regional road safety collaboration for reducing the toll of road traffic injuries in the region.

The participating organizations committed to work together during 2007 to develop a regional committee that will:

- Be representative of all relevant sectors of government, civil society, and the private sector,
- Promote a region-wide approach to road safety,
- Strengthen the capacity to collect and use road safety information throughout the region,
- Promote harmonization of laws for road and vehicle safety, and
- Share road safety information and best practices across the region.

The heads of the sponsoring organizations have agreed to serve as “patrons” of the commission, including: the Director of PAHO; President of the Inter-American Development Bank; Manager of the Transport, Water, and Infrastructure Department of the World Bank; Chairman of the Board of the FIA Foundation; and the Executive Secretary of ECLAC. Additional members from Latin American and the Caribbean Countries have joined the Transitional Commission. Additionally, a Secretariat is working with the Global Road Safety Forum and Transitional Commission members during 2007 to develop the Regional Committee. This secretariat consists of two road safety professionals who are funded by the FIA Foundation and supported by the automobile clubs of Latin America and the Caribbean, with further support and office space provided in Santiago, Chile by the Automobile Club of Chile. The decision was made to house the secretariat in Santiago so that the Transitional Commission could work in close conjunction with ECLAC.