

Declaration of San José: We Must Stop the Epidemic of Death on Our Roads

Background: We are running out of time.

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. In addition, the loss of the family breadwinner through death or disability often forces the families of these victims into poverty.

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).

This is a very preventable problem. The World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention, a landmark publication prepared jointly by the World Bank and the World Health Organization, provides a framework for addressing this problem and the basis for a common approach to a regional road safety policy.

Road traffic injuries have been recognized as an extensive and serious global health problem by the United Nations (UN General Assembly Resolution 58/9) and by the World Health Assembly (WHA resolutions 27.59 1974 and 57.10 2004). The member states of these organizations are already on record as having declared this a global epidemic whose solution requires coordinated international efforts.

Important groundwork has already been prepared by previous regional efforts of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Standards for enhancing road and vehicle safety have been developed and implemented in the developed countries; the World Health Organization's UN Collaboration is helping to develop best practice manuals; and a number of Latin American countries have developed national plans and programs for road safety. We have an opportunity to build upon these important works by developing regional road and vehicle safety standards and by implementing evidence-based interventions that have already been shown to be cost-effective for reducing the impact of road traffic crashes.

Our 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). Our interventions 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.

Viewing this situation with great concern, we, the undersigned:

1. Declare that it is both urgent and important 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. Road safety must become a health, transportation, law enforcement, education, and development priority for our nations and the region.
2. Urge all nations of the region to implement the recommendations of the World Report and to use this as the framework for addressing road safety nationally, regionally, and globally. Attention must be paid to the principle risk factors identified in the World Report: lack of safe infrastructure, non-use of seat-belts and child restraints, non-use of helmets, alcohol use, and excessive speed.
3. Urge that resources be committed to road safety commensurate with the need and magnitude of the problem. Development banks should lead the way by requiring that at least 10% of their investments for road infrastructure development be applied to road safety programs. The final results should be audited by independent parties using objectively constructed road safety audits or road assessment programs.
4. Urge that resources be committed to the World Bank Global Road Safety Facility by the industrialized nations so that the Facility can reach a total investment of at least (US) \$300,000,000 by 2015 so that there will be funds available to the countries in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean to develop road safety management capacity, catalyze increased investment, and accelerate knowledge transfer.
5. Commit to work together to develop a regional committee that will:
 - a. Represent all relevant sectors of government, civil society, and the private sector,
 - b. Promote a region-wide approach to road safety,
 - c. Strengthen the capacity to collect and use road safety information throughout the region,
 - d. Promote harmonization of laws for road and vehicle safety, and
 - e. Share road safety information and best practices across the region.
6. Commit to mobilize the active participation of regional ministers of transportation, health, law enforcement, education, and others to set and achieve measurable targets for road safety and traffic-injury prevention in the states of the region.


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