

Mr President,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I fully appreciate the honour and importance you have granted me in allowing me to address you, during this session of the United Nations General Assembly, in my capacity as Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations for Road Safety, a role that I have held since last year.

It is thus my duty, and my responsibility, to raise a certain number of alarming and disturbing questions and queries here –alarming because they force us to question ourselves.

These questions relate to the cause for which I, along with others, have been waging a fierce battle for many years now. I am speaking about the fight against the dangers of the road or, diplomatically speaking, the fight for road safety.

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1. First of all, why and how do we speak about silent carnage?

It is such a terrible scourge that we generally prefer to speak of it as little as possible. I could remind you of these terrifying figures which, alas, are well known, and which are mentioned in the draft resolution presented by the Russian Federation (to whom we must pay tribute here), but as time is short I shall merely say that, during the 5 minutes allotted to me to address you:

- 12 people will be killed on the roads;
- 480 will suffer more or less serious injuries;
- and 2 children will die every 5 minutes.

So, why this silence? I don't really have an answer to that.

2. There is of course no hierarchy or ranking of catastrophes and of their victims, and nobody can or should keep gruesome accounts, so I shall not attempt to do so.

But how can we not ask ourselves why this double standard exists?

Why this resignation?

Why this fatalism for which we are all responsible?

Would our awareness be greater if, instead of speaking in years, I were to speak in decades?

In that case we would have to say that every 10 years there are:

- 13 million deaths on the roads;
- half a billion people injured;
- and almost 2 million children killed.

And these figures do not take into account the growth and increasing mobility of the global population.

3. Where better than here to speak out and to remember that Road Safety is also a problem of solidarity and of development, a problem that urbanisation and motorisation (which will be addressed in Quito during the Habitat III Conference) will only increase and exacerbate if we do not act.

Because here too, the disparities between countries are striking: the less advanced and the middle income countries, with 82% of the global population and 54% of licenced vehicles, account for 90% of deaths on the roads, while the high income countries, with 18% of the population and 46% of vehicles, account for 10% of deaths.

One final figure: the cost of road accidents and their consequences is reckoned at around 500 billion dollars each year; 500 billion; it doesn't take much imagination to consider what these gigantic sums could be used for...

4. How can we then accept that the sums allocated to fighting this global scourge, this absolute carnage are so miserly, so small as to be almost ridiculous?

In fact, I am talking about a few tens of millions of dollars!

Yes, you heard correctly: only a few tens of millions of dollars, when campaigns against other global scourges – and I am genuinely pleased for them – have several tens of billions of dollars at their disposal.

Here again one must wonder why such a difference exists. Why such a gap?

The resolution before you will, I hope, enable concrete advances to be made, since nothing decisive or effective can be undertaken without substantial financial resources.

This again is a matter of urgency, which is why I would like to stress the importance of paragraph 20 of the resolution and the progress that could result from it.

It will therefore be one of the priorities of my activity during the second year of my mission as Special Envoy to try to obtain the actual creation and financing of the United Nations Global Fund for Road Safety that the draft resolution approved today by this General Assembly has just established.

5. Another question: when the United Nations and its specialised agencies are mobilising and 58 conventions have already been drawn up within the framework of the UN, why, in a certain number of countries, are vehicles that do not respect basic safety standards still being built?

What is even more worrying is that these vehicles are built in the same factories – often on the next assembly line – as those that do strictly respect safety standards and are being built for export.

6. So, why these deliberate differences? The list could go on and on, as the same questions arise with regard to road construction, compliance with traffic legislation, safety standards, the installation of road signs, etc.

7. I would like to finish by also stressing the importance of road safety education. In the 3rd millennium, each child must learn not only to read, write and count, but also to use roads properly: as a pedestrian, cyclist, motorcyclist and vehicle driver.

This is a huge goal, but one that is so easy to achieve.

Imagine for a moment that once a week, for an hour – just one hour – every schoolchild in the world is given a lesson in mobility. Imagine the progress that would be made, and the number of victims who would be spared.

How can I conclude, here, before the United Nations General Assembly, without recalling that in 1948 this Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3 of which stipulates that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”?

The right to life? This is indeed what it all comes down to, first and foremost.

This is indeed – Mr President, your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen – what we are fighting for. Let us not forget it, if only for the millions of people being killed and injured on the roads today.

Mr President, thank you.

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