World Youth Assembly
For
The
Report
For Road Safety
ALVIN LIM, YOUTH DELEGATE, SINGAPORE

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“I’d like to say thank you for giving me the chance to join the Assembly in Geneva. The meeting is an excellent experience for me not only to learn about the activities done by international NGOs and other countries regarding Road Safety, but also to share those of my own. I particularly cherish the Working Group 2, when we had the opportunities to detail specific plans and actions to be taken to implement the Declaration. With the plans and recommendations from other youth delegates and from the Assembly as a whole, I’m sure I can work hard to reduce the fatalities on the Cambodian roads in the future.”
“After this meeting for young people, I feel stronger to continue fighting in my National Assembly to ensure we have a debate and to commit to the Declaration being not just ink on paper, but a reality in my country.”

LUCIANA MILAGROS LEON ROMERO, YOUTH DELEGATE, PERU

“Just wanted to congratulate you on an amazing conference. It was wonderful to meet such a dedicated group of young people from across the world, and a pleasure to get to know you! You’ve paved the way for real change; hopefully, we can do something substantial in these next steps. Thanks again, keep in touch!”

CANDACE SALMON, YOUTH DELEGATE, CANADA

“Indeed I am very proud to associate myself with this Assembly. I think the United Nations has given young people the opportunity to prove to the world that we can commit ourselves to a solution that affects us, as young people. But we will fail ourselves, if we fail to implement this Declaration.”

OUSMAN CONTEH, YOUTH DELEGATE, THE GAMBIA

“When I will arrive back in Tirana, my family will ask me what did I do in here and I will start telling them about all the numbers and facts that I have heard here. So that on that particular day, one of those 1049 people killed on the roads won’t be my brother. The next day, I will tell it to my friends and some other people, to my fellows at my university. I hope to create a snowball effect, so that there will be less and less of those 1049 friends of mine lost on the road’s every day.”

ORION KULO, YOUTH DELEGATE, ALBANIA
The first ever World Youth Assembly for Road Safety was held at the United Nations Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland from 23–24 April 2007. Nearly 400 young delegates from 100 countries, many of whom are engaged as advocates for road safety in their countries, came together under the auspices of the United Nations to share experiences and ideas and to identify ways to strengthen their road safety efforts at home. The enormous enthusiasm and dedication these young delegates brought to Geneva was palpable throughout the event.

Modeled on the format of the United Nations General Assembly and the World Health Assembly, the Assembly was both organized and led by young people. The Chair, Nelly Ghossaini from Lebanon, and Vice-Chairs, Luis Escobar from Guatemala, Elise Klein from Australia, Floor Lieshout from the Netherlands, Precious Mumbi from Zambia and Amitasha Sinha from India, all under the age of 25 years, devoted several months prior to the event to developing the programme and preparing the Youth Declaration for Road Safety along with many others. In addition to the youth delegates who were nominated by governments and nongovernmental organizations and those who represented...
The World Youth Assembly for Road Safety was the key global event marking the First United Nations Global Road Safety Week, held from 23–29 April 2007. The Week, which focused on young road users, aimed to raise awareness about the societal impact of road traffic injuries, highlighting the risks for children and young people, and promote action around key factors: helmets, seat-belts, drink-driving, speeding and visibility. For further information about the Week and the Assembly, please visit: http://www.who.int/roadsafety/week/en/index.html

Under the banner “Road Safety is No Accident”, the Assembly’s opening ceremony featured statements from Mr Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General; Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General; Mr Marek Belka, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; Mr Jacques Barrot, Vice President of the European Commission in charge of Transport; Mr Tony Blair, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom; Mr Luis Lula da Silva, President of Brazil; and Moby, the world-renowned musician.

The panel of honoured guests for the Assembly’s opening ceremony, from left to right: Dr Etienne Krug, WHO Director of the Department of Injuries and Violence Prevention; Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General; Mr Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva; Ms Nelly Ghossaini, Chair of the Assembly; Mr Marek Belka, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; Mr Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Transport; and Mr José Capel Ferrer, Director of the Transport Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

The International School of Geneva and other local schools, many observers from Permanent Missions in Geneva, road safety organizations, foundations and private companies were present. Attendance neared 600 participants.
To set the stage, Precious Mumbi from Zambia summarized the main messages from a WHO report entitled *Youth and road safety* released the same day. In her presentation she indicated that road traffic crashes have become the leading cause of death for 10 to 24 year olds and that almost 400,000 people under 25 are killed in a road traffic crash every year. That is about 1049 youngsters every day.

“In addition to this terrible suffering, countries lose one to two per cent of their Gross Domestic Product to road traffic crashes, which has significant social and economic impacts. These costs occur mostly because of lost productivity linked to death or interruption of work or education. There are also costs related to health care and repair of vehicles and roads”, said Mr Lula da Silva, President of Brazil, in his message to the delegates at the Assembly.

The vast majority of these tragic deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries and involve pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and passengers of public transport. In high-income countries, novice drivers account for most of the youth-related traffic deaths. “It is right that we recognize the particular vulnerability of the young on our roads, because we all have a duty of care to keep our children and young people safe”, said Mr Tony Blair, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, in his video statement.

Ms Mumbi indicated that there are many interventions which can and should be taken into consideration which will make children and young adults safer on the roads. When planning road safety initiatives, policy-makers and leaders need to recognize children’s vulnerabilities as well as their relative inexperience, developmental needs and exuberance for life. When designing the road system, developing safer cars or passing road safety laws, these special needs should be taken into consideration.

“A number of countries have shown that by taking action on drink-driving, speeding, use of helmets and seat-belts, and increasing the visibility of pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists, a significant number of lives can be saved and resources spared, even as motorization continues to rise”, said Mr Ban Ki-Moon, the United Nations Secretary-General, in the message he prepared for the Week.

Mr Alexander Wurz, an Austrian Formula 1 driver, shared his experience of surviving the highest speed crash in history. His presentation, entitled “Learning from a crash”, highlighted the importance of wearing helmets and seat-belts, having a responsive emergency services system in place, and being able to drive safe cars on well designed roads.
Following Ms Mumbi's presentation, youth delegates from Argentina, Australia, China and Tunisia presented some national and local road safety initiatives involving youth currently being undertaken in their countries. This was followed by working group sessions in Arabic, English, French, Russian, and Spanish, during which other delegates were able to share the breadth of their experiences from home and inspire others.

A national and local road safety initiatives involving youth

In October 2006 Malin Ecker from Argentina lost her brother and eight of their friends and their school teacher in a bus crash. They have set up a nongovernmental organization which has challenged the government to recognize to a greater extent the severity of the problem of road traffic injuries and take additional action.

During the Assembly, awards were given for a short-film competition and an essay competition. Laser Europe and Prevention Routière Internationale organized the short-film competition for aspiring young film makers. The international jury which met the weekend prior to the Assembly awarded prizes to five of the 30 entries received. The award-winning films from Australia, Estonia, France, Russia and The Netherlands were screened during the event. The first prize was given to a series of short, powerful films produced by young Australians with support from the Transport Accident Commission in Australia's State of Victoria. Each of the winners was given a certificate of achievement.

UNICEF coordinated the essay competition through its monthly "Voices of Youth" Internet forum. Conducted in English, French and Spanish, many hundreds of entries were received on the theme of road safety from around the world. The winner, sixteen-year-old Anupama Kumar from India, received her award from Dr Pascal Villeneuve, UNICEF Associate Director for Programmes. As part of the prize, her essay will be published in the upcoming WHO/UNICEF World report on child and adolescent injury prevention.

During her acceptance speech for the essay competition, Ms Kumar said, "Road safety is a pretty big issue where I come from. The roads are very crowded and ill equipped to deal with the growing number of vehicles. I hold my breath every time I cross the roads to go to school".
To disseminate the key messages of the Assembly and the Week itself, WHO commissioned a series of posters and public service announcements (short video clips) as well as a documentary film.

The “Road Marks” posters and “Public Alarm” video clips were designed for young people by young designers from Fabrica, a prominent Italian communications agency. They address the key factors noted by Mr Ban Ki-Moon in his message: helmets, seat-belts, speeding, drink-driving and visibility. The posters were sent as part of a package of materials to 600 organizations around the world as well as WHO offices. The video clips were also shared with various audiences, broadcast on several national television stations and posted to YouTube.

“Road Marks” posters, in large format, line the halls of the Assembly, as a constant reminder to the youth delegates of the need for action.

photo © M.Kokic/WHO

The Road Marks posters highlight interventions which can address some of the major risk factors.
The 22-minute documentary film “Collision Course” was released on the British Broadcasting Corporation’s Newsnight on 19 April 2007, just days before the start of the Week. The film provides a comprehensive overview of road traffic injuries globally, their consequences, costs and prevention. Viewers followed road crash survivor, Harman Sidhu, through India and Brazil, where his interviews with emergency room doctors, urban planning authorities, representatives of pedestrian associations and others highlighted the myriad and long-term consequences road crashes have on the lives of victims and their families and hinted at ways the problem is being addressed in various settings. A 10-minute version of the film was screened at the Assembly, and made available upon request to groups in many countries hosting events related to the Week.

Media at both global and national levels demonstrated their interest in road safety by reporting widely on the World Youth Assembly for Road Safety and many other of the Week’s events as well as the products released during the Week. The coverage was vast. In the print media, articles featured in the International Herald Tribune and many national newspapers including the Bangkok Post, Jeune Afrique, Le Monde, the Los Angeles Times, the People’s Daily, La Prensa Latina, the Times of India and the Washington Post. Radio programmes aired on the British Broadcasting Corporation’s World Service, Radio France Internationale, United Nations Radio and Voice of America and television programmes on many of the world’s leading news channels, including Al Jazeera, the American Broadcasting Corporation, the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Fox News, France 24, Kashar World News, Sky News and France’s TV5. Stories highlighted the new data and information from the report on Youth and road safety, the many interventions being taken by countries to address the problem of road traffic injuries and the work being done by some of the youth delegates to the Assembly.

Captivating the media

Too late to stop drinking.
© WHO 2007/FABRICA Y. Hill, R. Young

Too late to be seen.
© WHO 2007/FABRICA Y. Hill, R. Young

Video clips designed for young people by young designers.
photo © M. Kocić/WHO
The Assembly opened with a poignant visual tribute to the 1049 young victims under the age of 25 who die on the world’s roads each day. Ms Ghossaini reminded delegates that “While we are sitting here today, working for road safety, many young people, some of whom we might even know, are still losing their lives”. As a constant reminder of this fact, a digital counter “ticked” throughout the two-day event, and tallied nearly 1700 deaths by the meeting’s end.

The individual loss associated with road traffic crashes was personalised with powerful testimonials by two people whose lives have been forever transformed:

Bright Ambeyi from Kenya recounted her experience as a road traffic victim in Kenya. Hit by a speeding vehicle in 1997, she was paralyzed from the waist down. She recounted “From a very active and social person, I had become invisible. I lost the use of my limbs, lost privacy, lost self esteem... and I actually felt like I had lost myself”. She went on to explain how her crash had placed huge financial and emotional strains on her and her family.

Peter Geszti from Hungary lost his step-brother at the age of 24, when he sped away from his sister’s wedding party after an evening of heavy drinking. Mr Geszti described the effect his death had on the immediate family, but also how it had challenged him personally and how he has changed his behaviour and attitude on the roads. “For those of you who have lived the devastation caused by a single crash, you can understand the passion which motivates me. It is for all the friends and loved ones who have not suffered in this way that we must all do our part to prevent this needless loss of life”.

A candle at the final moment of the tribute representing the young lives extinguished by road crashes, and the counter at the start of the Assembly.

Bright Ambeyi from Kenya is now an advocate for road safety. She does not hesitate to speak to young people about the dangers of drink-driving, not wearing seat-belts or speeding.
In an additional, moving tribute to victims of road traffic crashes, the delegates gathered on the steps of the Palais des Nations and released 1049 white balloons. As she released her balloon, Yomna Safwat from Egypt made a statement which she dedicated to her brother killed in a road crash, “We will now release 1049 balloons representing the daily young victims of road crashes. These balloons as many as they are, are without question outnumbered by the tears shed over loved ones needlessly lost on the road. In tribute to these young souls, each balloon is a cry out to the world to take action, to save the youth and to prevent road deaths and injuries. I send my balloons to my dear brother, Mohammed Karim, with a message that your life has not been lost in vain, but will fuel the efforts of the youth all around the world to make roads safer.”

“No family or group of friends is ever prepared for the news of a sudden and violent death. These deaths leave psychological scars that last a lifetime,” said Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of WHO in her keynote address.

To tell the stories behind the shocking statistics more fully, the Association for Safe International Road Travel and WHO launched a report called *Faces behind the figures: voices of road traffic crash victims and their families*. A compilation of testimonials, the stories included in the book deepen our understanding of the enormous suffering behind each of the 1.2 million deaths and 50 million injuries every year.

*photo © M.Kocic/WHO*
The crowning achievement of the World Youth Assembly for Road Safety was the Youth Declaration for Road Safety. The document was developed by a group of youth delegates over a six-month period, and discussed by dozens of others through an electronic discussion prior to the Assembly.

The Declaration commits young people to serve as role models on the road. The Declaration also calls upon others to take specific actions:

- Parents and guardians to create a safe environment for young people and teach them and their younger brothers and sisters the rules of the road
- Educational institutions to include road safety in the school curricula from an early age and conduct and publish more research on road traffic injury prevention
- Community leaders to be active in road safety groups and initiatives and involve survivors in advocacy campaigns
- Policy-makers to place road safety higher on political agendas and encourage partnerships with others
- Community-based organizations to promote road safety and adopt the most effective channels to be heard
- Private companies to acknowledge their social responsibility in developing safe products and marketing these responsibly
- Media to address road traffic deaths and injuries as a global health and development problem that affects millions each year
- Celebrities and the entertainment industry to serve as role models by promoting safe road traffic behaviour, not only in their professional roles, but also in their personal lives.

In its concluding paragraph, the Declaration states “We the youth of the world, declare our commitment to actively pursue the demands of this Declaration to ensure its impact. We will not allow it to remain ink on paper. From the moment we adopt the Declaration, it will go around the world like the Olympic flame, carried by youth on all continents, to enlighten countries, one by one, with the voice of the youth calling for action. We want to make the roads of the world safer and more secure, not only for ourselves, but for everyone and for the generations to come.”

Sheika Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, President of the United Nations General Assembly, noted in her statement delivered live from New York, that “The Declaration you are about to adopt is an important statement. It is a catalyst – of that I am sure. You – the World Youth Ambassadors for Road Safety – can use it to push for greater attention to be paid to road safety within your own countries and worldwide.” When formally adopted, the Declaration received a standing ovation by all participants in the Assembly, and was clearly the highlight of the two-day event.
Implementing the Declaration

On the second day of the Assembly, there were working group sessions in Arabic, English, French, Russian, and Spanish to plan the implementation of the Declaration at national and international levels.

Delegates agreed to the following 10-step plan to support implementation nationally and ensure follow up to the Assembly:

1. Translate the Declaration into national languages and present it to national or local policy-makers (mayors, governors, ministers, or Head of State).
2. Talk to the media about the Declaration, the importance of road safety and the role of young people.
3. Establish a local working group, including mentors and victims of road traffic crashes, to further develop ideas and support the message.
4. Send the posters and video clips to national and local media or have them adapted to illustrate the local reality.
5. Develop a national plan for youth involvement in road safety.
6. Find funding to support implementation of the plan by targeting companies that have an interest in young people.
7. Identify a local celebrity to champion the cause of road safety.
8. Adapt and translate the opinion editorial developed by the Chair and Vice-Chairs and have it published in a national or local newspaper.
9. Prepare a fact sheet on the problem of youth and road safety at a national level and prioritize areas where youth can be involved.
10. Stay in touch with the global group, and remain part of the global movement for youth and road safety.

To ensure follow up to the Assembly globally, an informal working group of youth delegates is currently being established by the delegates themselves. Their task will be to coordinate implementation of the Declaration and maintain and foster the links created through the Assembly. In addition, they will represent the youth at the international level. To this end, the following action points were identified.

- Create a global network
- Lobby for funds for youth-led road safety initiatives
- Nominate a youth to attend the meetings of the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration
- Develop a newsletter to keep delegates in touch
- Commemorate young victims of road traffic crashes on the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, the third Sunday in November every year.

The musician Moby, in his address to the Assembly, noted the disproportionate reaction that road traffic crashes elicit. “They don’t cause an outcry, or trigger a political reaction. Instead they ‘just’ destroy families, classes, friendships, and lives.” He urged young people involved to ensure that the reach of this event is not short-lived: “Make it the beginning of something, the start of a global campaign... Take control.”
Conclusion

“T he improvement of road safety depends not only on the initiatives taken by governments, ministers and international organizations, but also on the sustained commitment of people like yourselves, to slow these deaths on the roads”, said Mr Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Transport.

By all accounts the World Youth Assembly for Road Safety was a unique and historic event. All participants – youth delegates and observers alike – were greatly impressed by the energy and commitment the Assembly generated. One week following the event, as this report goes to print, work is already under way by many of the youth delegates to ensure that there are tangible results from this first ever gathering of young people on the issue of road safety. As World Youth Ambassadors for Road Safety, there is work to be done, and many are already proving that their efforts are more than ink on paper.

Vice-Chairs sign certificates of participation for delegates to the World Youth Assembly for Road Safety, thereby naming them as World Youth Ambassadors for Road Safety.

photo © M.Kokic/WHO
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