

ESCAP 6th Transport Committee – High-level roundtable
Questions and answers for Mr. Jean Todt, UN SG's Special Envoy for Road Safety
Bangkok, Thailand – 23 Nov 2022

10:55-11:00 – Question 1: What are your views on sustainable transport development from the perspective of road safety?

Your Excellencies, Dear friends,

Thank you for inviting me to this seventh session of the Committee on Transport of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. I am delighted to see the important place “Safe and inclusive transport and mobility” has in this meeting, as there is much urgent work to be done.

It is indeed an exciting time - in what feels like - a revolution for the transportation sector. And especially in the Asia-Pacific region where innovation (and opportunity to optimize technology) seem endless.

However, dear friends, I must admit that it feels like there are two parallel worlds:

One world which is discussing autonomous vehicles, electric cars and green fuel. And another, just outside this building - with roads that do not have footpaths nor bicycles lanes for these most common modes of transport. A world where road users are dying simply because they are not using helmets, seatbelts -- or not obliged to follow the road rules. 60 people die every day in Thailand – 75% are motorcycle riders. This is unacceptable.

I see one world that is talking about using transportation to grow economies, and another world that is in denial - about the fact that road traffic crashes can take 3-5 percent GDP every year. In fact, in Cambodia, where I am traveling tonight, it is estimated that road crashes take nearly 6 percent of GDP (repeat) annually. This is money that could otherwise be spent on development.

Within the ESCAP region, there is one world (like South-East Asia) that has some of the highest road traffic rates in the world. And there is another world like Singapore and Japan who are among the best in the class. These are gaps we need to close, and it is obvious that we can learn from each other; we must help each other with resources, either bilaterally or through contributions to the UN Road Safety Fund.

Your Excellencies, dear friends,

58% of the global 1.3 million roads deaths each year happening in the ESCAP region. This is even more unacceptable because we have the solutions.

Member states recognized this during the first high-level meeting on road safety which took place past summer in New York. They came out with a political declaration that reaffirmed their commitment to SDG 3.6 and 11.2.

The second High-level meeting on road safety is expected for 2026.

This is why, I am pleased to see the **Regional Plan of Action for Asia and the Pacific** for the Second Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030 being presented to you. It is a detailed recipe for saving lives in this region. In fact, it would be an excellent approach in any part of the world. I call on all governments to endorse the Regional Action Plan this week. Thank you.

11:20-11:25 – Question 2: While high-income countries have improved their road safety performance significantly over the first Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020, most middle-income countries are still behind their road safety targets. As countries enter the Second Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030, which has a goal of reducing road traffic deaths and injuries by at least 50 per cent from 2021 to 2030, what are some best practice and key priority action that can be implemented by middle-income countries, where 97 per cent of road fatalities in the Asia-Pacific region occur?

- We are hosting a side-event exhibition showing effective road safety projects after this session, outside. Please join us – The exhibition features projects supported by the UN Road Safety fund in the region.
- Let me start with the **simplest approaches** first: Reducing speed limits, especially in urban areas and near schools (being hit by a car at a lower speed can increase chance of survival exponentially); enforcing helmet use because they can reduce chance of death by more than 40 percent; text driving; drink driving.

- Beyond the strictly local changes, both here in Asia and around the world, we must **harmonize standards** so that everyone can benefit from the same level of safe technology on cars and road infrastructure. Safe car technology cannot be the right only of those who can afford to pay for it. This is where the UN Road Safety Conventions and regional agreements come in.
- We need better **road infrastructure, especially for walking and cycling**. This is especially important of Asia, where walking, bicycling and two-wheelers are the most common method of transport for low-income users. In addition, more use of walking and bicycle paths will help cities reduce air pollution, congestion and CO2 emissions.

- Better, cheaper, more accessible and safer **public transportation** systems lead to more sustainable and inclusive transport. 1.3 billion people in Asia and the Pacific live on less than \$3.20 per day, with few transport options; we must keep this in mind when developing transport. Furthermore, there are far fewer road crash fatalities and injuries in cities with better public transportation systems. More public transport use, rather than private cars, is also better for the environment.
- **More investments** in road safety pays off. A 2017 study by the World Bank reports that if Thailand cuts road traffic mortality rates by 50% over a period of 24 years, it could generate additional income equivalent to 22.2% of GDP.