

Sustainable Development Goals

A great opportunity in road safety policy

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Thank you for inviting WHO to participate and give a speech at this important Annual Congress of La Prévention Routière Internationale. I bring you greetings from Dr Etienne Krug and Dr Margie Peden, none of whom was able to come because of other commitments.

The theme of the Summit, “Autonomous Driving and the Impact on Traffic Safety conference”, is appropriate in view of the growing interest in driverless car and the overarching role of technology in road safety. As we know from the history of road safety policy, vehicle technology has contributed to the improvement of road safety crash protection and avoidance mechanism. Autonomous driving is further development of this technology and as it happens with any innovation, there are several questions that need to be addressed. This congress provides an opportunity to discuss some of these questions that relate to the benefits and threats of autonomous driving.

As most of us here are aware, road traffic crashes claim one million, two hundred and forty thousand lives every year. Sadly, road traffic crashes are the leading cause of death among those aged fifteen to twenty-four as well as those aged fifteen to twenty-nine years. An important message for us to take home is that globally, road traffic crashes are a leading killer of our young people, who are the future of any country. Encouragingly, the recently released Sustainable Development Goals have included a target (3.6) of reducing road traffic fatalities and injuries by fifty percent by 2020. In addition there is another target (11.2) that seeks to provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons by 2030. These two targets offer a powerful focus around which governments and the international community can take action to improve road safety around the world.

Once again, I am grateful for the opportunity you have given WHO to participate in this conference. I wish you success in your deliberations and I hope that while we learn about autonomous driving, we shall not look at it as the only and most urgent solution to road safety at the moment. We need to continue to implement proven solutions that exist at the moment — speed management, infrastructure design, legislation and enforcement, vehicle safety and post-crash care — while research and pilot testing on autonomous driving is going on.

Thank you.