

14 April 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
on General Assembly Item 21 on the Global Road Safety Crisis**

Today, the General Assembly turns its attention to the global road safety crisis. Thanks to the World Health Organization and the World Bank, it has the World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention launched on World Health Day, 7 April 2004, to assist its deliberations. The report unravels many of the inter-related issues that are impacted by this growing problem, and provides invaluable insights for shaping future initiatives of the General Assembly and indeed, of the international community, in this critical area.

The complete picture of death and injury on roads the world over has certainly come more sharply into focus now that the road safety crisis has been taken up by the General Assembly. It is, no doubt, the realization that this crisis is exacting significant human, social and economic costs in developed and developing countries alike and the implications of these costs for sustainable development, particularly in the developing world, that has given impetus to United Nations initiatives for global road safety.

When we commemorated World Health Day on 7 April 2004, we were alerted to the fact that "Road Safety is No Accident". In short, road safety is too critical to be left to chance. Safe roads come from initiatives we purposefully take, at the national and international levels. The success some countries have had in reducing road deaths and injury bears this out.

It is, in my view, instructive that with greater effort, we can reduce the 1.2 million that die and upwards of 50 million that are injured in road accidents each year. With appropriate and timely action, it should be possible to address the concern brought to our attention by the World Health Organization that if matters continue as they are, by 2020 road traffic accidents could rank third among causes of disease or injury, ahead of other health problems such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

It requires only commitment and action to take the targeted initiatives for capacity building in developing countries that could help reduce the significant numbers that die or are injured in road accidents. Commitment and action would also avert the tragedy and hardship of families and communities that can affect the future of countries, particularly in the developing world. It seems to me that together, we can reduce the human costs as well as the global economic costs of road crashes and injuries, estimated by the World Health Organization to be about \$518 billion - \$65 billion of which is borne by the developing world.

The General Assembly now has an invaluable opportunity to examine national and international standards for road traffic safety, with a view to reinforcing and improving these standards through national action and international co-operation. Formulating effective strategies to address the global road safety crisis requires partnerships - between governments, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector, lawmakers and all road users - motorists and pedestrians alike. This is our opportunity to continue to build them.

Motor vehicles have significantly improved the lives of millions of people around the world. We must all work together to ensure that it continues to be a positive benefit. The cost of not doing so is simply too high.