UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Nineteenth meeting of the Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole/
Seventh Intergovernmental Group of Experts

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
30 April – 4 May 1999

ISSUES FROM SUBSIDIARY ORGANS AND SECTORAL BODIES CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE
This document contains an assessment done during the eleventh meeting of African Ministers of Transport and Communications held in Cairo, Egypt, from 25 to 27 November 1997; on the health problem and its cost constituted by the casualties caused by road accidents, and is brought to the attention of the Conference of Ministers to investigate modalities for funding the African Road Safety Initiative.

THE AFRICAN ROAD SAFETY INITIATIVE
NEED FOR URGENT ACTION

Road accidents are now a world-wide problem and result in over 70 000 deaths and over 10 million persons being injured or crippled every year. Around 75 per cent of these deaths occur in the developing world even though such developing countries possess only 32 per cent of the total global motor vehicle fleet. The World Bank has estimated that road accidents now cost the developing world around $US100 billion per year. Such recurring annual losses in developing countries amount to more than the total annual development aid or loans – around $US60 billion per year – that they receive from the developed OECD countries. Such recurring annual losses are inhibiting social and economic development of these countries and, in many cases, perpetuating poverty for their populations.

Previous World Health Organization research indicated that for 3 to 35 years olds worldwide, road accidents are now already the most predominant cause of death and disablement when compared to other accidents and diseases. The 1998 International Red Cross Disaster Report identified road accidents as a major and growing health “disaster” affecting the developing world and one that needs urgent attention. Recent studies in the Global Burden of Disease undertaken by Harvard University for WHO and the World Bank indicate that “among adults aged 15 to 44 worldwide, road traffic accidents were the leading cause of death for men and the fifth most important cause of death for women”. The study also indicated that by the year 2020, road accidents would be the third most predominant health problem world-wide exceeded only by heart disease and depression (by comparison, War will only rank eighth and HIV will rank tenth!). By the year 2020, health ministries will be spending 25 per cent of their budgets on road accident casualties.

The problem is particularly severe in African countries. Whereas the situation in developed countries has been stabilizing or improving during the last couple of decades, the situation in Africa is rapidly deteriorating.

Analysis of accident occurrence between 1968 and 1990 showed an increase of 350 per cent in Africa, compared to a reversing trend in industrialized countries where car ownership per 1000 inhabitants has been estimated to be 10 times higher on the average, than in our continent. Further analysis of global accident statistics indicates that the fatality rate per vehicle registered in African countries ranges from 8 to 50 times higher than in the industrialized world.

Studies by several research institutions showed that road accidents were commonly the second highest cause of death for the 5 to 44 years age group in Africa. This should be seen in the light of the fact that approximately 50 per cent of the African population are below the age of 16 years. Pedestrians and young road users have been identified as highly vulnerable groups.
The economic cost to African countries accruing from road accidents have been estimated to approach 2 per cent of GNP ($US10 billion), with a high foreign currency component for importing medicines, hospital equipment, vehicle spare parts, etc.

Growth in urbanization in Africa has reached 11 per cent and has resulted in serious implications for road safety. The proportion of accidents occurring in urban areas is very high with figures ranging from 80 to 90 per cent of the national totals.

The important point to note is that African countries are only just entering the “explosive” phase of motorization growth. The numbers of deaths and injuries are therefore likely to increase substantially in future years in line with the growth in vehicle fleets unless urgent action is taken. Learning from the experience of OECD countries, it is possible to commence implementing effective strategies and avoid the millions of deaths and injuries that will otherwise occur over the next 30 to 40 years.

During the next 10 years alone world-wide, a total approximately 6 million persons will die and over 60 million will be crippled or injured as a result of road accidents in developing countries unless urgent action is taken to address this problem. The global health leaders (WHO and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [IFRC] have specifically identified road accidents as a major public health problem and have urged that appropriate action be taken.

Despite the gravity of the problem, the African region is the only one that has not undertaken an extensive study to develop action plans for addressing the road accident issues. In this regard, ECA requests the Conference of Ministers to investigate modalities for funding the African Road Safety Initiative (ARSI).

The World Bank, WHO, IFRC, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic Commission for Europe, the Asian Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and other International Agencies involved in road safety have established the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP) to address road safety issues world-wide. In this regard, it is also proposed that the African Initiative be spearheaded by the African Development Bank and ECA who will also be members of the GRSP.