

ADDRESS BY
MR KRISH PONNUSAMY, SENIOR CHIEF EXECUTIVE
MINISTRY OF PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE, LAND TRANSPORT
AND SHIPPING AT THE OPENING CEREMONY
OF THE
UN GLOBAL ROAD SAFETY WEEK AT THE OCTAVE WIEHE
AUDITORIUM, UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS, REDUIT
Monday, 23 April 2007

Dr the Honourable A R Beebeejaun, GCSK, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping

Honourable Ministers

Acting UN Resident Coordinator

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Commissioner of Police

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping used to organize every year its road safety week with the collaboration of the Traffic Management Road Safety Unit (TMRSU) and the Police Department. However, this year the Road Safety Week has taken a broader dimension. In fact, it is being organized on an international scale, thanks to the vigorous intervention of the UN.

During the debates at the UN General Assembly in April 2004, the Assembly noted that traffic accidents were well on their way to becoming

the third leading cause of global death and disability by the year 2020 ahead of malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/Aids. Some 1.2 million men, women and children are killed yearly in traffic accidents. Over 20 million are injured and the vast majority is registered in developing countries. The worldwide economic cost of the casualties was estimated in 2004 at US\$518 billion

The UN General Assembly expressed serious concern at the alarming number of death casualties and invited the World Health Organisation (WHO) by way of a resolution to act as coordinator on road safety issues within the UN system. The resolution also called upon each member state to take immediate and appropriate measures to improve road safety measures and reverse the present trend.

Reading the verbatim debates on the UNGA resolution, I came across an interesting fact mentioned by the then Director General of the WHO. He recalled that the first person to be killed by a car was Mrs Bridget Driscoll, a 44 year old mother of two. She was knocked down at London Crystal Palace on the 17 August 1896. The car had been travelling at a speed of 12 kms per hour!

From one casualty in 1896, we have now overstepped the global figure of 1.2 million deaths on our roads yearly. It is sad that Mauritius also contributes to the global figure. We have recorded 134 deaths on our roads in 2006. Are we working to allow that figure to increase every year or are we seriously working to lower it?

The answer is clear. The Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping, under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister is fully supportive of all measures aimed at reducing the number of road accidents. The measures can be summarized thus:

- a. raise awareness about road traffic accidents, especially among road users
- b. promote action around factors having greatest impact on road traffic injuries i.e use of helmets, seat belts, no drink driving and better road design and infrastructure

The concrete measures which we have taken will be explained in detail to the entire population during the activities marking the Road Safety Week. These measures are based on the following planks of our strategy:

- a. We should make the roads safer for our children
- b. We need safer drivers with better driving skills and behaviour. Focus should be put on training and retraining so that drivers avoid drinking under the influence of alcohol, drugs, and in a state of drowsiness
- c. We should provide better road infrastructure with appropriate pedestrian paths, street lighting and road signs
- d. We should publicize widely the risks of speeding and the reasons for imposing limits as speeding is far more

than any other single contributor to casualties on our roads

- e. We should promote the use of safer vehicles by setting better standards of maintenance and inspection by manufacturers, dealers and Government agencies
- f. We should focus on safer motorcycling as motorcyclists constitute a vulnerable group on our roads
- g. We need to improve conditions for vulnerable pedestrians and road users and put in place victim support systems. In this context, I should like to refer to another UN General Assembly Resolution of October 2005 designating the 3rd Sunday of November as the annual day of remembrance for victims of road traffic accidents and their families. The resolution is being given due attention by Government agencies concerned
- h. We should not only have better road traffic legislation but we should be able to enforce it. Enforcing the law is an essential part of reducing road casualties and Police has a central role in this respect

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Deputy Prime Minister has been in the forefront not only in the elaboration of the above strategy, but also in ensuring the effective implementation of road safety measures. He is determined to see a

gradual reduction of road accidents. We thank him for his valuable advice and guidance.

This morning's function is the kick off of the UN Global Safety Week in Mauritius. I take this opportunity to thank all the officers of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping, the different Government Departments, especially TMRSU, Police Road Safety Unit, Ministry of Health and Quality of Life; Ministry of Education and Human Resources and all other stakeholders, including the private sector for their wonderful teamwork which has been essential for putting up so many activities across the island this week and also in Rodrigues within the next fortnight.

I thank you for your attention.