

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

2nd Global High Level Conference on Road Safety, Brasilia 18 November 2015
Speech by Zoleka Mandela, Global Road Safety Ambassador, #SaveKidsLives Campaigner

Your Excellency President Rousseff, Director General Dr. Margaret Chan, Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

May I ask you to be upstanding as we take a moment of silence to remember those who have lost their lives on the world's roads.... Thank you.

Distinguished guests,

I am privileged to be here on behalf of civil society, as a campaigner and as a daughter of Africa. I stand here on this platform representing the victims of road traffic injury. And most importantly - I stand before you as a mother.

I come today with a simple request for you. It comes from the voices of those who have suffered at the hands of this man-made epidemic of death and injury on our roads.

As we speak here in this hall just today, out there on the roads worldwide, many thousands of people will be killed and injured. Families robbed of their loved ones. Hopes and dreams destroyed. Lives shattered.

We ask you only one thing: please, please take action. You, the governments of the world, you the international community, you have it in your power to end this crisis.

You know – and we all know - exactly what measures need to be taken. For this, is an entirely preventable epidemic.

The answers are so obvious that even a child could tell you what needs to be done. And indeed children have told us:

We have been campaigning all throughout this year under the 'Save Kids Lives' banner. This campaign involves all the partners in the UN Road Safety Collaboration. It has been led by children and they have said exactly what's needed. Six year olds told us that they needed a safe crossing to get to school; little ones said they needed child seats to keep them safe in vehicles; school kids asked for action against speeding and drink driving. Perhaps we should listen to our kids. If children find the answers self-evident, why are our leaders not doing more?

How can there be so little action? Let me tell you about my tragedy. Just over five years ago, my life was shattered. My world was destroyed. It only took seconds. My daughter, Zenani Mandela Jnr, had been a teenager for just one day. One moment, my little girl who was full of hopes and dreams and laughter was with us. And then, in the few seconds it takes to crash a car - she was gone.

You watch your children grow, you see them start to make their own lives. You never imagine it could end so suddenly.

As parents, this is our darkest fear. I can tell you that the pain and the grief is endless. It never goes away. It could happen at any time, to any one of us. None of us are immune. And this is why I am here today. I'm here because I am fighting to make sure other parents, other families, do not have to suffer as I have done. Every single day over 500 children are killed on the world's roads. Just think about it. In the last 24 hours, at least 500 families have been sentenced to despair. And the same tomorrow, and the same the day after.

This is a global epidemic which the world has ignored. It's shocking to think, and the world has barely woken up to this, but more young people aged 15 and over are killed on the roads each year than from any other cause: more than all the wars worldwide; more than TB; more than Malaria; and HIV. Yet compared with these other crises, very little is done.

We are allowing the lives of children to be destroyed on the roads. We are sentencing families to darkness. We are doing almost nothing to halt the biggest killer of our young people. We have the answers. We know exactly how to cure this epidemic. And yet, we are failing to take action. And we are failing our children.

So I stand before you at this Global High Level Conference on Road Safety on behalf of the victims, and as a mother, and I say to you:

No more empty commitments. No more delay. We are approaching five years into the Decade of Action for Road Safety. Road deaths are actually rising in nearly 70 countries. Where is the action? Where is the urgency?

At the UN in the new Global Goals, all our governments have agreed a target to halve road deaths in the next five years. This target is simple, it is powerful, and it is highly ambitious. And yet, it is also achievable.

My grandfather, Nelson Mandela knew a bit about difficult challenges. As he famously said, "it always seems impossible, until it is done". What lies in front of us may be difficult, but it is far from impossible. This is a man-made epidemic and we don't need to look very far for the means to end it.

We must use this conference to set a global agenda for the measures needed to save lives:

All new cars meeting minimum UN standards by 2020 – no excuse;

100% seatbelt and motorcycle helmet use by 2020 – no excuse;

At least three star safety on the highest risk roads by 2020 – no excuse;

Lower speeds by all schools and residential areas – no excuse;

Safe pavements and cycle lanes in all our cities – no excuse;

A safe route to school for all our children – no excuse.

We must demand that our leaders step up and take action. Surely it is time for urgency.

There can be no excuses.

We can prevent millions of deaths and injuries. But we need real political commitment and we need it now.

We can ensure families do not suffer tragedies like mine have done.

But we need real funding and support worldwide, and we need it now.

We can halt the biggest killer of our young, but we need real action, and we need it right now.

The UN targets, the targets our leaders have agreed, can be achieved. We can end this epidemic and we must. The time for empty words is surely over. Let this conference not be another talking shop, but a first real step to save lives on a global scale.

Thank you.