

Remarks Prepared for
David Strickland, Administrator
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Thank you, Dan [Smith], and good afternoon everyone. I am deeply honored to be here with you today to speak about global collaboration for vehicle safety.

As you know, at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration we focus on reducing highway fatalities in the United States and throughout the world. Our efforts to improve highway safety address a broad array of factors, including roads and infrastructure, vehicle testing, enforcement efforts, and automotive technology.

The foundation of our work is a data-driven and research-oriented focus that touches on every aspect of driving safety. We envision, and are working to create, a new safety era that revolves around emerging technologies, safe vehicle designs, and responsible driver behavior.

It has become a cliché to assert that we are living in a time of rapid and extraordinary change, but it remains true. Technological advances are enabling us to build safer, more fuel-efficient vehicles and to improve highway infrastructure.

In addition, the capacity to collect, analyze, and leverage data resources is helping leaders of advanced and developing nations to better understand the roadway challenges they face and to implement more effective safety policies.

But as we all know, global highway safety cannot assured by technology alone. We are, in fact, contending with serious discrepancies in the capacity of nations to provide safe highway infrastructure, create and enforce traffic regulations, and encourage safe behavior among drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians.

The responses to safety initiatives—such as reducing congestion and road speeds—are likely to vary widely from country to country. I have seen firsthand on the streets of Mumbai a family of six on a motorcycle, babies included. Changing that picture poses significant challenges to all of us convened here. It is our task and our calling to work together in order to aid developing and developed countries to improve the safety in individual mobility, and to support a global vehicle safety culture.

In the years ahead, we anticipate a surge in worldwide modernization and an expansion of the number of drivers and vehicles on the road. It is vital that our safety community marshal a strong, collaborative response. And as we leverage our experience to enhance traffic safety for countries in need, we must also proceed with an acute awareness of environmental, social, and cultural differences and sensitivities.

Technology transfer in this context is not easy. There are no out-of-the-box solutions.

Collaboration, more than ever, is the key to expanding the benefits of our traffic safety culture worldwide. I am convinced that we can effect this change because our international safety community shares a strong collaborative tradition.

In 2004, when World Health Day highlighted the critical impact of road safety on the daily well-being of people around the globe, our community captured the world's attention and focused a remarkable outpouring of resources on this issue.

Since 2009, our work has gained momentum through the Decade of Action of Road Safety, the first global ministerial effort dedicated to the topic of road safety. The strength of this international commitment is unprecedented; the United Nations, government organizations around the world, as well as NGOs and foundations, have begun to raise public awareness of global traffic safety to a new level.

Our potential as partners in the Decade of Action is incredible—more than five million lives, 50 million serious injuries, and \$5 trillion can be saved over the decade—and the returns will continue accumulating into the future. This is a powerful vision for global safety that we must absolutely sustain and support.

Our community has also worked tirelessly and effectively under the auspices of WP.29, with leading technical experts from 31 countries collaborating with automakers, component manufacturers, and safety standard organizations to establish global technical vehicle regulations: To keep consumers informed, to share data resources and science-based knowledge, and to minimize barriers to trade.

In the United States, progress has come through a combination of improvements—in driver behavior, the vehicle, and the roadway. Some initiatives, such as the introduction of air bags, were complex and required extensive research. Others were much easier to understand. Seat belt use alone has saved nearly 150,000 lives in the United States during the past decade. Simple initiatives can make a big difference.

Our challenge is formidable, but achievable. The United States has experienced remarkable progress in reducing roadway deaths over the past decade. The number of annual fatalities on our roads dropped by more 9,000—and the rate of traffic deaths per vehicle mile fell by nearly a third. We at the Department of Transportation played a role in this of course—but the accomplishment was due to an incredible amount of work by a broad range of constituents.

I am not here to give you a step-by-step account of our progress, but rather to tell you that ten years ago there were many people in the United States who felt that it couldn't be done. We had barriers that seemed insurmountable. But it was done and it has affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. What I am here to say is that I believe in the power of the Decade of Action. And I am convinced that your important, collaborative work here at the ESV Conference will help to achieve our vital global safety goals in the decade ahead.

I recognize that the challenges to improving road safety in other nations will be very different than those we face in the United States, in both scale and variety. I also believe that our colleagues in many nations that have experienced safety improvements themselves have much knowledge to share and can facilitate the work of nations that are just starting down this path.

We are still learning how to work across a variety of governmental structures, roadway infrastructures, and often-competing health care priorities. It is important to remember that introducing changes out of context can produce unintended consequences that undermine the safety benefits we all want to see.

For example, there are fundamental differences between the character of a transportation system in which 70 to 80 percent of vehicles are two-wheelers than that of a system with 95 percent four-wheelers. The reasons behind these differences are embedded deeply in the environment, economics, and culture.

Our global road safety mission requires sensitivity and care, and I believe it also requires a vision. Let me tell you about mine.

I am looking forward to expanded global partnerships in research and policy that focus our best minds worldwide on the toughest roadway safety problems and bring economies of scale to the development and deployment of countermeasures.

We need to continue to improve the crashworthiness of vehicles and develop advanced safety systems such as vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-infrastructure communications that support the driver and can even help avoid a crash from happening.

Technology is critical, but we also know that driver error is a factor in approximately 90 percent of crashes in the United States. So our dedication to programs that help drivers make the right decisions needs to be stronger than ever.

Driving while impaired by drugs or alcohol or while distracted, driving too fast or without wearing a seatbelt, are decisions that are within a driver's control. We know that we can change this behavior through education, strong laws, and enforcement—but we need more effective and efficient methods for building local commitment to get the job done.

NHTSA is now engaged in a number of productive partnerships that provide meaningful international assistance. Of course, we work through the United Nations System—through our long-term partners at the UNECE and through the World Health Organization and the World Bank—and with many others. We have focused on best practices that can be offered to nations looking for evidence-based strategies. We have fostered the development of international standards to ensure a common level of vehicle and equipment safety performance.

We have focused in particular on traffic safety data system development. The experience of the U.S. and many other nations has shown that the best way to approach traffic safety is through a systematic, science-based approach similar to the public health model of injury prevention. It includes: Collecting/analyzing data to determine the nature and scope of the problem; developing and testing approaches to address the problems; delivering interventions; and evaluating the implemented programs

Data collection and analysis are unquestionably fundamental to understanding and addressing traffic safety problems in countries around the world.

In 2009, NHTSA conducted a pilot training program to help nations implement the types of data systems described in the new Data System manual developed in partnership with the WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control, along with support from the Make Roads Safe Foundation and the Global Road Safety Partnership. Representatives of Argentina, India, Indonesia,

Jordan, Kenya, and Vietnam participated in the pilot. Last year, we conducted regional data conference in Vietnam.

this fall. Participants learned to improve and strengthen the collection and evaluation of traffic and road safety data systems in their own countries. They also learned how to leverage data to create, develop, and implement effective traffic safety policies.

Our community—including ESV and many international colleagues engaged in highway safety research, as well as partner nations committed to the UN Decade of Action—understands the challenges and rewards of reducing highway fatalities for the benefit of those who will soon see an expansion of personal motorized travel. I look forward to working with all of you to advance the vision of a safer and more secure transportation future throughout the world.