

Zoleka Mandela Speech
1st General Assembly of the African Road Safety Observatory 27 June 2019

Good morning.

Your Excellencies, Ministers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen ...

I would like to invite you all to please stand and to observe a moment of silence in memory of all the children who have tragically lost their innocent lives as a result of road traffic injury. Thank you.

I'd like to start by thanking the Government of South Africa for hosting this conference that is long overdue. I would also like to pay tribute to all the partners for launching this vital initiative: The African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the World Bank and SSATP, the International Transport Forum, the FIA as well as the FIA Foundation.

Thank you all for an initiative we so urgently need on our continent. Your work is so vital, and what I want to say today is that it desperately needs to be strengthened and expanded. As we launch the African Road Safety Observatory, that the people of Africa for whom this will serve, need to be at the very top of our minds.

Please allow me to use this platform to address you as a daughter of Africa but most importantly, as a mother. I am a mother advocating for the safety of our children following the tragic passing of my daughter who was killed by a drunk driver. As a mother standing here, I represent the thousands upon thousands of families who are suffering as a result of an easy to deal with plague, road traffic injury.

There are millions and millions on our continent who have become victims, add to that the millions and millions who grieve for those they have lost from this most preventable epidemic. So on their behalf, I bring a strong message to the Governments and to all the experts here today. I urge you to please give your full support to this Observatory, to make it as strong a platform as possible to address road traffic injury because there are families across Africa, there are lives of countless men, women and children, who depend on all your efforts. Road traffic injury is an epidemic that we are failing to adequately confront in this century and far, far too little action is being taken. The reality is that we have put up with 'business as usual' for too long and now we need renewed efforts and fresher energy.

Back in 2015 I was given the privilege of opening the Second Global High Level Ministerial on Road Safety in Brasilia and I remember standing in front of Ministers from around the world, calling for a response and asking Governments to stop making excuses.

I called for urgent action on basic safety measures, key measures such as:

- All new cars meeting minimum UN safety standards,
- 100% seatbelt and motorcycle helmet wearing,
- At least 3-Star safety on the highest risk roads,
- Safe streets in all our cities,
- A safe journey to school for all our children.

We cannot ignore the issue of data – we know that the effectiveness of all actions like these that I have mentioned essentially depend on good data.

What has happened since Brasilia? More than three years on, far too little progress has been made and the roads on our continent remain the most dangerous in the world. In far too many African countries, casualties are on the rise and in many countries, we don't even know the exact toll of death and injury on our roads. All around us enforcement and implementation are inadequate. Our roads are clearly unsafe and we are experiencing an increase of road building.

Billions of dollars are being spent on new roads across Africa but little is being spent on protecting the actual people who use these roads. Each day, roads that are being laid, lack basic safety measures so if there's a crash, instead of being protected, you will be punished with an avoidable death sentence. As Africans we really must ask ourselves, do our brothers and sisters deserve this?

What is most unforgivable, is the millions of children who are exposed every day on the roads. We fail to provide them with a safe journeys to school. Do we really have to continuously sacrifice the lives of innocent people, of our innocent children while we develop our continent? Are we not living in the 21st century, surely we can all agree that we must be able to find a better way.

As a mother, I would like our Ministers, Mayors, heads of agencies here in Africa to look their own families in the eye and explain how keeping them safe is not a priority to you. As a mother, I would like to say to our leaders, that you need look your own children in the eye and tell them they cannot be protected from high speed traffic on their way to school. Ask yourselves, will you continue to turn your cheek until your child is injured or killed, like my child, like all the children who are tragically killed or face serious injury every?

This is a very personal issue for me. My own daughter, my Zenani Mandela Jnr, was killed on a Johannesburg road by a drunk driver in 2010. She had only just turned 13 and had barely been a teenager for 48 hours. This year, she would have been 22 years old. This year would have been her final year in university and somewhere overseas where she would have liked to study but Zenani's not with her peers and preparing for her graduation, she lies in a grave in between my late grandmother and my late son because of a deadly crime – drink driving. Zenani's death was preventable. All of the suffering on our roads is preventable.

In my campaign work with the Child Health Initiative and FIA Foundation we have launched a project in one of South Africa's poorest communities – Khayelitsha in the Western Cape. In Khayelitsha you see the kids by the road each morning, five and six year olds with their brothers and sisters, all terrified to cross the road as the traffic bears down on them at 80 km/h. Early in the morning, you see them, trying to cross in the dark, taking their lives into their own hands because the safety of our African children is not a priority. I was in Gaborone, Botswana last week and it's a similar story there – children exposed to the risk of death and injury on the journey to school and all they are doing is striving to receive an education.

This is a daily story that is repeated throughout Africa, and it really does not need to be this way. Not when the answer is quite simple. Our children, our little ones, hundreds of them walking to school each day, should never have to face traffic at more than 30 km/h. A speed that is faster than 30km/h is a death sentence. For the sake of our children, low speeds are non-negotiable and we must implement them.

In several countries we are working with our partners Amend and iRAP to give children a safe journey to school with road infrastructure that will actually save lives. We're working hard to turn the situation around in Botswana, in Zambia, in Morocco and many other African countries. What we're showing is something both very powerful, and perhaps something that ought to be a little embarrassing for our leaders. We have the solutions and they are as simple as a safe crossing, a footpath, or a speed hump. Our young people should not be killed and injured on the roads.

The question we ask our policy makers is, will you implement these very simple solutions or are you willing to fail our children? Will you ensure that every single child has a safe journey to school no matter where they live?

The next year is so crucial as 2020 marks the end of the Decade of Action for Road Safety, and a point where we must assess the Sustainable Development Goal agenda on road safety. Governments of the world will gather in Sweden at the start of 2020 to ask what we have achieved and what we must do. So, from now until then we must send them a strong message because our leaders must step up their action. We call upon them to make commitments to make our streets safe and healthy for all.

If we are honest with ourselves, we've had a need for the initiative we are discussing today for many, many years and really, this African Road Safety Observatory is so important that it should be given much more of a priority and much more support by the international community. I urge donors to please support initiatives like this one and to support the United Nations Road Safety Trust Fund.

It's time for plain speaking, and it's time for action. It's time for the international community to get its house in order. There is a clear path ahead:

The Third Global Ministerial in Sweden must be an indication of real action over the next 10 years to achieve the SDG agenda on road safety. From now to 2020 we must push Governments here in Africa and worldwide to make commitments and following that, we need Governments at the highest level to build on this - to reverse the neglect, to commit and follow through on a programme to combat the big health burdens for older children and adolescents because it seriously makes no sense that the world's big strategy for children, known as 'Every Woman, Every Child', is delivering nothing to combat the biggest killer of adolescents. Billions of dollars are spent on women's and children's health and rightly so but barely 1% of this is targeted at adolescents - and an even smaller fraction is allocated on road traffic injury which is the biggest killer globally of our young people.

We are facing a major but preventable epidemic. We lack data, and we lack the political will and we lack the financing. We are simply failing to mount an effective response and as a mother and an African woman, I say enough. We are calling for a High-Level Summit for Adolescents, I believe that this is a focal point to drive the change that is desperately needed for our next generation and I call upon the Governments who are assembled here today to please support this initiative.



For too long we have sat back and accepted the man-made epidemics taking place right in front of us and now is the time to reclaim the agenda and to say: This is My Street, this is the future we want. For our families, our children and the next generation we surely must not fail.

Thank you.

