



Iraq committed to improving road safety Baghdad, 11 May 2011

Iraq launches the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020 and pledges to reduce the level of road traffic fatalities by 2020.

“Road traffic crashes rank as one of the leading causes of mortality in Iraq. About 75 000 lives were lost during the period 1979–2005 due to road traffic crashes. In 2005, despite the restrictions on movement in place due to the security situation in Iraq, still there were 1789 deaths caused by road traffic crashes,” said H.E the Minister of Health in Iraq, Dr Majid Hamad Amin. Adding that, “Although road traffic injuries are a major public health problem, it has been viewed in public health traditionally as an 'accident' and as a random event that happens to others. Such events are looked upon as an inevitable outcome of road transport.

The Iraq Ministry of Health 2009 Annual Report revealed that in Iraq, the injury toll from road accidents is almost four times greater than that from acts of terrorism. H.E Dr Majid affirmed that, “The time is right to shape our future - comprehensive laws should be in place and more collaboration and cooperation is needed to endorse the Decade of Action for Road Safety programme and start the implementation process of a national plan that would involve many sectors: transport, health, education, communications, and across many types of institutions to prevent the growing number of road accidents, save lives and strengthen the services provided for road accident victims.”

Dr Taher Hawrami, the Minister of Health in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq stressed that road safety has become a major national health objective and said “Further development of road infrastructure and traffic regulation is key to saving human lives and promoting economic development.”

The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Interior with the full cooperation of WHO marked the day to launch the Decade of Action for Road Safety at the Ministries of Health in Baghdad and Kurdistan Region in the presence of hundreds of delegates representing the Iraq Parliament, related ministries, academic institutions, civil society and media representatives.

The WHO Representative in Iraq Dr Syed Jaffer Hussain informed that the Decade of Action for Road Safety from 2011-2020 is the result of UN General Assembly Resolution and stated that “It outlines steps towards improving the safety of roads and vehicles, enhancing emergency services, and building up road safety management.” He explained further that it also calls for increased legislation and enforcement on using helmets, seatbelts and child restraints and avoiding speeding while driving. WHO will play a role in coordinating global efforts over the Decade and will monitor progress towards achieving the objectives of the Decade at the national and international levels. He emphasized that “Road traffic injuries and the resultant deaths and disabilities is a major and has been a neglected public health challenge that requires concerted efforts for effective and sustainable prevention. Of all the systems with which people have to deal with every day, road traffic systems are the most complex and the most dangerous.

However, in the recent years, WHO and other UN partners have been able to position the issue a grave public health concern and push it high on global political agendas. That is why the role that is enshrined for the Ministries of Health in the UN General Assembly Resolution is very crucial. In order for the countries to effectively respond to this growing public health burden, the Organization seeks through its publications to support national health strategies and address the most pressing public health concerns of populations around the world. To respond to the needs of the Member States at all levels of development, WHO publishes practical manuals, handbooks and training material for specific categories of health workers; internationally applicable guidelines and standards; reviews and analyses of health policies, programmes and research and state-of-the-art consensus reports that offer technical advice and recommendations for decision-makers

“Everyone can play a part to bring about change and prevent unnecessary deaths and injuries due to road traffic accidents”. Dr Jaffer further added that with the high level of political commitment, the implementation of good practices and the collaboration of various stakeholders

of society towards the creation of a culture of safety first, this goal can well be achieved.

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