7 May 2019 – The Fifth United Nations Global Road Safety Week, under the theme “Leadership for road safety”, is taking place from 6 to 12 May 2019. This major worldwide campaign was requested by the United Nations General Assembly in April 2018 in resolution A/72/271 on improving global road safety.

Road safety continues to be a grave public health and development issue globally and in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The Global status report on road safety 2018 shows that road traffic crashes claim approximately 1.35 million lives across the world every year. An additional
20–50 million people are injured annually, with many sustaining permanent disabilities.

Road safety cannot be improved without sound leadership. Leadership is essential to achieve road safety targets, including Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 3.6: to reduce road traffic deaths and injuries by 50% and SDG target 11.2: to provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all.

Leadership at all levels of society is key to driving change, raising awareness and generating demand among all stakeholders. That means parliamentarians improving laws; mayors making their cities safe for walking and cycling; headteachers calling for speed limits and sidewalks around their schools; and parents becoming role models for their children. Young people can also take the lead by advocating for safer behaviours among their peers and safer systems to support such behaviours.

Road traffic injury prevention and control is a public health priority for WHO at the regional level, and a key part of the Organization’s new vision for the Region, Vision 2023, which calls for solidarity and action to achieve the ultimate goal of Health for All by All.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region accounts for almost 10% of global road traffic deaths. The Region has the third highest road traffic death rate among WHO regions. Over 50% of these deaths are among vulnerable road users: pedestrians, motorcyclists and cyclists. Road traffic injury is the eighth leading cause of death among all ages in the Region and the second leading cause of death among adolescents and young adults aged 15–29, after collective violence.

Road traffic injuries and deaths are largely preventable through the adoption of a Safe System approach to address different aspects of road safety and the implementation of evidence-based interventions that have proven successful in many countries. Along this line, the WHO Save LIVES technical package calls for action to address speed management, leadership, infrastructure design and improvement, vehicle safety standards, enforcement of traffic laws and post-crash survival.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, leadership solutions undertaken by countries include establishing an agency to spearhead road safety, developing a road safety strategy, evaluating the impact of road safety strategies, harmonizing and improving road traffic injury data, and
raising awareness and public support.

To demonstrate its leadership in road safety, WHO has developed a comprehensive, Road Safety and Vehicle Management Policy. The policy aims to ensure that WHO vehicles are operated safely to reduce the risk of road traffic crashes and that its fleet is professionally managed. Among many other initiatives planned during Road Safety Week, WHO offices including the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean will host various activities to support implementation of the policy.

Leadership for road safety will be an important theme during the Third Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety, to be hosted by the Government of Sweden in Stockholm on 19–20 February 2020. Country delegates from concerned sectors such as transport, health and the interior will review progress in the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020 and agree urgent steps to accelerate action to achieve global road safety targets.

Global Road Safety Week 2019 is a milestone event towards achieving global road safety goals. It is a unique opportunity to renew global commitment to work actively towards saving the thousands of lives that are lost on the roads every day.
WHO fact sheet on road traffic injuries

WHO web site on road traffic injuries

SaveLIVES: a road safety technical package

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