ROAD TRAFFIC ACCIDENT STATISTICS

Note by the Secretary-General

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Introduction

The attention of the members of the Transport and Communications Commission and the Statistical Commission is drawn to the international interest which exists with respect to unification of road traffic accident statistics. The problem was studied before the war on a world-wide basis by the League of Nations. The question has also been taken up on a regional basis in several parts of the world. Thus the Fourth Pan American Highway Congress which met in Mexico City in 1941, adopted a resolution calling for unification of such statistics in the Americas. This has not as yet been implemented. The Sub-Committee on Road Transport of the Economic Commission for Europe in 1950 set up a Working Party on the Prevention of Road Accidents which has made certain proposals based on the work of the League of Nations. Finally, the Ad Hoc Committee on Inland Transport, convened by the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, and which met in Bangkok in October 1950, adopted a resolution recommending the establishment of an ad hoc working party of experts on highway safety, which should consider, inter alia, the problem of accident statistics.

Meanwhile the Secretary-General of the World Touring and Automobile Organization (CIA),\(^1\) in a letter to the United Nations Secretariat (see annex), has drawn attention to the work undertaken by the ECE and to the desirability of reaching agreement on this matter on a world-wide basis.

League of Nations and ECE activities in this connexion are summarized below.

League of Nations

The Advisory and Technical Committee for Communications and Transit of the League of Nations in 1935 took up the question of road traffic accident statistics on the recommendation of a number of interested organizations, e.g., the International Red Cross Committee, the League of Red Cross Societies, the International Association of Recognized Automobile Clubs. The Committee for the Unification of Statistics Relating to Road Traffic Accidents was established in 1935 under the auspices of the Advisory and Technical Committee.

\(^1\)/ Composed of the International Touring Alliance and the International Automobile Federation.
The Secretariat of the League of Nations prepared for the Committee of Experts a memorandum \(^1\) based on information received from the Governments of forty-six countries to a questionnaire on particulars concerning the existence of statistics, classification of statistics or records regarding the nature of accidents, the types of vehicles involved, causes and circumstances of accidents and their consequences.

The Committee completed its work in 1937. It made detailed recommendations concerning the compilation of statistics, prepared a list of data which should be obtained, drew up a model statistical form to be used for recording particulars of accidents and also drew up statistical tables for the completion of annual statistics relating to the number of accidents, number of persons killed or injured, the number of vehicles involved and the nature of the accidents, the circumstances and causes of accidents. The Committee considered that its recommendations should be put into effect as soon as possible. \(^2\) The Advisory and Technical Committee at its twentieth session, in September 1937, adopted the conclusions of the experts and requested that the Council communicate the report to Governments "in order that these should in future draw up their statistics on the subject in accordance with the recommendations and tables annexed to the report, and should inform the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, before December 31, 1940, of any experience they may have gained and of any other observations they might see fit to make." \(^3\) The texts in question were communicated to the Governments in December 1937. During 1938 and 1939 the Secretariat received several replies but due to the war no further information was received with regard to any experience gained by Governments. \(^4\)

**Economic Commission for Europe**

The Working Party on the Prevention of Road Accidents of the ECE Sub-Committee on Road Transport at its first session in December 1950 \(^5\) had before it the replies of sixteen European Governments and the United States of America.

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to a questionnaire concerning, inter alia, the maintenance, publication, and analysis of accident statistics. The replies indicated that accurately comparable road accident statistics were not available and that various differences existed as regards definitions and items included in these statistics.\(^1\)

The Working Party agreed on definitions of the terms: "accident", "death", "serious injuries", "minor injuries", "material damage", as follows:

"For the purposes of international statistics on road accidents an accident shall mean any accident to a road user on a road open to public traffic which causes death (1), injury (2), or material damage (3), provided that a vehicle (including bicycles with or without engine) or an animal, whether in motion or not, is involved.

(1) Death
A person shall be considered as being killed in an accident if his death is a result of the accident and occurs within 30 days.

(2) Serious injuries
Fractures, concussion, internal lesions, crushing, severe cuts and laceration, severe general shock requiring medical treatment and any other lesions entailing hospitalization.

Minor injuries
Secondary injuries such as sprains or bruises. Persons complaining of shock, but who have not sustained other injuries, should not be included in the statistics unless they show very clear symptoms of shock, have received medical treatment or appeared to require medical attention.

(3) Material damage
Material damage for which a statistical form must be completed shall be considered to mean any damage the repair of which entails an expenditure of more than 200 Swiss francs, it being understood that accidents causing material damage only may not necessitate the completion of such a form."

The following statistical tables designed to show the circumstances in which accidents occur were adopted:

\(^1\) ECE document TRANS/WP.20/3, Restricted.
1. Number of Accidents,
2. Number of Persons killed or injured,
3. Analysis of Vehicles Involved,
4. Nature of Accident,
5. Accidents by Months,
6. Accidents Classified According to Day of Week,
7. Accidents Classified According to Hour of Day,
8. Age of Drivers and Pedestrians Directly Involved in the Accident,
9. Accidents Analyzed to Indicate the Features of the Road and the Nature of the Accident.

These tables are based on those adopted by the League of Nations Committee for the Unification of Statistics Relating to Road Transport Accidents. The Working Party took account of suggestions of the Permanent International Association of Road Congresses, which had previously co-operated in the League of Nations' study. Tables showing the causes of accidents are to be considered at a later session.

**Communication from the Secretary-General of the OTA**

Attention is drawn to the fact that the letter from the Secretary-General of the OTA, annexed to this paper, suggests that action be taken by United Nations bodies in two respects.

Thus in the first place the letter stresses the importance of the initiative of the ECE in taking up the question of standardization of road accident statistics and emphasizes the need to carry out such standardization not only in Europe but amongst as many countries as possible. The OTA suggests, therefore, that consideration be given to steps which could be taken by the competent bodies of the United Nations, be it the Transport and Communications Commission or the Statistical Commission or both, to ensure that the work being undertaken in Europe form the basis of a world-wide understanding.

In the second place the letter draws attention to the establishment by OTA of an international road safety information centre, and states that the support of the United Nations by recognition in one form or another of the general usefulness of the OTA's initiative in the field of international co-operation for the prevention of road accidents would facilitate the quick development of the activities of the international information centre.

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ANNEX

Letter from the Secretary-General of the
World Touring and Automobile Organization

London
January 1st, 1951

Sir,

I should like to refer to the work on road safety initiated by the Economic Commission for Europe.

As you are well aware, the study of this most important subject has been entrusted by the Sub-Committee on Road Transport of the Economic Commission to a special Working Party on the Prevention of Road Accidents.

Amongst the items discussed at the first session of the Working Party figures the standardisation of road accident statistics. Discussion on this subject led to some definite proposals being put forward by the Working Party. Definitions of the concepts "road accident", "death", "serious injuries", "minor injuries", "material damage" were agreed upon, and several amendments to the twelve statistical tables prepared by the Committee for the Unification of Statistics relating to Road Traffic Accidents of the League of Nations, have been adopted.

The World Touring and Automobile Organisation (OTA) considers this initiative to be of the utmost importance from the point of view of road safety. We are of the opinion that international cooperation in the field of road safety will greatly contribute to facilitate work on the prevention of road accidents in all countries and increase its effectiveness.

We realise that such cooperation requires a standardisation of statistics, so that data given by different countries can be compared. We are therefore particularly happy that work on this problem has been started amongst European countries.

As a World Organisation, the OTA considers, however, that a great opportunity would be lost if agreement on this very important matter were to be sought between European countries only. European countries, including the USSR which, to our knowledge, does not at present participate in the activities of the Working Party mentioned above, represent some 18.7% of all cars in circulation. It is essential that non-European countries should participate in a general standardisation of road accident statistics, so as to broaden the field of research.
research and increase the amount of available information. We should like to stress that even if the United States of America, who participate in the work of the Economic Commission for Europe, adopted the scheme for standardising road accident statistics which it is the task of the European Working Party to prepare - this would still leave outside any international agreement many countries as deeply interested in the development or road safety measures and as active in this field, as among others: South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Latin American countries, India and the countries of the Middle East.

We feel that, if full benefit is to be drawn from international cooperation on the prevention of road accidents, such cooperation should be as broad as possible, and that consequently standardisation of road accident statistics, which is an essential prerequisite to cooperation, should be achieved amongst as many countries as possible.

I have the honour to suggest therefore, in the name of the World Touring and Automobile Organisation, that you be kind enough to consider what steps could be taken by the competent bodies of the United Nations, be it the Transport and Communications Commission or the Statistical Commission or both, to ensure that the most important and useful work being undertaken in Europe form the basis of a world-wide understanding, which alone can result in all participating countries obtaining the full benefit of their cooperation.

I should like to avail myself of this opportunity to mention another aspect of international cooperation in the field of road accident prevention. At the suggestion of the Government of the United Kingdom, the Geneva Working Party proposed to recommend that the various countries engaged in research on road accidents prevention should be in direct contact with one another with a view to exchanging information.

It was also agreed that details of any further measures introduced in any one State should be circulated among other States, through the machinery of the Economic Commission for Europe.

The World Touring and Automobile Organisation is of the opinion that the suggestion of the United Kingdom goes a long way to answering a pressing and essential requirement.

Considering that one of the OTA's tasks is the promotion of road safety, the World Organisation has already taken the initiative of establishing an international road safety information centre. Such a centre has been deemed necessary
necessary not only to simplify the technical aspect of the proper distribution of information, but also, because it has been considered useful to have an office to which requests for specific information pertaining to road safety could be directed. This centre, employing road safety experts, will also prepare and publish comparative studies.

The information centre, attached to the General Secretariat of the OTA in London will be ready to service any national organisation or agency, whether private, semi-private or governmental, interested in road safety. A great number of such organisations are, of course, affiliated to international Associations members of the OTA. It would keep in close touch with the United Nations Secretariat, as a matter of course.

In the accomplishment of this task, which the World Touring and Automobile Organisation (OTA) deems highly important and beneficial to all countries, the support of the United Nations would be a very considerable help. Although the provisions of point 31 of the rules relating to consultation with non-governmental organisations might not be considered applicable in this case, the recognition, in one form or another, of the general usefulness of the OTA's initiative in the field of international cooperation for the prevention of road accidents, would certainly facilitate to a very considerable extent the quick development of the activities of the international information centre.

I should be very obliged, if you would kindly consider whether and in what manner, support could be given by the United Nations, in order to encourage international cooperation in the field of road accident prevention.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

(signed) M. Perlowski
M.H. PERŁOWSKI
Secretary-General

B. Lukan, Esq.,
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TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Fifth session
Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Sixth session

ROAD TRAFFIC ACCIDENT STATISTICS

Supplementary Note by the Secretary-General

In addition to the information in document E/CN.2/113 and E/CN.3/118 concerning the work of the League of Nations in the field of standardization of accident statistics, and that of the ECE Inland Transport Committee based on the work of the League, the attention of the Transport and Communications Commission and of the Statistical Commission is drawn to the fact that the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries, and Causes of Death,\(^1\) adopted 24 July 1948 by the First World Health Assembly classified and defines *inter alia* injuries and deaths resulting from road traffic accidents. Regulations governing the application by Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) of the classification and definitions relating thereto were issued at the same time and came into force on 1 January 1950. According to the Regulations, Member Governments shall compile and publish mortality and morbidity statistics in accordance with the International Statistical Classification unless they notified the Director General of WHO before 24 July 1949 of rejection of, or of reservations to, the Regulations.

This is brought to the attention of the Commissions because of its bearing on any work which may be undertaken with a view to the standardization of road accident statistics. The purposes of the standardization of road transport accident statistics as undertaken by the League of Nations Committee for the

Unification of Road Traffic Statistics and by the ECE Inland Transport Committee, and as provided by the International Statistical Classification are somewhat different as the former are concerned more particularly with the manner in which road accidents happen and with their prevention whereas the latter is concerned with showing the extent of loss of human life and damage to health resulting from road accidents. However, despite this difference in purpose, it would appear to be essential to avoid differences in definition and classification which would result in divergent statistics.

The problem of avoiding divergence in statistics compiled with these different purposes was recognized by the League of Nations Committee for the Unification of Road Traffic Statistics which made the following recommendation:¹/

"9. The Committee recommends that countries which do not yet apply the scheme of classification of accidental deaths contained in the International Convention on the Nomenclature of Causes of Death, signed at Paris on October 19th, 1929, should adopt this system, and that the road accident statistics outlined above should be accompanied, if possible, by statistics of deaths due to means of transport, compiled according to this scheme."

Since then the International Convention of 1929 has been superseded by WHO "Nomenclature Regulations 1948" which also contain mandatory provisions for compiling and publishing statistics of injuries resulting from accidents.

It would appear, therefore, that any work undertaken in the field of road accident statistics should be carried on in close consultation with the WHO.

¹/ LON document C.276.M.179.1937.VIII.