

Guest View

Mark L. Rosenberg



Dr. Mark Rosenberg is Director of the Global Road Safety Forum, a programme of the Task Force for Global Health. He also serves as President and CEO of the Task Force, a non-profit public health organization working to build coalitions to promote global health and human development. Prior to leading the Task Force, Dr. Rosenberg served 20 years with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including early work in smallpox eradication, enteric diseases, and HIV/AIDS. He was instrumental in establishing CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) and became the first permanent director in 1994, serving as Director and Assistant Surgeon General until 1999.

Dr. Rosenberg has done research and consulted widely – with the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Bank – on effective collaboration in global health, and is the lead author of *Real Collaboration: What Global Health Needs to Succeed* (2009). Dr. Rosenberg is a member of the Institute of Medicine, where he served seven years on the Board on Global Health. He was also co-editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Injury Control and Safety Promotion*.

Dr. Rosenberg was educated at Harvard University, where he received his undergraduate degree as well as degrees in public policy and medicine. He completed a residency in internal medicine and a fellowship in infectious diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital, a residency in psychiatry at the Boston Beth Israel Hospital, and a residency in preventive medicine at the CDC.

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ISO Focus: What are the objectives of the Global Road Safety Forum?

Dr. Rosenberg: The Global Road Safety Forum (GRSF) is a programme of the Task Force for Global Health, a non-government organization located in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. With the ultimate goal of saving lives and turning around an epidemic that threatens to kill 75 million people by 2050, the GRSF has worked in the role of advocate, facilitator, and convener of global and regional partnerships and forums on road safety. GRSF helped to bring road safety to the attention of

the United Nations (UN) and helped to organize two sessions of the UN General Assembly focusing on this issue.

In 2008, the UN General Assembly passed a historic resolution calling for the first ever global ministerial conference on road safety in Moscow, Russia, in November 2009. GRSF also worked to help Latin American and Caribbean countries to collaborate to stop this epidemic, and has brought together stakeholders in the region for three Stakeholders Forums on Road Safety.

GRSF also works to build capacity for road safety at the country level, and is working to improve the safety of children on the roads of Uruguay, and explore ways to help build the technical and managerial capacity of developing country governments' lead agency for road safety.

From its inception, the GRSF aims to generate widespread demand for road safety, build political will, and mobilize the resources needed to respond to the global epidemic of road traffic injuries and deaths. It does this through building coalitions, working closely with the UN General Assembly, WHO, UNICEF, UN Development Programme, the World Bank, foundations, non-government agencies, and the private sector. In 2008, the GRSF decided to focus more on regional- and national-level coalitions and let the UN Road Safety Collaboration (UNRSC) take the lead in organizing road safety forums at the global level.

The UNRSC has undertaken several initiatives, including developing a series of manuals on good practice; creating a web-based database on road safety legislation; completing and updating a series of resolutions on road traffic signs and signals adapted in the European region; following-up on regional stakeholder meetings; and establishing of an annual World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims.

ISO Focus: Over 90% of the deaths in road accidents occur in low-income and middle-income countries, which are also hardest hit by the financial pressure resulting from road traffic crashes. To what extent does enacting and enforcing appropriate legislation contribute to decreasing the considerable economic and social costs caused by road traffic crashes? What is your opinion on this, in terms of both developing and developed countries? Can you please comment on the benefits of International Standards?

Dr. Rosenberg: Our biggest threat in road safety is not from people who speed, not from people who drive drunk, and not from pedestrians who are not careful where they are going. Our biggest threat is from fatalism, the sense that nothing can be done to prevent road traffic deaths and injuries, the sense that these are just a part of life that



When residents of Nairobi's huge slum, Kibera, leave the slum for work in the city they must cross multiple lane highways with no provisions for safe pedestrian crossing.

will inevitably increase as a country becomes more and more motorized. In fact, we know that this is not true. For this reason, we try never to use the word “accident” because accident implies that a collision or injury was completely unpredictable, and if it is not predictable then it is not preventable so why even try to prevent these injuries and deaths?

“90% of the fatalities are in poor and middle income nations.”

We believe that road traffic deaths are both predictable and preventable. For this reason, we should no longer call them accidents. To emphasize that point, we developed a fine system for getting rid of the word accident: whenever someone uses it, we fine them a dollar. It used to be just 25 cents but the cost has gone up.

But this fine system alone won't bring about the changes that we need. It



A woman getting ready to run across the highway with a baby strapped to her back. There are no provisions for pedestrians to cross.

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has been demonstrated many times over that the right policies and legislation, if rigorously enacted and enforced over a sustained period, can prevent road traffic injuries. Enforcement of speed limits and rules against drinking and driving, enforcement of helmet and seat belt laws, and policies for safe roadway construction all have helped to reduce the social and economic costs of road traffic crashes and injuries. This has been demonstrated in both developed and developing countries.



First UN Stakeholders Global Road Safety Forum at the UN, New York City, April 2004.

One of the most dramatic and impressive demonstrations of this has been the impact of Sweden's Vision Zero. It has demonstrated that a concerted effort that addresses the whole road safety system can both predict and prevent road traffic crashes.

About 35 years ago, there were 137 children killed on the roads in Sweden; four years ago there were 11; three years ago there was one. The important question for us is how do we describe the types of policies and standards, the kind of system management that brought this about. If we could translate these into a set of International Standards that could be used by developing and developed countries alike, they could avoid having to reinvent the wheel and save many lives.

ISO Focus: *By 2015, road crashes will be the leading cause of death for children aged 5-14 in the developing world. What are some of today's major obstacles towards road safety becoming a mainstream development issue? What role could ISO standards play in overcoming some of these obstacles?*

Dr. Rosenberg: There are a number of reasons why road safety does not get onto the agenda of most development agencies.

First, it primarily affects developing countries – 90% of the fatalities are in poor and middle income nations. What happens in these places happens out of the sight of the developed countries. In addition, the developed countries are actually doing better and better in terms of reducing road traffic injuries and deaths, and when this happens the people in these countries tend to forget about this problem.

Second, road traffic injuries happen one or two at a time, thus not drawing the kind of attention that would be given to the crash of a jumbo jet with 300 people on board – even in a country like India where there may be as many as 700 deaths per day – equivalent to two jumbo jets.

Third, we have inadequate metric systems to accurately quantify the problem; estimates in many countries are as much as ten times too low. The lack of reliable metrics also hampers our ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of our interventions.

Fourth, in many developing countries the majority of the victims are frequently vulnerable road users, very often those too poor to have cars, and bilateral aid agencies and governments currently do not take the needs of the urban poor into account in their infrastructure development strategies; instead they are focused on improving motorized transport and often ignore the impact of new roads on the vulnerable road users. Their approach to building roads assumes the majority of road users are using motorized transport.

In Kenya, where we have been looking at this problem in more detail, the majority of road traffic victims are pedestrians and users of non-motorized transport, the urban poor looking for and

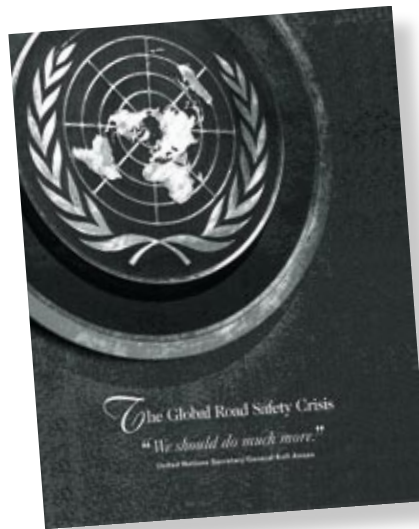
going to and from their work. The lack of attention paid to their needs not only results in needless deaths and injuries but also in a vicious circle of poverty where the costs are borne by families of the victims who are most frequently the family's wage earner.

Fifth, we are fatalistic and have become anesthetized, thinking that there is nothing that can be done, that road traffic incidents are just "accidents," just a part of development – the price of mobility we all must bear.

"We must take all road users into account, pedestrians, as well as drivers, poor as well as rich."

Sixth, the issue of safety falls through the cracks and no one ministry takes ownership of road safety. Most people assume that road safety "belongs" to the ministry of transport, but the priority for the ministry of transport is usually road construction and their goal is to move more goods and vehicles farther and faster. They are usually busy with this and don't have time for safety. When a transport ministry does pay attention to safety it is usually air safety, or railroad safety, or maritime safety – areas where governments often perceive a collective governmental responsibility; not road safety where the responsibility for safety is usually put onto individual drivers and road users. Sometimes when a ministry of transport does have responsibility for road safety, it is limited to developing policies, not enforcing them.

Ministries of roads usually focus on building more roads or repairing damaged roads, not building safe roads or upgrading old roads to make them safer. Police pay more attention to catching criminals and preventing violence than to catching traffic violators. And ministries of health these days have their hands full taking care of the infectious diseases – including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria – that have traditionally been the main



Front cover of the Global Road Safety Forum Report from the First UN General Assembly meeting on the global road safety crisis and the First UN Global Road Safety Stakeholders' Forum.



The 1st Latin America and Caribbean Stakeholders' Forum on Global Road Safety held in San José, from left, **Karla Gonzalez**, Costa Rican Minister of Transport; **Oscar Arias Sánchez**, President of Costa Rica; and **Mark Rosenberg**, Director of Global Road Safety Forum.

focus of public health; they don't have time to take on a problem that, initially at least, seems to be under the control of other ministries.

Seventh, and finally, all of these obstacles have an effect on politicians – always faced with many competing priorities – that keeps them from seeing the road safety issue as an issue they want to commit to and lead. Without political will, the issue does not rise high on the development agenda.

ISO standards that are backed by data and evidence can help to overcome every one of these obstacles. Coming with evidence of effectiveness, they can help bring attention to the problem as a solvable problem, with solutions that can work in developing as well as developed nations.

International Standards suggest that the collection and analysis of road safety data are an integral part of any road safety system, and that even if they occur one or two at a time, we know how to and must track these events; and we must do this accurately if we want to be able to improve our systems.

International Standards make it clear that we must take all road users into account pedestrians, as well as drivers, poor as well as rich. Standards, and the results that they have helped to achieve in countries like Sweden, show that they can be incredibly effective.

What could be stronger proof that road traffic deaths don't have to happen than the accomplishments of Vision Zero? To translate the developments that made Vision Zero a reality into a set of standards is to put into everyone's hands the tools and knowledge to guarantee that road traffic deaths can be prevented. If ISO

standards can help to lay out the roles and responsibilities of each ministry or sector for road safety, they can help to draw on the potential contributions of each ministry, rather than leaving this issue where it might never become a priority.

Finally, a set of International Standards speaks to politicians because it gives them a clear target, a clear rationale, and a proven-effective way of reaching that target. This is what will make them stand up and take notice.

ISO Focus: *What is your view on how ISO project committee ISO/PC 241, which is charged with developing a road traffic safety management system (ISO 39001), can contribute to halting and reversing the current global trend of increasing road traffic deaths and injuries?*

Dr. Rosenberg: If the future ISO 39001 provides guidance on developing, nurturing, and sustaining a management system for road traffic safety, it will go a very long way to stopping the current epidemic of road traffic deaths, an epidemic that is out of control and quickly getting worse in developing countries.

The lack of management capacity is probably the single most important missing ingredient in road safety in low- and middle-income countries. Countries often know what they ought to do, but don't have the capacity to do it. The lead agency that is so often highlighted as an important component of road safety is really a metaphor for management capacity, the critical link for successful implementation or for the effective delivery of effective road safety measures.

The future ISO 39001 can make it more likely that a country can develop the management capacity it needs. It will be important, however, to go beyond just writing the standard and really provide support for its implementation.

ISO Focus: *How do you perceive ISO's efforts to develop specific standards such as crash test dummies, air bags, motorcycle safety, tyre and rim performance, and driver licenses, just to name a few, that may contribute to improving road safety?*

Dr. Rosenberg: It is important to look at all components of the system as a whole, because every part matters. For example, Uruguay recently passed a national law requiring seat belts for all passengers in all cars. But when we looked at the stock of cars, a majority of both old and new cars did not have the appropriate hardware for safely installing seat belts.

So the legislation by itself would have been ineffective; or worse, it might have led to installation of two-point restraints in the rear seats which might have actually increased the risk of serious injury to child passengers. This is a point that Claes Tingvall makes over and over: all parts of the system contribute to the outcomes we want so the standards must address all parts of the system (see Comment by Claes Tingvall on [page 1](#)).

ISO Focus: *What new International Standards would the Forum like to see coming out of ISO? Are there areas for which you would like to see more or different standards?*

Dr. Rosenberg: The Global Road Safety Forum emphasizes the value of looking at the conditions that make our roads unsafe for pedestrians as well as motorists. Pedestrians and vulnerable road users make up a majority of the road traffic injury victims, but most infrastructure design is based on the needs of the motorists and doesn't take the safety of pedestrians into account. There are frequently no provisions made to allow pedestrians and non-motorized traffic to cross dual or multi-lane roadways, and no barriers to keep mini-buses off pedestrian pathways or sidewalks. It would be nice to see ISO standards for these conditions. ■