

Prevent road deaths in Africa - Desmond Tutu

The G8 must act to ensure new road development does not lead to more deaths on African roads, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has warned in advance of an African road safety conference.

Tutu said: "Road deaths and injuries are becoming a new health emergency for Africa. The human and economic cost is growing. I call on the leaders of the G8 to heed the request of African transport and health ministers, to ensure that safety is at the heart of international road investment. Protecting the poorest and most vulnerable road users in our communities must be the first priority."

Archbishop Tutu is opening the Make Roads Safe Africa conference, in Cape Town, which is being attended by senior UN and World Bank officials and road safety campaigners from across the world.

The conference will also see the announcement of a new African Road Assessment Programme, based on a pilot study run in South Africa, which aims to measure the safety of African roads. John Dawson, Chairman of the International Road Assessment Programme said: "We need to identify the high risk roads across Africa. We must steer aid towards the roads where people are dying in large numbers just because there are no footpaths, safe crossing points or safety fences."

Africa has the highest road death rate per population in the world, and has so far only avoided a greater number of such deaths because of relatively low motorisation and an under-developed road network.

Yet the conference will hear that international efforts to foster African economic growth through massive new road building projects could actually make the situation worse – unless road safety is systematically included in the process. The G8 in 2005 under the UK Presidency approved an initial US\$1.2 billion for new roads in Africa, but only US\$20 million has been allocated to road safety measures, well below the World Bank's recommended guidelines.

Alarmed by the potential for further catastrophe on African roads, African health and transport ministers issued the Accra Declaration in February, calling on the G8 to ensure that road safety is the first priority in roads built with international donor money.

The critical situation of Africa's roads is revealed by the Make Roads Safe campaign:

- Africa has the highest road death rate per population in the world – 28.3 people per 100,000 population are killed in road crashes (Western Europe's average is 11 per 100,000);
- Africa's road deaths, currently almost 200,000 a year, are predicted to rise by at least 80% by 2020;
- Economically active young people are most at risk of road injury – in Kenya at least 75% of injuries involve young family breadwinners;
- Road crashes account for half of the injury-related deaths of African children;
- Road crashes are estimated to cost African countries between 1-3% of their Gross National Product (GNP).

