



Address

by

**Anwarul K. Chowdhury
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
and High Representative**

at the

**International Conference on Sustainable Transportation
in Developing Countries**

30 January 2005

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Your Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Excellencies,

Dear colleague and friend Klaus Topfer, Executive Director of UNEP, one of the
sponsors of this Conference

Mr. Secretary-General,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I bring with me the greetings from the United Nations and Secretary-General Kofi
Annan to Your Highness and to all participants.

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you in the United Arab Emirates to
participate in this International Conference on Sustainable Transportation in Developing
Countries. At the outset, let me commend our hosts, the Environmental Research and
Wildlife Development Agency and the General Exhibitions Corporation, for their
excellent arrangements and gracious hospitality. I also thank other sponsors for their
support to this remarkable endeavour. I am honored to pay tribute to HH Sheikh Khalifa
bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates for his continued leadership
in raising international awareness for sustainable development and particularly for his
encouragement and support to our meeting on sustainable transportation in developing
countries.

The theme of this International Conference is particularly important and timely.
As we all know, trade is the engine for economic growth. Export competitiveness of
developing countries is largely determined by their productive capacities as well as their
ability to deliver their goods to foreign markets efficiently at the lowest possible
competitive cost. The availability of efficient transport and logistical services is a
decisive factor here. Demand on transport services is increasing rapidly in developing
countries because of the increase in population and in economic activity.

During 1990s, the trade growth coincided with even faster growth in expenditure
on international transport. While exports increased by 75 percent, real expenditure on
international transport more than doubled. Despite such positive trend, developing
countries are still far behind the developed countries in terms of transport infrastructure
development and efficiency. The international transport costs of developing countries
exports are on average 2 to 3 times higher than the level of import customs duties
imposed in major markets. Therefore, for the effective participation of developing
countries in the international trade, it has been found that high transport costs are more
significant barriers today than tariffs.

Transportation must be dealt in a holistic manner. Sustainable transportation
means that in addition to economic aspect we must integrate also social, health and
environmental considerations in the policy formulation and decision-making in respect of
the transportation sector. There is a wide diversity of issues. There is no simple formula
or model that fits all countries and situations. It is very encouraging, however, that our

Conference marks an important step forward to arrive at generally applicable principles required for sustainable transportation.

Let me single out a few of them. First, of course, is **road safety**. It should be considered as an important element for development of sustainable transportation. Every day thousands of people are killed, maimed and injured while using a mode of transportation. According to the UN statistics, 1.2 million people are known to die only in road accidents worldwide every year. Millions of others sustain injuries, with many suffering permanent disabilities. Road traffic injuries cost developing countries nearly 2 percent of their gross national product- more than the total development aid received by them. Road traffic injuries are also a growing social and health concern. Road traffic accident prevention must be pursued vigorously. Immediate policy measures must include the development and management of road infrastructure, the provision of safer vehicle, law enforcement, provision of health and hospital services, urban and rural planning. Close cooperation and partnership of all stakeholders, in particular, private and public sectors, are necessary to this end. In view of the seriousness of the matter, in early 2004, the United Nations the General Assembly considered the issue of road safety to increase awareness of the magnitude of the road injury problem, and to consider the related issues. The relevant United Nations system organizations have stepped up their road safety activities over the past decade. Efforts will further continue.

HIV/AIDS is an emerging concern in the transport sector. For example, in the recent study conducted by the International Organization of Migration in South Africa, truck drivers were identified as one of the five vulnerable groups to be infected with HIV/AIDS, as well as responsible for spreading the infection to a wider circle. As illustrations, the situations in Botswana and India come to our attention. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop and strengthen HIV/AIDS prevention programme targeting truck drivers, especially along the international transit corridors.

Efforts to ensure sustainable transport should be considered as part of the international commitment to combat **global environmental threats** such as climate change and air pollution. In this regard, the forthcoming entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol next month would provide legally binding obligation to reduce emission of greenhouse gases. Now, businesses, particularly those in the sector of transport and automobile industry, have a strong signal about the need for energy saving technology and services. In the same vein, the financial community and insurance industry now have a globally accepted legal basis to undertake measures and incentives to encourage environmentally sound technology and corporate performance.

2005 is the turning point in our common efforts to attain the goals agreed upon at the United Nation Millennium Summit held in 2000. In September this year, the United Nations at the summit level will review the progress made in the implementation of commitments and goals embodied in the Millennium Declaration. Sustainable transport is a key contributor to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the specific targets for halving the poverty and reduction of carbon dioxide emissions.

Populations without access to viable transport are poorer than those with reliable access. Problems of access are particularly severe for the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs). These countries suffer from the constraints of lack of access to the sea, remoteness from world markets and dependence on transit services provided by their transit neighbors. By making trade expensive and uncompetitive, high transport costs cannot but have an enormous impact on the economic development prospects of developing countries, especially landlocked ones among them. There are 31 such countries in the membership of the United Nations, 15 which are in Africa. It is in this context, a key target of the Goal 8 of the MDG focuses on action by the international community to adequately address the special needs of landlocked developing countries.

In this context, in 2003, the United Nations convened the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and the Donor Community on Transit Transport Cooperation in Almaty Kazakhstan. The Conference resulted in the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action, the over-arching goal of which is to forge partnerships to address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and to establish a new global framework for action for establishing efficient transit transport systems in landlocked and transit developing countries. The Programme of Action thus aims to (a) secure access to and from the sea by all means of transport; (b) reduce costs and improve services so as to increase competitiveness of their exports; (c) reduce the delivered costs of imports; (d) address problems delays and uncertainties in trade routes, (e) develop adequate national networks; (g) reduce loss, damage and deterioration en route; (g) open the way for export expansion; and (h) improve safety of road transport and security of people along the corridors.

To achieve these goals the Almaty Programme of Action identifies specific actions in the five priority areas, namely, Fundamental transit policy issues; Infrastructure development and maintenance, including rail, road, air transport, inland waterways, ports, pipelines and communications; International trade and trade facilitation; International support measures; and Implementation and review of the Programme itself.

It is my conviction that the effective implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action will certainly contribute to the global efforts for building sustainable transport system in developing countries. The United Nations system organizations have been actively embarked on the implementation of this Programme of Action in cooperation with other relevant international organizations. We have agreed on a road map that guides our joint collaborative efforts. The World Bank, UN agencies, including the UN Regional Commissions, are making renewed efforts to promote international cooperation in order to establish viable subregional and regional transport networks to expand the intraregional and international trade. The Regional Commissions of the United Nations continue to play a major role.

In this connection, I would like to emphasize the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network signed in Shanghai, China last April. This network covers 140,000 kilometers of highways extending to 32 countries, including 12 landlocked

developing countries. The Asian Highway has the potential of integrating countries spread across the huge Asian continent. The international community should give greater attention to African landlocked developing countries where up to 40 percent of export earnings on average are spent for transport services. Particularly, Central and Western African countries have to pay the highest costs for the international transport services. The high transport costs, borne due to the lack of adequate infrastructure and inefficiency, are a contributor to the economic difficulties of Africa. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa has been making a valuable contribution through its Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Programme. This Programme has adopted an action plan for transit transport facilitation that allows for the observation of abnormal practices along transit corridors; port security audits; port facilitation; road safety; harmonization of transit transport documents; and capacity-building for transport planning specialists. In West Africa, the World Bank, the Economic Community of West African States and the West African Economic and Monetary Union are preparing a transport sector project to improve road conditions, facilitate border-crossing operations, and implement inter-regional transit agreements.

In conclusion, let me emphasize that efforts for efficient use of existing transport facilities and for ensuring sustainable transportation should go hand-in-hand. Efficient transport will lead to the reduction of delay in transit time and costs, in its turn it will result in less burning of fuels and pollution. Extensive introduction of information and communication technologies into transport and logistical services in developing countries is crucial here. Also, the development of an appropriate and supportive national, regional and international legal environment is necessary for sustainable and efficient transport.

In this context, the recent agreement at the WTO to include trade facilitation in the Doha round of trade negotiations would provide an important opportunity for developing countries, particularly the landlocked, to address the issues pertaining to transport efficiency and sustainability. The negotiations on trade facilitation shall aim to clarify and improve relevant aspects of the articles of the GATT relating to freedom of transit, fees and formalities connected with importation and exportation and publication and administration of trade regulations with a view to further expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. Negotiations will also aim at enhancing technical assistance and support for capacity building in this area. In addition, the negotiations will address the issues pertaining to effective cooperation between customs or any other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues. Well prepared and coordinated participation of developing countries in the negotiations is essential for securing an outcome that would serve their best interest.

Support and cooperation of developed countries is an essential element for the development of sustainable transportation in developing countries. Let me, in this context, refer once again to the Almaty Programme of Action, in which priority areas for international assistance have been identified in a detailed manner, including international financial assistance for transport infrastructure development and maintenance, technology transfer, technical assistance for the wider use of information technology, and streamlining transport operations and border crossing procedure. An engaged and

meaningful international cooperation in these areas can bring so much economic and social benefits to the millions in the developing world.

I thank you for your attention.

I wish you every success in your deliberations.

----- o -----