

The Annual Road Death Pandemic

The pandemic has killed over 2.5 million people worldwide. This is a global tragedy. But it pales in comparison with the 1.35 million deaths which occur on the world's roads *each and every year*.

Worse, unlike the pandemic, the majority of those killed on the roads are under 50. Globally, road crashes are the leading cause of death amongst 5 -14 year olds and a significant factor for people between 15 and 49.

The world has become inured to what this means. Children taken away when their lives have hardly begun. Bread-winners killed in their prime of life – with all that means for the families who so often depend upon them. It hits all families hard, but for those in the 'developing' world it can tip them over the edge into absolute poverty.

And it is in poorer countries where the road death pandemic is at its worst. 93% of the world's fatalities on the roads occur in low- and middle-income countries, even though these countries have approximately 60% of the world's vehicles.

Improvement has been painfully slow. In 2011 the Global Plan of Action for Road Safety, produced by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations, envisaged a 50% reduction in road deaths, but hasn't achieved a single percent. Now again in 2021 50% is the target.

There are, though, some encouraging signs. Ethiopia, under its new transport minister, has developed an innovative programme to promote sustainable transport and cut road deaths: <http://motr.gov.et/-/1-2013-12-00-> Other emerging economies are beginning to think along the same lines. And, if you go on to social media, you will see numerous campaigners calling for their countries in the global south to adopt the sort of policies to cut danger, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists, being implemented in places like Norway and the Netherlands. More than half of all road traffic deaths globally are among vulnerable road users: pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists.

The internet could be one of our greatest allies in reducing danger on the roads.

The second encouraging sign is that the voice of road victims is now firmly embedded in the international bodies drawing up plans to cut road deaths. It is no exaggeration to say that much of this is down to the pioneering work of RoadPeace and the foresight of its founder and President Brigitte Chaudhry.

Road victims had no voice in the European or international arena before the founding of FEVR (the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims) by Professor Marcel Haegi, himself a bereaved parent, in 1991. Brigitte was its President from 2004 until 2010 and the driving force behind many of its initiatives for years after that. Common cause was made with victim organisations outside Europe.

FEVR is 30 years old this year. Much has been achieved. The voice of victims is now heard in international bodies across the world. But much has still to be done. In the year of FEVR's anniversary it is appropriate to leave the final words to Brigitte:

"Together with our members we also campaign – we feel we are forced to campaign – on issues of road victim treatment, justice or rather lack of justice, and on road danger issues."