

## **THE REPORT OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS' DECADE OF ACTION IN NIGERIA ORGANIZED BY ROAD SAFETY NGOS IN NIGERIA.**

The programme was held on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2012 at the Ladi Kwali Hall, Sheraton Hotel & Towers, Abuja. The programme started at 11 am.

The Chairman of the occasion, Dr. Sydney Ibeanusi, who is also the National Focal Point and Coordinator, United Nations Decade of Action in Nigeria recalled how the event was launched on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2011 to kick start international focus on road safety issues that are gradually becoming a global epidemic. He said that about 50 million people are injured annually from traffic fatalities apart from the 1.3 people that are killed annually. He commended the vision of the Federal Roads Safety Corps to reduce traffic fatalities in Nigeria by 50% within the Decade of Action period, stressing that the newly introduced Nigerian Road Safety Strategy by the FRSC will contribute significantly towards achieving the goal.

In his goodwill message, the Corps Marshal and Chief Executive Officer of the Federal Roads Safety Corps, Mr. Osita Chidoka, represented by Mr. Abayomi Omidiji, the Deputy Corps Marshal, Planning Research and Statistics explained that the Corps in response to the estimated increase in road traffic crashes / incidences by the World Health Organization has been in the fore front of crash reduction through various activities in line with the 5 pillars of the UN Decade of Action.

He revealed that the Nigeria Road Safety Strategy (NRSS) for the Decade of Action road map which was prepared with inputs from stakeholders has reached an advanced stage. He announced that the United Nations Road Safety

Collaboration in recognition of the strides being made by the FRSC to promote safety in Nigeria recently accepted FRSC Nigeria as a member of the collaboration.

The FRSC express delight that road safety NGOs in Nigeria have improved in their areas of specialization and requested that the NGOs should keep the Corps abreast of their activities so that they could be uploaded into the Corps website. He commended the road safety NGOs for putting the event of the day together and specially appreciated the coalition of road safety NGOs in Lagos for the robust interactions and innovations they engage in to get the road safety message to the grassroots.

A documentary on Dreams Cut Short was shown to the audience to prepare the ground for the keynote address titled “Faces Behind the figures: That they may not die in vain”.

In the Key note address delivered by Olanrewaju Osho, the Executive Director of Safety Beyond Borders, he revealed that One major reasons why it has not been easy to make the issue of road safety a national priority that commands the attention it truly deserves is the lack of interest in road safety issues by governments in particular and the big wigs in the society in general. “The lack of interest” he said, “is because of lack of understanding of three critical facts. According to him, the first fact is that **we are all road users**. Road transportation system affects the life of every single one in the society. When we all understand that we are all road users, then we will know that whatever risks or dangers that exists on the roads could affect us. When we know we are at risk like every other person, we will become interested in road safety.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> lack of understanding that militates against support for promotion of road safety in our society is that of the philosophy called **“it will come back to you”**. If our government invests in road safety for example, it will come back in many ways. E.g., preservation of economic players that would have been lost; saving of about N500 million that are being used to buy coffins and conduct burial for those killed in auto crashes annually and so on. He revealed the notable victims of violation of this principle in Nigeria as General Abdulkarim Adisa a former minister of works who died in auto crash in one of the bad roads that he could have used his position as minister of works to repair and the then famous Eze Ego of Igbo land whose stupendous wealth was more than enough to have repaired the pot hole that led to the car crash which killed him.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> lack of understanding that makes government, corporate organizations and the society at last to see no reason to provide necessary support for promoting road safety is that lack of understanding that **road traffic crash victims are not ordinary figures, data or statistics, but that they are people with flesh and blood**, with visions and dreams and with families and friends. He blamed the journalist for reducing road traffic victims to numbers through their reportage and blamed government for viewing victims of road traffic victims as mere statistics. He went ahead to show pictures of some road traffic crashes and told the story of where and how they died. He further stated that:

- Whenever traffic fatalities figures are rolled out, how we see the statistics play a major role in determining what our response toward the problem will be.

- If we reckon the statistics as ordinary data or mere figures, we might not feel the need to move proactively to bring down the level of the carnage, but if we see it as human beings, as great men and women cut down in their prime, as dreams aborted through journeys of no return, our anger at the problem will rise and some positive actions will follow.

He challenged Nigerians to begin to see and understand that there are faces behind each of the road traffic crashes data roled out annually by the FRSC, and stressed that seeing them as figures; data or statistics make their death to be in vain. He opined that if we continue to treat victims of road traffic crashes as mere figures, it means we have learnt nothing from their death and therefore circumstances that led to their death might never be addressed.

He argued that recognizing them as real people and not mere statistics can galvanize the government and the citizenry to stop paying lip service to the issue of road safety and start demonstrating true passion and genuine desire to make Nigeria's roads safe.

“We make no illusions that achieving this milestone of expounding the understanding of decision / policy makers in Nigeria about the victims of road traffic crashes as human beings and not statistics will solve all the problems of needless deaths and injuries on our roads. Good as this matter is, there is another thing that must happen before we could get excited that we have made significant progress” he said and declared that “value for life is the most critical facture that drives every initiative to raise the standard of road safety in particular and good governance in general in any jurisdiction.”

Osho stressed that one of the reasons while it has been difficult for the FRSC to receive the needed support to defeat the traffic fatalities epidemic in Nigeria is because the value placed by government on the lives of the people is very minute or even non-existent. “How much is the life of a Nigeria worth?” he asked, “This is a question no one in government can truthfully answer.”

He submitted that to significantly raise the bar of road safety in Nigeria, government has to redefine the value of every Nigerian and direct all their energies and resources towards ensuring that nothing reduces the assigned value.

In conclusion, Osho posited that the philosophy behind the United Nation’s declaration of 2011 – 2012 as the Decade of Action was the desire to place a greater premium or value on the lives of road users globally. He stressed that every of the five pillars revealed this fact. He then went forward to do a diagnostic analysis of how Nigeria has performed in the first year of the Decade of Action.

He stressed that Pillar 1 – Road Safety Management is the key driver of the other pillars, and explained that anyone suggesting that the independence of the Federal Roads Safety Corps (which is the soul of this pillar) be withdrawn is not a friend of Nigeria and does not want Nigeria to do well in achieving the goals of the Decade of Action. He said that the FRSC model is envied worldwide and is being copied by many nations. “The United Nations categorically required every country that has no road safety lead agency to go ahead and form one, why then should anybody think or suggest that FRSC’s autonomy be forcefully taken away and the Corps be merged with another

agency?” he asked. He urged the participants to stand up for road safety in Nigeria by speaking out and by taking positive actions that will prevent the progress we have made from being reversed and that will not allow the death of the victims of road traffic crashes in Nigeria to be in vain.

At the end the keynote address, a general assembly was held to enable participants bear their minds on issues relating to roads safety management. During the assembly, the following issues were agreed upon:

1. That the FRSC model is the minimum requirement by the United Nations Roads Safety initiative, therefore the Federal Government should reject the proposal to merge FRSC with any other agency.
2. That FRSC should urgently do something about the dangers that trailers and tankers constitute to other road users.
3. Road safety education should be aggressively pursued
4. Road traffic crashes investigation should be extended to all forms of accidents not only the one in which six people and above are killed. If an accident in which one person is killed today is not investigated, it might lead to the death of more people tomorrow.
5. The quality of vehicles imported to Nigeria should further be reviewed
6. Stakeholders should be made to review the safety elements of new roads to be built before commencement of construction
7. The BRT project in Abuja should be reviewed to prevent traffic fatalities that are currently occurring on the general lane around Mararaba axis. The road has been made narrower because BRT lane demarcation and crashes are occurring almost on a daily basis.

8. FRSC should appreciate Road Safety NGOs and allow their members to be made Voluntary Special Marshals.
9. That all the stakeholders should recognize that the focus of the Decade of Action is “Action” and not “Talk”, and as a result embark on positive actions to help Nigeria achieve the objectives of the Decade of Action.

At the end of the General Assembly, Mr. Patrick Adenusi, Safety Beyond Borders’ Chief technical Officer spoke on the Way forward to ensure that Nigeria does not fail to achieve the goals of the decade. He urged all road safety enthusiasts to make louder noise about road safety issues on radio and television and promote road safety awareness in schools and in the communities. He urged the FRSC to drive the process by encouraging a more cordial relationship with the NGOs while urging government to provide all necessary support for FRSC to achieve its mandate.

The Chairman Dr. Sydney Ibeanusi, thanked everyone for coming and promised that the National Focal Office of the Decade of Action will speak against any proposal to destroy the FRSC’s autonomy by merging it with another agency. He urged all and sundry to deemphasize talk and pursue positive actions to make Nigerian road safer to drive or walk through.

The delegation of the NGOs management and the National President of the Special Marshal, Mr. Sini thereafter proceeded to the Federal Ministry of Health to attend the Hon. Minister’s press briefing on the 1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Decade of Action.

**SATURDAY, 12<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2012.**

On Saturday, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2012, the NGOs and the Special marshal went to the Trailer Park in Tafa, along Kaduna Road to paste retro-reflective tapes on 100 petrol tankers.

This is to reduce the number of crashes involving trailers and tankers in the night due to poor visibility. The NGOs that took part in the exercise are: Safety Beyond Borders, Arrive Alive, Association for Better Environment and TOCCS Foundation. The National President of the Special Marshal led about 12 Marshals to take part in the exercise.

Many of the drivers and members of the community were full of joy and praise to the NGO Coalition for the good gesture. They agreed that the reflective tapes will make the tankers more visible in the night and prevent other vehicles from crashing into them whenever they break down in dark corners.