Joint ITU/UNECE Workshop on “Intelligent transport systems in emerging markets – drivers for safe and sustainable growth”

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*Opening Address*

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Distinguished colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to this first joint ITU/UNECE workshop on intelligent transport systems (ITS) in emerging markets.

I would like to thank Eva Molnar, Director, UNECE Transport Division, and her team for their help and support in bringing this event to you today.

Many of you that are new to ITU may not be aware that the interplay between ICTs and the transportation sector has become a major focus in ITU in recent years.

Just six weeks ago we hosted an event to mark World Telecommunication Information Society Day with the theme “ICTs and improving road safety”.

The 2013 World Telecommunication and Information Society Award was presented to three eminent personalities: Mr Ueli Maurer, President of the Swiss Confederation; Mr Volkmar Denner, Chairman of the Board of Management of Robert Bosch GmbH; and Mr Jean Todt, President of the International Automobile Federation (FIA); in recognition of their leadership and dedication towards promoting ICTs as a means of improving road safety.

ITU has since formed a partnership with FIA to promote ways of decreasing driver distraction caused by ICTs, and to promote the important role that ICTs can play in reducing the numbers of accidents on our roads.

And the statistics are incredible: Every year, 1.3 million people die in traffic-related accidents, and another 20-50 million people are injured.

The main victims are in emerging economies, highlighting the fact that road safety is also a major challenge to sustainable growth.

In some countries victims of car accidents occupy up to 30 percent of hospital beds.

The global economic loss is equally staggering - an estimated half a trillion USD. The cost to low and middle income countries is USD 65 billion, more than all incoming developmental aid. In the European Union, the cost equates to more than twice the annual EU budget.

So throughout the world the human and financial costs are vast.

Implementation of internationally agreed technology solutions offers a real opportunity to drastically reduce these statistics.

Some analysis suggests that ITS will reduce road traffic accidents by as much as 80 per cent – so we are talking of thousands of lives being saved every year!

ITU has been making great efforts in developing state-of-the-art standards for ITS and driver safety, using a combination of information technology, telecommunications, navigation positioning and automation technologies, including in-car radars for collision avoidance.

The radio frequency spectrum necessary for ITS is high on the agenda of ITU’s next World Radiocommunication Conference in 2015.

You will learn more about this important matter later in the workshop.

ITU has also been developing standards for safe user interfaces, and communication systems in vehicles, as well as optimizing driving performance by eliminating unsafe technology-related distractions while driving.

The UN Secretary General has recently called upon ITU to promote their use and national policies that encourage the use of ICT to enhance road safety.

But safety is not the only benefit. ITS also improves traffic management, reducing congestion and polution, and therefore contributes to combating climate change.

Concerted international action involving all stakeholders is very important, and I am very pleased that we have many of these stakeholders participating in this workshop here today. ITU is keen to work with all of you.

In recent years ITU initiated the Fully Networked Car@Geneva Motor Show an event which brings together key players in the ICT and car industries. Many of you have participated there and I hope you will continue to do so.

In addition, in 2010 ITU produced a Technology Watch Report on Driver Distraction, and initiated work in a Focus Group on the topic. The output of the Focus Group is now being turned into internationally recognised standards, which are known in ITU as Recommendations.

More recently, we have been trialling a new form of collaboration that brings together different standards bodies, technology solutions providers, and car manufacturers.

This group is called “Collaboration on ITS Communication Standards” and has met six times over the past 18 months, including yesterday here in Geneva. The meeting will continue tomorrow and I take this opportunity to invite all of you to participate in the group.

I will leave it to my colleagues to provide more details but the intention of the group is to provide a globally recognized forum for the creation of international ITS communication standards, and I am pleased to report that we are well on the way to meeting that objective.

I am sure that this workshop will contribute towards building safer, more efficient transport systems, especially in developing countries. I would like to thank the moderators and speakers all of whom are experts in the field so I am sure you will have a very interesting and enjoyable day.

As with all our workshops we invite the participants to identify, at the end of the day, some recommended actions that can be taken forward. I am sure that if you do so they will be very much appreciated.

Finally, I am pleased to invite you all to a reception this evening, kindly sponsored by QNX, that will take place in the Satellite Restaurant on the 15th floor of the ITU Tower building starting immediately after the end of the workshop at 17.30.