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COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Exchange of experiences in the field of road safety

Transmitted by the Government of Belarus

**Situation concerning road accidents in the Republic of Belarus and
accident prevention measures being taken by the State Motor Vehicle
Inspectorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs**

1. A total of 6,709 road accidents, in which 1,764 people died and 6,690 people were injured, were recorded in the Republic in 1999. That was less than in 1998. The number of road accidents has thus reached its lowest level for 27 years. Only in 1973 were fewer accidents recorded than in the current year.
2. The accident rate in the last quarter of a century peaked in 1990, when there were 9,311 reported road accidents, in which 2,264 people died and 9,308 were injured.
3. The figures show that in 1999, as compared with 1990, 500 lives were saved and 2,618 fewer people were injured or maimed on the roads of the Republic of Belarus.

4. The efforts of the State Motor Vehicle Inspectorate during the current year are directly reflected in the following, admittedly rather modest, figures (here, as elsewhere in the text, the current year is compared with the same period of 1999). Since the beginning of the year there have been 1,008 road accidents (-10.3%), in which 282 people died (-18.3%) and 952 were injured (-13.6%). There have been fewer road accidents in all regions of the Republic.

5. No fatality was reported in January-March 2000 on the roads of 38 districts and towns of the Republic. Only one fatal accident has been reported since the beginning of the year in each of 14 towns and districts.

6. The main factor giving rise to road accidents continues to be driving in a state of intoxication. In January-March drunken drivers were responsible for 75 accidents (-19.4%), which represents 12.1% of all road accidents caused by drivers of motor vehicles.

7. With a view to accident prevention the State Motor Vehicle Inspectorate devotes considerable attention to detecting violations of the traffic rules by road users. Since the beginning of 2000, its employees have intervened to deal with more than 1 million violations. They detected some 20,000 cases of drunken driving, 200,000 cases of speeding and more than 250,000 cases of violation of the road traffic rules by pedestrians.

8. As regards the road discipline of particular categories of road user, in January-March pedestrians, for example, were at fault in 404 accidents (-12%), i.e. 40% of all reported accidents. There has been an increase compared with last year in the number of accidents caused by cyclists and motor cyclists. Children were reported to have been involved in 103 accidents (-10.4%), in which 8 children died (-42.9%) and 98 were injured (-7.5%).

9. Exceeding the speed limit was reported to have caused 86 accidents (-31.2%), crossing over into the lane of oncoming traffic caused 90 (-28.0%), violations of rules for manoeuvring caused 69 accidents (+40.8%) and violations of the rules governing pedestrian crossings caused 37 (-27.5%). Nineteen accidents were attributed to the poor state of repair of vehicles (+11.8%). Unsatisfactory road conditions were a contributing factor in 85 accidents (-42.2%).

10. Road accidents have always been one of the principal causes of violent deaths. At one time, in the early 1990s, they were the first cause, but they now rank third.

11. Thus, the road safety situation in the Republic cannot be described as straightforward, but it is nevertheless being kept under control by the State Motor Vehicle Inspectorate. Its efforts guarantee that any law-abiding and careful road user can feel safe on the roads.

12. A few predictions can be made on the basis of indicators of the current road transport situation in the Republic. The decline in the number of road accidents over the past nine years offers no absolute assurance that the trend will remain unchanged.

13. The increase in the number of vehicles is irreversible. The rates of increase are significant - up to 11% annually over the past five years. There are already more than 136 private vehicles per 1,000 inhabitants now in Belarus (in 1994 the figure was 80).

14. Experience of industrialized countries shows that Belarus has entered the so-called "explosive growth" phase, which we expect to continue up to the level of 300-400 vehicles per 1,000 inhabitants. This phase is an integral part of the process of automobilization and is characterized by a sharp complication of the road safety situation and a growth in the number of road injuries.

15. Secondly, the Republic's road network is not suited to the actual intensity of transport flows. The main highways carry two to three times the planned traffic load. The density of the road network in large towns has remained virtually the same as in the 1970s and 1980s and in most towns is no higher than 50% of standard requirements.

16. Thirdly, the transport discipline of road users remains unsatisfactory. About 4 million breaches of the road traffic rules were detected in 1999. Moreover, it is common for violations to involve conscious or deliberate non-compliance with the rules, including:

Drunk driving;

Exceeding the speed limit;

Non-observance of rights of way at junctions and pedestrian crossings;

Failure to stop when required at traffic lights.

17. Fourthly, the standard of operation of the road system remains low. Many State transport enterprises have collapsed or been transformed and there has been a virtual collapse of the system of State regulation of work to ensure road safety, involving the development of the public sector.

18. Relevant structures established especially for this purpose - departmental road safety services, facilities for the preliminary medical examination of drivers, public road safety commissions, etc. - have also been abolished.

19. With regard to future developments, there are reasons to expect an increase in the number of road accidents and the number of casualties over the next few years. Consequently, the main task of the State Motor Vehicle Inspectorate is to ensure a higher degree of protection of road users against accidents and their consequences while at the same time earning public respect and trust for the Inspectorate's services.

20. For this purpose the administration of the State Motor Vehicle Inspectorate has set the following priority objectives:

(a) Establishment of an effective legal and regulatory framework for the Inspectorate's activities. The administration of the State Motor Vehicle Inspectorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs has proposed a Road Safety Bill, which lays the legal and organizational foundations for social relations in the field of road transport, and the basic rights and duties of drivers and requirements for vehicles. In the formulation of a national programme for the improvement of road safety up to the year 2005 we have drawn on the resources of the National Academy of Sciences, the Belarusian State Polytechnical Academy and the Academy of the Ministry of Defence. It has been about five years since the first national road traffic rules came into force and we are now engaged in the work of making the additions and amendments which have become necessary. There are reasons for us to believe that we can deal with the above matters since the recently established Research and Training Centre of the Ministry of Internal Affairs now includes a road safety laboratory which is expected to provide the necessary assistance in carrying out studies on the problem of road safety and should become a leading scientific agency in this field.

(b) Elimination of the main sources of danger for road users (especially drunk drivers, reckless drivers, road "hooligans", etc.).

(c) Improvement of public information work.

(d) Intensification of preventive measures in motor vehicle enterprises.

(e) Improvement of the road patrol service.

21. The above matters can be addressed if citizens are themselves concerned with road safety issues and hence, their own safety, and begin contributing through their conscious actions to improved safety on the roads.
