Mr. President,

India welcomes the opportunity to participate in this debate on the important issue of road safety. We would like to thank the Government of the Russian Federation for their initiative in hosting the First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in Moscow on 19-20th November, 2009. We would also like to express our appreciation to the Government of Oman for their consistent support for this agenda item.

We have carefully gone through the report transmitted by the Secretary General on Improving Global Road Safety. We thank the World Health Organization [WHO] for preparing the report in consultation with the regional commissions and other partners of the United Nations Road Safety collaboration.

According to this report, low-income and middle-income countries witness over 90 percent of the world’s fatalities on the roads, despite accounting for only 48 percent of the world’s vehicles. Apart from the personal suffering these road traffic injuries cause, these also threaten health and development gains. The importance of addressing road safety, thus, has a key development dimension. It is, therefore, encouraging that the United Nations has recognized road traffic injuries as an extensive and serious global health problem, requiring coordinated international cooperation efforts.

Mr. President,

In India, road transport is the dominant mode of transportation, accounting for 70% of freight movement and 85% of passenger traffic. We have one of the largest road networks in the world, with 3.3 million kilometers of roads. National Highways account for about 2% of the country’s road network, but carry 40% of total traffic, leading to severe congestion.
Road traffic accidents claim over 80,000 victims a year, constituting a major public health problem, with considerable social and economic costs. Almost half of those who die in road traffic crashes are “vulnerable road users” including pedestrians, cyclists or users of two-wheelers.

India is therefore acutely conscious of the imperative to address road safety and reduce the adverse consequences of traffic accidents. India’s economic growth lies in part upon the rapid expansion of our infrastructure, including roads.

We are actively engaged in efforts to enhance road safety. We believe that road safety requires the coordination of three aspects: Engineering and design; Enforcement; and Education involving civil society to spread awareness. Our response entails a coordinated and multi-sectoral approach, incorporating relevant parts of government, civil society, and the private sector. Our interventions seek to cover the following phases of road traffic injury control - prevention of crashes and injuries in the first place; provision of prompt and high quality care to those injured in traffic crashes; and provision of rehabilitation and long-term care to those who need it in order to minimize disabilities. We are striving to make road safety a health, transportation, law enforcement, education and development priority.

The national highway system is being widened and strengthened under various schemes. Plans for the development of a Indian National Expressway Network in a phased manner by the year 2022 are currently underway. Many of the recommendations made in the WHO report are being used as a framework for addressing road safety.

We recognize the significance of strengthening capacity to collect, use, and share road safety information. Legislation is being reviewed comprehensively to meet the emerging requirements of road safety. Information technology is also being used in the road transport sector, including through Smart-Card based Driving Licenses and Registration Certificates. We are also taking steps to develop a Road Safety Culture in the country. The 21st annual road safety week was observed from 1-7 January 2010 throughout the country involving regional governments, voluntary organizations and vehicle manufacturers.

Mr. President,

International cooperation is imperative in assisting developing countries to effectively address issues of road safety. Availability of adequate financial resources, technical assistance, capacity building, sharing of best practices and advocacy are crucial in this regard. While we are encouraged by an increase in funding reported in the WHO report, including through private sector and civil society involvement, we agree with the report’s assessment that levels of funding for road safety are still not commensurate with the scale of the problem, and increased efforts must be made to
secure additional financial support for road safety projects. However, we would caution against setting universal standards based on what may have been developed in one region, and stress that specific circumstances in various parts of the world must be taken into account in addressing road safety.

We strongly support the intent to increase cooperation at the national, regional and global levels for achieving the objectives of road safety as part of the Decade of Action for Road Safety. We also look forward to a concrete Plan of Action to implement the objectives by the end of the decade, which will take into account the need of developing countries for adequate support to build capacities in this area.

Thank you, Mr. President.