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**PROTOCOL**

Let me start by expressing my profound gratitude to the organizers of this forum for this opportunity to speak on the state of road infrastructure in Nigeria and indeed the African continent.

As you might be aware, Africa is the region with the worst death rate from road crashes. There are an estimated 161 deaths per 10,000 vehicles for accidents in Nigeria. More so, Africa is a region where 50% of the population is below the age of 16 with attendant road crashes placing heavy burden on the continent's youths and most productive workforce. Notably, Road crashes are the second leading cause of death between the ages of 5 to 44 in African countries.

It is also pertinent to know that while the "Human factor" accounts for majority of Road Traffic Crashes (RTCs) in Africa, accidents caused by poor road infrastructure and the dearth of befitting road furniture have the highest fatalities. It is therefore vital to address the deploring state of Road Infrastructure in the region, particularly if the region is to make any meaningful Economic Development.

First, Africa in its present state presents a major challenge to current global efforts to increase safe road use due to the poor state of its road

infrastructure. This could be attributed to the lack of a maintenance culture and the substandard quality of road construction in most African countries.

Let me point out that the global drive towards the improvement of the quality of lives in Africa through the instruments of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will only increase road fatalities if the current road infrastructure is not improved upon. Therefore, we believe that foreign investments in Africa must adopt a holistic approach that underscores the need for a transportation system that guarantees safety, livability and a sense of community. I have no doubts in my mind that safer roads and diminished fatality index ratios will remain a mirage for Africa if its Governments are not made to appreciate the imperative of increased investments in the area of road infrastructure and furniture.

Unfortunately, the issue of Road Safety does not attract the required high level Public Policy interventions in Africa like other regions, for many reasons. High cost of road construction and absence of indigenous construction capacity renders the road way sector susceptible to mismanagement and quality issues. The mode choice of the ruling elites which tends to be flying or the use four wheel drives to navigate the poorly maintained roads reduces the incentives for addressing the poor state of road infrastructure. More so, the fringe nature of road safety lobby groups, absence of international pressure, lack of adequate NGO intervention and the wrong perception of road use as "poor people issues" remain obstacles to the entrenchment of adequate and safe road

infrastructure in Africa. Also the low level of human and technical capacity especially in the areas of safety engineering, driver testing as well as vehicle inspection, contribute significantly in combination with poor road infrastructure to rising fatality rates in Africa.

In contrast, the aviation sector in Africa presents an interesting comparison to the road sector. It attracts higher government attention due to robust international conventions, elite interest and the international capacity to promote pilot training, certification, aircraft inspection and engineering. In Nigeria for example, plane crashes in 2005/2006 leading to about 400 deaths led to a special intervention fund amounting to an estimated \$161,000,000 (one hundred and sixty one million USD) in conjunction with grants and technical support from multilateral agencies to improve aviation infrastructure. Ironically the far more alarming yearly average of 4000 fatalities from road crashes over the past twenty years in Nigeria has attracted little or no attention of such scale to road infrastructure and safety improvements.

Obviously, Africa needs assistance to tackle the growing public health, economic and social challenges that road crashes present today. The decimation of Africa's most productive age bracket through road crashes has ultimate grave implications for its future as young people between the ages of 21-55 years continue to perish on its dangerous roads. In spite of the alarming statistics road construction is yet to consider the impact of new construction on pedestrian, bicyclist and motorcyclist safety. School children routinely have to cross dangerous roads to get to school while

maternal health is usually at risk due to poor consideration for hospital facilities.

It is important however, to appreciate the example of the World Bank in improving road safety in Nigeria through the recent \$330 million facility grant to Nigeria for the upgrading of three major highways. The three major roads to be upgraded will serve as models of "Safe Corridors". Already \$6m has been allocated for the provision of safety components which includes adequate road furniture, provision of tow trucks and other operational equipments that would enhance enforcement of safety regulations. The World Bank program promotes the lead Agency model, enhances local capacity and encourages a learning process that would positively impact on the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC)

While this move is certainly commendable, there is no gainsaying the fact that much more needs to be urgently done to stave off the impending disaster to the African continent and indeed the global community. Nigeria is at the threshold of a new dawn that sets to improve road infrastructure through massive new investment and adoption of the Public-Private Partnership model in road construction. In this regard the Present administration of the President Umaru Yar'adua has expressed its commitment to improving road safety through improved funding of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC).

I wish to seize this special opportunity to call for more global interventions in Africa in the areas of road infrastructure funding, capacity building and

technology transfer. Global initiatives using foras like this should nudge African governments to implement the G8 10% rule, adopt the lead agency model for road safety, invest more in safe road infrastructure and help build capacity for training and enforcement.

Thank you for listening.