



Association for Safe International Road Travel

11769 Gainsborough Rd. • Potomac, MD 20854 • USA

www.asirt.org asirt@asirt.org phone (240) 249-0100 fax (301) 230-0411



Safe Travel and Tourism: Paving the Way, a Road Safety Travel Summit

On Monday, May 13, ASIRT convened a broad array of experts and advocates to highlight the key role organizations around the world can play to improve road safety for tourists and other travelers.

The summit objectives were to:

- Engage decision makers on key road safety issues and policies;
- Improve data transparency and collection of information on road crash fatalities and injuries;
- Further champion the issue in media; and
- Strengthen high-level links and relationships within the tourism and travel sectors.

At this inaugural summit, representatives from the tourism and hospitality sector, U.S. and other government agencies, the insurance industry, tourism ministries and embassies, education abroad, media and civil society presented their strategies and best practices to help ensure and improve road safety for their constituents.

Rochelle Sobel, ASIRT founder and president set the stage for the summit by recounting the death of her son Aron, who was killed in a bus crash with 23 other passengers while vacationing in Turkey.

“Tourism accounts for one tenth of the global GDP and is a key driver of economic growth,” said Sobel. “People are traveling increasingly for business, pleasure, education, adventure, sports, cultural, medical and humanitarian reasons, at tremendous benefit to themselves and to their host countries. At the same time, the world is experiencing a critical, escalating global road safety crisis. To compound matters, tourists are traveling increasingly to low and mid-economic countries, where most crashes occur. Tourists are particularly vulnerable road users; road crashes are the single greatest risk to healthy Americans traveling abroad. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly one half of the medical evacuations back to the U.S. are the result of a road crash. “Unless action is taken, the number of international tourists killed or seriously injured on the roads will continue to rise,” Sobel stressed.

Dr. Adnan Hyder, senior associate dean for research, professor of global health, Miliken School of Public Health, George Washington University in his overview presentation during the summit stressed that “Measurement alone is not enough; recognizing the lack of progress (in road safety) is the first step towards the development of a strong and sustainable set of actions for changing the current status quo on global road safety.”

Dr. Maria Vegega, road safety and injury consultant presented a 10-year review of the U.S. State Department’s publicly accessible data base of U.S. citizens who died abroad of non-natural causes, which, she noted, highlighted the limitations of current data.

Dr. Stephen Hargarten, professor of the Department of Emergency Medicine, associate dean for Global Health and director of the Comprehensive Injury Center at the Medical College of Wisconsin articulated the need for better data and information, one of the key recommendations of the summit, “Better information provides the platform for developing evidence-based programs and policies. It provides a focus for discussion and strategy development such as preventing road traffic crashes or drownings. In collaboration with travel industry and global health leadership, these and other analyses can and need to engage other sectors of local civil society to address other issues as such as strengthening EMS and emergency care. These systems of care benefit everyone, citizens and travelers/learners alike. Better information on the scope and nature of deaths of U.S. citizens is a positive essential strategy towards preventing these deaths. It really represents a global health strategy to prevent illness and injury.”

Bonnie Glick, deputy administrator, USAID expressed her commitment to global road safety in her keynote address. Glick emphasized the importance of road safety as an economic and development as well as a public health issue. She described the establishment of the Academy for Safe Truck Driving, and the training for drivers of heavy-duty equipment and commercial vehicles in Morocco as examples of USAID’s involvement in road safety.

Senator Chris Van Hollen, summit sponsor, delivered the charge to participants: “The issue of road safety is one that’s close to my heart. As a former co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Global Safety, when I served in the House, my colleagues and I made it a goal to reduce global road death rates and improve road safety for Americans traveling abroad and at home. That work continues now that I am in the Senate. As we mark the fifth United Nations Global Road Safety Week, it gives us the opportunity to look forward – to dedicating ourselves to reducing road crashes worldwide and to making sure that families do not have to suffer the pain of losing a loved one.”

Michelle Bernier-Toth, managing director, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Overseas Citizens Services directorate, U.S State Department, stressed that “the protection of U.S. citizens traveling and residing abroad is the Department’s highest priority. Through our Consular Information Program, we work to provide U.S. citizens with information about possible risks to their safety so that they can make decisions about their travel plans and activities.”

Dr. Jasminka Goldoni Laestadius, senior occupational health specialist, The World Bank recounted that in 2017, 800 crashes involving World Bank personnel occurred, prompting it to design an incident and injury survey. Implementation of a new strategy based on the survey yielded no new fatalities; reduced the crash rate and increased seat belt compliance.

Since 1997, when it introduced its Vision Zero policy to reduce car crashes and the effects of those that occur, the Swedish government has been mixing strong law enforcement and education with steps that acknowledge and account for the fact that road users aren’t perfect, explained Karin Olofsdotter, Sweden’s Ambassador to the United States. Today, Sweden employs a systemic approach to making every aspect of the driving landscape safer, ranging from comprehensive safety devices in cars—the three-point car restraint was invented in Sweden—to building lane barriers that cause cars to bounce, rather than crash on impact, and building roundabouts to compel drivers to slow down. “Through such measures, Sweden has reduced its

number of road fatalities from 590 in 2000 to 253 in 2017” thereby establishing the country as a global model for road safety, Olofsdotter explained.

Fernando Llorca Castro, Costa Rica’s Ambassador to the United States, indicated that Costa Rica welcomes a large number of tourists to its country every year and faces great challenges. “Overall, the safety and protection of tourists are a top concern. The Costa Rican tourism board along with visitors must work together to ensure that laws are being upheld and respected in order to keep everyone safe.”

Dr. Anne-Gaelle Selod, medical director, Pan American Health Organization echoed the need in the Region of the Americas, for legislation, advocacy and policies that contribute to reduce risk factors in road traffic injuries should be a priority, especially on speed control and blood-alcohol limits. Selod observed that “The United Nations with more than 180,000 employees and 400,000 dependents deployed in the field, including in very high-risk environments, experiences around 15 deaths from road traffic crashes every year. Through the launch of the Road Safety Strategy for UN personnel, it officially committed to internally applying the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) bringing all UN agencies’ Road Safety policies and programs under a unique overarching framework.”

Peace Corps Associate Director of Safety and Security Shawn Bardwell emphasized that “There is a need to prepare those traveling overseas in a way that empowers them to make informed, risk-based transportation decisions. By providing international travelers with the necessary information and giving them the skills to assess risk, they can make those myriad, daily decisions in a way that minimizes the likelihood of being involved in road traffic accidents.”

Natalie Draisin, director, North American Office and UN representative closed the third panel with a call-to-action: “we have the data, now we need action. We know what causes crashes and how to prevent them. Schools (and young people) are an excellent place to show positive change.”

Elizabeth Brenner, co-founder of Protect Students Abroad represented the voice of families and loved ones of victims of injuries and fatalities abroad, especially students. Protect Students Abroad is dedicated to educating the public on the need for evidence-based data and transparency of student risk, injury and fatalities while abroad.

Journalist Tanya Mohn, a regular contributor to *The New York Times*, *Forbes* and other news outlets described how she approaches writing about road safety. “The most important strategy is to make articles personal. Statistics, like the fact that 90% of global traffic deaths occur in low-and-middle income countries, often mean very little to people. But when readers realize that *they* are traveling to a country with one of the highest death tolls in the world, (with different vehicle standards, for example) or more important, if their kids plan to study abroad in those regions ...then they begin to care.”

Debra Bokur, award-winning journalist, writer and researcher and a writer of ASIRT’s Road Safety Reviews, explained that “Road travelers often encounter conditions that vary greatly from what they’re used to at home. Gathering information about a destination is essential to safely

preparing for any journey. Whether an expedition abroad includes self-driving, taxis, public transportation or a combination of these things, ASIRT’s road safety tools should be standard to any travel kit.”

William Atkins, co-founder and executive director of Point Comfort Underwriters and Rob Poli, president of Insurance Marketing Center, communicated the perspective of travel insurers. “Fifty percent of all medical claims from overseas travelers involve roadways, vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles or other forms of transport. And, as more of our insureds venture into uncharted waters we have a responsibility not only to inform but to contribute to all legitimate efforts to reduce roadway medical events. A competent international assistance provider and high-quality insurance company should also be part of the pre-planning process,” Atkins said

Leanne Johnson, director, International Risk Management, Office of International Affairs, University of Maryland and Natalie Mello, vice president for Programs, Training and Service, The Forum on Education Abroad, conveyed their priorities in protecting students and faculty while abroad. Both the Forum on Education Abroad and the University of Maryland promote the exploration and advancement of knowledge but also prioritize safety in program development, planning and implementation; understand the needs, strengths and vulnerabilities of travelers; assess and mitigate risk on study abroad programs; and inform and alert travelers of risks.

Marc Grossman, former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, as summit moderator in addition to opening the Summit, summarized the main points that emerged from the summit:

- Data: They are important but need to be connected to people and trigger action.
- Accountability: Four groups have responsibility to improve road safety—individuals, government, private sector (insurance companies, large corporations) and civil society (ASIRT, FIA Foundation, etc.), which must push the other three groups.
- Execution: An example is the World Bank’s staff survey on crashes and near crashes that led to the crafting and implementation of a road safety directive. After the organization resurveyed staff, the number of employee crashes and near crashes dropped significantly and no fatalities were reported. Based on this follow-up survey, the Bank realized there were still gaps in implementation, which led to further updates of the road safety directive. Similar surveys will be conducted every 3 years to evaluate the impact of the road safety management system and achieve its continuous improvement.
- Leadership: Do not be complacent. Challenge the status quo and take action. The [ASIRT recommendations document](#) is a good start. If we take a few of these recommendations and implement, we will begin to achieve goals.