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## To the editor, The Guardian

### A language of neglect and denial

In Open door (11 April 2011), the reader's editor and style guide's editor of The Guardian discussed, and rejected, RoadPeace's campaign calling for the use of appropriate terminology such as road crash or collision, instead of road accident.

We are disappointed by this decision, and even more so by the justification that '*accident is a neutral term – a drink-driver may be negligent and dangerous, but even they don't deliberately set out to kill anyone*'. Here, the editor of the style guide is fundamentally wrong and his example is worse; the drunk driver puts him (or less often her) in a position where a crash is more likely to happen.

It is almost ten years since the British Medical Journal banned the word accident as it implies an unpredictable and chance occurrence whilst in reality collisions are predictable and preventable: <http://www.bmj.com/content/322/7298/1320.extract>. Other public health organisations, including WHO, have also argued against its use.

The same day The Guardian was defending its terminology, the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration was meeting in London, in preparation for the launch of the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety on May 11. This initiative is needed to tackle the road traffic injury epidemic and prevent 5 million road deaths. In the 2010 *Missing Link: Road Traffic injuries and the Millennium Development Goals*, Kevin Watkins, of Oxford University's Global Economic Governance programme, also highlights how:

*Death and injury on the world's roads is arguably the single most neglected human development challenge. The vocabulary of the road traffic injury epidemic helps to explain the neglect. While child deaths from, say malaria are viewed as avoidable tragedies that can be stopped through government action, road traffic deaths and injuries are widely perceived as 'accidents'—unpredictable events happening on a random basis to people who have the misfortune to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.*

*The vocabulary is out of step with reality. Road traffic fatalities and injuries are accidents only in the narrow technical sense that they are not intended outcomes. They are eminently predictable, and we know that in advance the profile of the victims. Of the 3,500 people who will die on the world's roads today around 3000 will live in a developing country and at least half will be a pedestrian or vulnerable road user who is not driving a car.*

This is not the first time we have confronted the Guardian on this topic. When we won the Guardian Charity Award in 2008, we used our acceptance speech to urge you to help us stop the media using the term 'accident'. And we will continue to make the case for this change, especially in the run-up to the launch of the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety on May 11.

Yours sincerely

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