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New charge acknowledges victims and increases consistency in sentencing

The proposed charge of Causing Serious Injury by Dangerous Driving is welcomed by RoadPeace. The national charity for road crash victims was founded by Brigitte Chaudhry in outrage that death and injury was not mentioned in driving offences. So this new charge represents a step forward, but has taken almost 20 years to achieve.

Many may focus on the increase in maximum custodial sentence to five years. But this is no more than the Sentencing Advisory Panel called for in 2003 for the basic offence of Dangerous Driving.

At present dangerous drivers who leave people facing a lifetime of impairment only face a maximum of two years imprisonment. This cannot be fair. We do not expect this increase to have any noticeable effect on prison population but it needs to be there for extreme disregard for the risk to others on the road.

With this new charge, those seriously injured by dangerous drivers will be able to be counted and included in crime victim statistics. RoadPeace had previously asked for assurance from the Ministry of Justice that before the consultation on Victim's Strategy is launched next month, that they had considered all the ways in which road crash victims are discriminated against. The lack of mention in driving offences was highlighted.

This new charge represents two big steps forward. First, victims are acknowledged. Secondly, it provides greater consistency in sentencing. Those working in restorative justice should also welcome this charge as it means that dangerous drivers will be held more accountable for the consequences of their actions.

It is a good start but should not be the end. We need this extended to other driving offences. We do not know how many are injured by drivers convicted for driving carelessly or speeding or drink driving. These victims remain uncounted and unacknowledged.

And it is only right to mention another longstanding call. These cases exemplify why it is not appropriate to refer to these collisions as accidents.

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Notes for journalists:

1. Sentencing Advisory Panel recommended increasing maximum custodial sentence for dangerous driving to five years in 2003
<http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20100307064325/http://www.sentencing-guidelines.gov.uk/docs/dangerousdriving.pdf>.
2. http://www.roadpeace.org/resources/Crash_not_Accident_May_11.pdf

RoadPeace

RoadPeace is an independent national charity, providing practical information, emotional support and advocacy to those affected by road crashes; as well as campaigning for justice for road crash victims and for road danger reduction, with a focus on reducing the volume, speed and dominance of motorised traffic and promoting cycling and walking.

RoadPeace was a winner of the Guardian Charity Award in 2008:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/video/2008/dec/04/guardian-charity-awards-roadpeace>

RoadPeace was founded in 1992 on the principle of road danger reduction (RDR) which places a greater duty of care on those that pose the greater threat, and argues for danger to be controlled at source through reducing the speed, volume and dominance of motorised traffic. RDR differs from traditional road safety in that it also takes into account the other negative consequences of inappropriate and excessive motor vehicle use such as fear and intimidation, environmental impact and public health issues, . adopting a wider approach that considers not only the quantity of death and injury by crashes, but also the effects of inappropriate and excessive motor vehicle use on the quality of life and the environment.