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World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims Sunday, 21 November 2010

Remembering those lives lost and broken on our roads

Seven days after Remembrance Sunday when we honour our war dead, the public is being asked to remember the toll from another type of conflict, that which the British Medical Journal described as “*the war on the road*”ⁱ. The playwright Heathcote Williams previously referred to it as “*the third world war which nobody bothered to declare*”ⁱⁱ. In the year which the government has talked of ending the ‘war on motorists’, it is important to remember the real casualties of our transport system. Road crashes are the leading cause of death to young adults and children over the age of 5.

This year there will be a humanist service in Bath, where a memorial stone to road crash victims was unveiled earlier this year. RoadPeace members and representatives from the region’s police, fire & rescue services, bereavement support organisations and the local council will join together to lead this act of public remembrance. It takes place at 4pm at the Chapel Arts Centre, off Lower Borough Walls in the centre of the city.

A Day of Remembrance for road crash victims was first introduced by RoadPeace in 1993. Since then, over 52,000 people have been killed in crashes on British roads. Road deaths may have dropped to their lowest ever in 2009, with ‘only’ 1653 sons and 569 daughters killed, but these losses, whilst significant, represent only the latest addition to our road death toll.

A road death is not a normal death but a sudden violent death that is often grossly premature and leaves the bereaved with long-term if not permanent devastation. Nor does a life have to be ended for there to be such suffering. For every person killed in a crash, there are several left with permanent disabilities. Thus this year we will be remembering those bereaved and also those grievously injured.

Many of the World Day events are coordinated by bereaved RoadPeace members, committed to working to spare other families the pain they had to endure. This includes Jeff and Sue Baker who helped to coordinate the service in Devon. Their son, Ben would have turned 25 on this year’s World Day of Remembrance, if he had not been killed whilst cycling in Spain in July 2003. They speak for many when they say “*Speed killed our son, his hopes and dreams, our life and future*’. Dave Myler is another

bereaved father who, for the past ten years, has been organising school assemblies highlighting the danger on the road.

Cynthia Barlow, RoadPeace Chair, stresses:

“The purpose of this day is to acknowledge the pain and suffering of the bereaved and injured, remember the lives of our loved ones, give thanks to the emergency services, and highlight the need for change.”

We refuse to accept that the lives of our loved ones are expendable, the price we have to pay for convenience and industrial progress. We remember our loved ones in ways which we hope will stop this dreadful carnage on our roads and hopefully prevent other families, friends and colleagues from having to experience the utter desolation of a road death.

This day is also dedicated to giving thanks to the emergency services and, as in Bath, many of the events include representatives of the police, fire and ambulance services. As crashes are the leading cause of death to police officers, they have a dual reason for participating.

This day was adopted by the United Nations in 2005 because road crashes are a global epidemic. Already the leading cause of death to young adults worldwide, WHO estimates they will double in low and middle income countries by 2030. WHO is developing a plan for its Decade of Action on Road Safety next year and has included commemorations of the World Day of Remembrance as an indicator of government and societal awareness. Events in Britain will highlight the global tragedy.

References

1. A list of UK 2010 remembrance services and events is available on the RoadPeace website (http://www.roadpeace.org/resources/WDR_Services_2010_Revised_.pdf). More events from organisations in other countries are featured on www.worlddayofremembrance.org.
2. See our leaflet Six a day for an insight into the devastation caused by six road deaths, the average daily total for 2009. http://www.roadpeace.org/resources/Six_a_day.pdf

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Notes for journalists:

ⁱ British Medical Journal (2001)

ⁱⁱ Heathcote Williams (1991) Autogeddon