



Prevent unnecessary loss of lives on roads

ZIMBABWE'S hosting of the International Association of Roads Congress in the resort town of Victoria Falls has come at an opportune time. The congress presents an opportunity to Zimbabwe to learn from other countries how to curb road accidents, which have been on the increase. The country's roads have been turned into death traps and there is no respite in the high number of crashes that Zimbabwe records on its roads.

The crashes, most of them fatal, increase each time there is a public holiday.

Officially opening the congress on Monday, the Deputy Minister of Transport, Communications and Infrastructural Development Mr Morgan Komichi said a total of 1 986 people died on the country's roads last year alone with human error accounting for the majority of the fatalities.

Deputy Minister Komichi said in the last decade Zimbabwe has had its fair share of accidents and fatalities.

During the decade under review, 2003 recorded the highest number of deaths with 3 549 people perishing on our roads.

Four years later there was to be an encouraging downward trend when the number of deaths dropped to 1 037 in 2007 but unfortunately the country has been witnessing another rise in the number of fatalities with 1 986 people perishing on our roads last year.

The statistics are unacceptable given that the vehicle population in Zimbabwe is only around 800 000 against the country's population of 13,5 million people.

What is even more worrying is the fact that the majority of the fatalities are blamed on human error on the part of road users, chief among them the vehicle drivers.

Speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol, misjudgments when overtaking and failure to adhere to road traffic regulations

are some of the major causes of the fatal crashes.

We should urgently come up with measures to curb these accidents because we have far less vehicles than some countries yet we record so many accidents and deaths on our roads.

"By comparison, Sweden which has about nine million vehicles recorded less than 300 fatalities in 2012," Deputy Minister Komichi told the congress.

There should be no excuse for human errors on our roads and drivers found on the wrong side of the law should be made to pay hefty deterrent fines.

Passengers and other road users should also help by reporting wayward drivers to the police so that the rogue drivers are stopped before they kill themselves and innocent people.

Public transport has been cited as the main contributor to road fatalities with the single worst accident being the Nyanga Bus Disaster of 1991, in which 89 people lost their lives.

We urge relevant authorities to come down hard on those found flouting road traffic regulations.

The non use of safety belts and child restraints, driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs, inappropriate and excessive speed, lack of infrastructure and use of mobile phones and other information communication technologies while driving should be sternly dealt with.

We commend Government's target to reduce accident fatalities by half by 2015 and the congress should provide an impetus to the fight against accidents as well as injuries and deaths on our roads.

As the Traffic Safety Council of Zimbabwe board chairman, Mr Nelson Mawema said at the congress, the death of one person on the roads is one too many. Safety should be emphasised to road users so that we prevent unnecessary loss of lives and the maiming of people on our roads.