Your Excellency the Prime Minister
Honourable Ministers
Ms Anupama Rao Singh, Regional Director of UNICEF
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to be here with you today in this vibrant city of Hanoi to launch this groundbreaking World report on child injury prevention.

The launch of the world report comes on a particularly auspicious day - International Human Rights Day. On this day, we recall the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - 60 years old today - and the landmark Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention states that all children have a right to a safe environment and to protection from injury and violence. Safeguarding these rights everywhere is not easy, but it can be achieved by concerted action. The World report on child injury prevention provides the tools to do so.

Every day around the world the lives of more than 2000 families are torn apart by the loss of a child to an unintentional or accidental injury. The grief that these families suffer – mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents and friends – is immeasurable and often permeates the lives of entire communities.

Once children reach the age of nine years, unintentional injuries - from road traffic crashes, drowning, burns, falls, poisoning and other causes - are the biggest threat to their survival. Unintentional injuries are also a major cause of disabilities, which can have a long-lasting impact on all facets of children's lives: relationships, learning and
play. And these injuries are preventable. For example, road traffic injuries are the leading causes of death among children ages 10 to 19. Seat belts and child restraints, helmets, pedestrian lanes, use of daytime running lights for vehicles, speed limits, laws against drinking alcohol while driving are among the most successful interventions to prevent death and injuries. Equally effective interventions exist for other causes of injuries.

Of the 830 000 children who die from unintentional injuries each year, the vast majority are from low and middle income countries. Children in poorer communities in all countries are at increased risk of injury as they are more likely to be exposed to hazardous environments and are less likely to benefit from prevention programmes. In addition they often lack access to good quality trauma care and rehabilitation services.

In many of the countries where children are at highest risk of injury, the overall rate for unintentional injury deaths is a staggering 10 times higher than that of the rate in high-income countries such as Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In these latter countries, great strides have been made in recent decades in reducing child injury death and disability.

Yet even these countries cannot afford to rest on their laurels. While they have made great gains in child health generally, injuries still account for 40% of all child deaths.

As we gather today at the kind invitation of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to mark the formal global launch of the first ever World report on child injury prevention, my message to you is a simple one: implementing proven injury prevention strategies could save more than a thousand children’s lives every day.

Mandating swimming pool fencing in Australia, regulating tap water temperatures in Canada, covering wells in Mexico, establishing dedicated burns centres in Pakistan, making use of child resistant closures on paraffin containers in South Africa, implementing graduated driver licensing in Sweden and installing window guards in high-rise apartments in the United States are some of the many strategies which have dramatically reduced the rates of injury to children. These and other measures have
yielded as much as a 50% reduction in child injury rates in countries which have made a concerted effort.

I commend the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and its injury prevention experts for their recent efforts to prevent child deaths and injuries. Community surveys are being conducted to assess the extent of the problem in the country. There are also steps being taken to improve the helmet legislation currently in force to better benefit children, conduct drowning prevention programmes and implement through the Safe Communities model many of the good practices being highlighted at this event.

Ideally these and other proven injury prevention strategies should be integrated into overall child survival efforts and implemented on a larger scale. If that were to happen, then hundreds of thousands of families would be spared the heartache of losing their child to a preventable injury. Improved health services - including the training of a cadre of injury prevention practitioners - would also go a long way in reducing the consequences of these injuries.

Child injury prevention is a responsibility shared by many government ministries - health, education, transport, environment, consumer safety and law enforcement among others. The health sector has a leading role to play, particularly with regard to collecting and analyzing data; carrying out research on risk factors; implementing, monitoring and evaluating interventions; delivering appropriate primary, secondary and tertiary care and campaigning for greater attention to the issue.

The World report on child injury prevention harnesses the best available research, information and evidence about what works to prevent child injury deaths and disabilities. With the power of the evidence we have in hand, we must step up our efforts and through partnership work to ensure that child injury prevention policies and programmes are aligned with these best practices.

Previous world reports on violence prevention and road traffic injury prevention have helped to strengthen prevention and improve services, and have lead to the development of a number of guidelines, enhanced partnerships and spurred discussions.
in both the World Health Assembly and UN General Assembly on these topics. We hope that this World report on child injury prevention will lead to a similar set of actions, and will be used to guide our work for many years to come.

My colleagues and I would like to warmly thank the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for its kind and generous hospitality and our colleagues at UNICEF and the other 180 contributors to the World report on child injury prevention for their dedication to this cause. Should we succeed in our efforts collectively, we could indeed save more than a thousand children’s lives every day.

Ala Alwan
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World Health Organization