Mr President, Ministers, Dra Roses, dear colleagues and friends,

On behalf of the International Organizing Committee - composed of Drs Wim Rogmans, Leif Svanstrom, Robin Ikeda, Dinesh Mohan and Pierre Maurice - I would like to wish you a very warm welcome to the 9th World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion.

Our gratitude goes to Martha Hijar and the rest of our colleagues at the Mexican Institute for Public Health, Jess Kraus and other members of the Scientific Committee and all others who have worked tirelessly for more than two years to prepare an exciting programme for the coming three days.

The Mexican Government should also be thanked for its unwavering support since we first started discussing the idea of this event.

We also express our appreciation for the warm welcome we have received from the lovely city of Merida and the State of Yucatan. I encourage you to take some time to go discuss injury and violence prevention on Merida's central square or in the beautiful haciendas and archaeological sites surrounding the city!

We are particularly pleased that this edition of the World Conference is held for the first time in Latin America, which is a region of the world with some of the highest rates of injuries and violence, but where many innovative responses also exist. I personally look very much forward to learning from these experiences.

The theme of the 9th World Conference - globalization - is timely, as images of violence continue to flash in media around the world, as the global trade of drugs, alcohol, and weapons continue to flourish, as hundreds of new vehicles and new drivers take to the road every day, and as economic inequalities continue to grow in many parts of the world. Let's, however, focus also on the positive aspects of globalization. After all, it is thanks to global communication means that we are all here, representing more than a hundred countries. We also owe it to the global sharing of wealth that over 200 scholarships were attributed to participants from low and middle income countries.

Let's make this 9th World Conference an exciting event where we will learn and share, exchange and debate some of the latest scientific knowledge in our field of injury and violence prevention and safety promotion. Our focus on the best possible science remains an important one. This is an essential part of the value we - the injury prevention community - add to other existing efforts.
It is our hope that in addition to strengthening the scientific knowledge, the Conference will also serve as a bridge between science and policy making. The presence of several Ministers of Health from the Americas and of several dozens of national focal points from all over the world should help achieve that. In fact, while the Conference starts today, we already have several pre-meetings behind us, including a global meeting of national focal points as well as the first ever Ministerial Meeting on Injury and Violence Prevention in the Americas. Yesterday the Ministers adopted a powerful new declaration which should lay the ground for additional attention and action on our topics across this continent. Dr Cordova, senor Ministro, muchas gracias por su liderazgo - thank you very much for your excellent leadership and to your team as well as to Dr Mirta Roses and my other colleagues in PAHO and WHO. This deserves applause!

Dear colleagues and friends, thanks to your hard work, the number of countries collecting data or conducting research on injury prevention, adopting prevention approaches or strengthening their services continues to increase. Injury and violence prevention is gradually getting more attention. However we have a long way to go still. We need to continue to build capacity; we need to empower NGOs to do visible and vigorous advocacy; we need to include injury prevention in other relevant political agendas such as those on development, child survival or global warming; we need to further develop partnerships; and, above all, we need to build up and evaluate the impact of comprehensive injury and violence prevention programmes in low and middle income countries. I will be talking in much more detail about my - and WHO's - vision for the field on Monday. These are exciting times and the possibilities to see the field grow further are abundant!

Before closing, I'd like to take one minute to talk about the origins and future of this series of World Conferences. In 1989, the 1st World Conference was organized by the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. Since then we have met in Atlanta, Melbourne, Amsterdam, Delhi, Montreal, Vienna, Durban and now here in Merida. The International Organizing Committee - together with WHO and its Collaborating Centers and many of you - has worked hard to support the local organizers for each of these events. As the field has grown considerably in the past two decades, the International Organizing Committee is interested in finding another mechanism to ensure that the ownership of these World Conferences lies with a larger group. It is possible that ISVIP - the International Society for Violence and Injury Prevention - over time becomes that group. It is therefore important that all of you participate in the ISVIP meetings and elections during this 9th World Conference. We need to elect an active and representative board that will build on the past and develop the internal mechanisms to liaise with the Committee to support the organization of future World Conferences. Beyond this role, we also need ISVIP to become an independent and vocal advocacy-oriented NGO.
I would also like to take the opportunity to encourage you to attend the WHO business meetings. During these meetings we will share information on a number of global violence and injury prevention projects focused either on data collection, prevention, or trauma care for which your ideas and input are important. There will also be regional meetings to advance the agendas in Europe and the Middle East.

Mr President, Ministers, dear colleagues and friends, as we start the 9th World Conference, it is important to have a thought for those people for whom we are working. Every year we continue to lose more than 5 million lives due to violence and injuries. Tens of millions more people survive their injuries, but remain disabled for life. In fact, during the time of the Conference alone, 40,000 people - yes, 40,000 - will die from injuries or violence. Their families, friends, colleagues and classmates will be faced with the grief and pain of their passing for the years to come. During that same time, millions of women and children and elderly will suffer abuse mostly in their own homes behind closed doors and windows. In many cases, nobody except them and the perpetrators will even know about it.

We all know that most of these deaths and much of this suffering could be prevented. Let's make sure that this 9th World Conference serves as a catalyst for change and as an inspiration that allows us all to go home with new ideas and energized to continue our important work.

Muchas gracias.