

Oman Concerned over Rising Road Fatalities

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MUSCAT — The rising incidence of traffic deaths and injuries in Oman is causing concern at the topmost level in the country.

“What is happening on our roads is worrying,” His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said said, noting that negligence by motorists had been found to be the main contributory factor.

He called upon all segments of society to seriously discuss the issue and jointly try to contain it, reminding them that “it is better to reach safely than reaching on a stretcher.”

The Omani leader was addressing shaikhs and other notables of the Batinah region and Musandam governorate on Sunday, the seventh day of his ‘Meet the People’ tour of the country, at the royal camp in Saih Al Makarem in Sohar. During the annual trips, a unique feature of the ruler’s style of administration, he reviews subjects of national importance with his people. But this is the first time traffic casualties are figuring in these open discussions, signifying the gravity of the situation.

“What is happening on the Sultanate’s roads should be of concern to everyone. Misuse of vehicles by the different sections of society – it’s not just a single category – is irritating and worrying as it results in the death of many,” Sultan Qaboos said.

Oman has one of the highest rates of fatality from traffic accidents – 28 per 100,000 people, compared with the global average of 19/100,000. Official statistics for the past eight years indicate an alarming 6,000 deaths and 70,000 injuries, or an average of 750 deaths and 8,750 injuries, some permanently disabled, per year.

The trend is continuing unabated in 2009 with 788 deaths and 7,998 cases of injuries in 5,896 accidents until Saturday. This was on top of 951 fatalities last year in 8,816 incidents that also wounded 8,531 others, many seriously.

“While we believe that life and death are destined by Allah, at the same time Allah’s order is not to kill ourselves,” Sultan Qaboos observed.