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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CONTRIBUTION BY THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

The world vehicle industry is actively addressing sustainable development in its three main concepts - environmental protection, economic growth and social equity.

Automobile manufacturers have clearly committed themselves to supply the market with ever safer and more environment friendly products and are continuously investing huge R&D resources in further product improvements and in developing radically new propulsion systems. The results clearly show that most road traffic related environmental concerns are in the process of being solved, with all studies indicating air quality improvements on their way. As an example, official prognoses in the European Union indicate that by 2010 at the latest, road traffic will cease to induce environmental concerns in the European cities. Such remarkable results, owing to vehicle and fuel improvements and fleet renewal, can equally be obtained in other less developed regions, by ensuring that vehicles and fuels meet at least some minimum requirements; the vehicle industry strongly supports the concept of promoting the technology which is best available in terms of efficiency and affordability, versus the best technology which is available.

In terms of economic growth, the vehicle industry plays a key role in developing economies. Massive investments in production facilities all over the world ensure steady economic growth, create employment, enable developing economies to play a role in the ever increasing globalisation and to fully participate in the international trade. These vehicle production facilities act as a magnet, inducing a positive economic spiral by attracting suppliers and a whole vehicle distribution network. As an example, it is estimated that the automobile industry in the South African economy accounts for more than 270 000 direct employments (production, distribution, maintenance) and 5,6 % of the Gross Domestic Product; it also represents a quarter of the total manufacturing output of the country.

The industry's contribution on a macro-economic level also yields positive micro-economy implications, allowing a growing number of individuals and their families to benefit from a stable income.

Moreover, it should be recalled that road transport is inherently linked to economic development : the one cannot go without the other. Road transport is indeed particularly flexible, fast and reliable.

Social equity is the result of, among others, the internal manufacturers' policies of equal opportunities for all employees and of continuous improvement processes. Manufacturers devote huge amounts in employee training, not least because of the ever increasing complexity of the products and their production processes. This often results in a highly qualified workforce with manufacturers setting up their own educational systems for all.

In conclusion, it is clear that the vehicle industry is actively committed towards sustainable development. It is of course equally clear that much remains to be done, which is why support from all stakeholders is strongly needed. The vehicle manufacturers need stable and economically sound policies, following the rules of open markets, such that ongoing and future investment strategies can be sustained.
