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ARAB RACING DRIVER WANTS MIDDLE EAST TO FOLLOW AUSTRIAN LEAD TO FIGHT YOUNG ROAD DEATHS

Rising star Shaaban wants region to import driver training, programme after winning role in global road safety drive

Dubai, UAE, 30th April, 2007: Arab racing driver Basil Shaaban will campaign for a compulsory driver training and education programme to be imported to the Middle East from Europe where it has dramatically cut road deaths of young people.

It has become one of his top priorities after he joined a global road safety initiative which unites young activists in efforts to prevent traffic accidents worldwide.

Shaaban has been nominated to the Global Youth Road Safety Council whose role is to connect the road safety activities of groups around the world.

It follows last week's World Youth Assembly for Road Safety in Geneva, Switzerland, which spearheaded the First United Nations Global Road Safety Week, organised in conjunction with the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as UN Regional Commissions and their partners.

Shaaban is working with his race sponsors, Shell, towards improving road safety in the Middle East and reducing the region's disturbing rate of traffic fatalities among young people. Middle East statistics show there are 34.2 deaths per 100,000 men in the 15-29 age range, the worst record in the world.

One of the Assembly speakers in Geneva was Williams F1 racing driver Alexander Wurz, whose father runs a driver training and education programme which all new probationary drivers in Austria must complete before receiving their full driver's license.

Campaign 2

Said Shaaban: “This system is said to have cut traffic deaths of young Austrians by 30%. Such a programme could have a great future in the Middle East, and it’s something I hope to play a role in importing to our region.”

In Geneva he was nominated by the Arabic-speaking group to address the Assembly on behalf of the Middle East. Later he was nominated along with the conference chairperson, fellow-Lebanese road safety activist Nellie Ghusayni, to represent the Middle East on the Global Youth Road Safety Council.

“It means I will be actively helping shape the future of Youth Road Safety programmes in the Arab world,” said Shaaban, born in Beirut and raised in Abu Dhabi. “We’re committed to making our roads safer, and saving the 1,049 precious young lives that are lost on the world’s roads every day.”

Shaaban, who made his debut in Formula 3 Euro series at Hockenheim, Germany recently after signing a new sponsorship agreement with Shell, is bidding to become the first Arab driver to enter Formula One.

He said: “My position as a racing driver gives me a unique view of road safety, and also a unique persuasiveness on its behalf. It is highly motivating for young people when someone who drives to the limit on race circuits tells them how irresponsible, careless and criminal it is to speed and drive aggressively on public roads.”

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