

**Background and report on meeting between
Umma wa Wapanda Baisikeli Dar es Salaam (UWABA)
and
Road Safety Department, Ministry of Infrastructure
14th January 2008**

Background to meeting

UWABA had written a letter to the Minister of Infrastructure (Hon Andrew Chenge) on 18th February 2007 requesting to meet him. UWABA received a reply on 27th February 2007 congratulating UWABA for setting up this important organization for cyclists and for its aims of protecting the environment, reducing traffic jams, reducing transport costs and promoting exercise. The Minister expressed a willingness to meet with UWABA but suggested we meet with subsidiary organizations and departments under his Ministry such as TANROADS first before meeting with him.

During 2007 UWABA had meetings with TANROADS, both Dar es Salaam branch and headquarters, and wrote several letters and received two helpful replies on issues of design of roads in Dar es Salaam for cyclists.

In early 2008, UWABA then decided to seek a meeting with the road safety department of the Ministry of Infrastructure. The secretary of UWABA delivered a letter requesting a meeting with this department. In the letter, UWABA expressed the aims of the meeting as follows:

- To make a powerpoint presentation on issues affecting cyclists
- To request information on road traffic regulations relating to cyclists
- To request information on policies for design of roads and how roads should protect the safety of cyclists
- To examine how UWABA can continue to contribute ideas in the road safety sector in Dar es Salaam

The head of the road safety department received this letter in person and gave UWABA an appointment for Monday 14 January 2008 at 10am. A meeting time of approximately one hour was agreed including presentation and discussion. We were told we could bring up to five UWABA representatives to the meeting.

Prior to this, UWABA had prepared a presentation on issues of road safety and road conditions for cyclists in Dar es Salaam. Members surveyed various roads and then we had compiled the suggestions together.

On Saturday 12 January at the weekly UWABA meeting, members made suggestions and we adjusted our previous draft presentation especially for this meeting and chose which members should represent UWABA at the meeting.

Report on the meeting

The UWABA representatives turned up at 10am to the Ministry of Infrastructure Road Safety Department as per appointment. All four representatives volunteered their time and gave up their normal work to attend this meeting, as none of them are paid to represent their fellow cyclists and do so voluntarily. We were asked to wait and were not admitted until 10.45am. There were three representatives of the road safety department there. UWABA distributed copies of our presentation.

The head of the road safety department then told us we would have only 15 minutes, and not one hour as previously agreed. UWABA started off by attempting to introduce the four UWABA representatives and asking to be introduced to the three representatives from the road safety department but were cut short and told we cannot do introductions as there was no time, so we do not even know the names of two of the people we met with.

Due to the time constraint given to us, the chairman of UWABA started to go through the presentation extremely quickly taking only a few seconds per slide, which meant we could not express our ideas clearly. Despite trying to accommodate the time constraint as best he could, he was continuously interrupted in an abrupt way by the head of Road Safety and told to move on or skip sections of the presentation.

When the issue of consultation of stakeholders was discussed, we were told that UWABA has no right to be consulted as we are not “experts” and have not studied. We responded that we may not have expertise in engineering or law, but that we do have extensive experience of cycling on roads and that this is a different type of expertise. However it was simply repeated to us that we were not engineers or lawyers and so should not be consulted as stakeholders. We made the point that MKUKUTA has a policy of consultation with stakeholders and were told that this department “has not started MKUKUTA”.

One of the slides asked for copies of the road regulations. We were told in an abrupt manner that we “had not done our homework” and that these regulations are available from the Government Printer or the traffic police. We responded by saying the regulations are usually out of print and not available at the Government Printer or the Government Bookshop and that we had also requested them from the Traffic Police but had not yet received a copy and we asked for assistance in obtaining copies. We were then told that we were wasting the Government’s time.

We were then abruptly told to leave before we had finished the presentation.

In total we were only in the office about 15 minutes and much of this time was spent not on the presentation but rather being told that we had not studied or “done our homework” and were wasting the department’s time.

Discussion after meeting within UWABA

The four representatives discussed the meeting among ourselves after the meeting. The representatives felt that we had not been respected as we should be given three of us were citizens of Tanzania and all of us were elected representatives of a broad based grassroots NGO representing cyclists needs. We had expected to be able to finish the presentation without interruption and to then have meaningful discussion in a polite respectful way on how we could cooperate with the department to improve road safety for cyclists. Instead, we felt that we had wasted our time preparing for and attending this meeting. We felt that it was disrespectful of the department to suggest that we had no ideas to offer simply because we were not engineers or lawyers, and that the comments that were made to us were intended to make us feel inadequate and stupid. We fail to understand why we were given an appointment at all if this was to be the result. We saw that the road safety department of the Ministry of Infrastructure attaches no priority to listening to citizens or stakeholders' views or engaging in democratic consultation with road users.