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14th Meeting of the UIC Middle-East Region (RAME) was held in Tehran in conjunction with a conference on application of COTIF in the Middle East

The 2015 UIC Middle-East Action Plan will include conferences in Qatar, Jordan, Iran and Turkey

(Tehran/Paris, 18 November 2014), The 14th meeting of the UIC Regional Assembly for the Middle-East (UIC RAME), which brings together 14 railways or railway authorities from 8 countries within UIC, was held on 11 November 2014 in Tehran in connection with a conference on the application of the COTIF convention in the Middle-East. This conference was jointly organised by OTIF (the Organisation for International Carriage by Rail), ECO (the Economic Cooperation Organisation consisting of 10 Member States from the Region), the UIC Middle-East Region as well as the railways of the I.R. of Iran (RAI).

The UIC Middle-East meeting was co-chaired by Mr Mohsen Pour Seyed Aghaie, Vice Minister of Roads and Urban Development, President of Iranian Railways RAI, and 1st Vice Chairman of the UIC Middle-East Region, together with Mr Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, Director General of UIC, in the presence of Mr Adem Kayis, Deputy Director-General of Turkish State Railways (TCDD) representing Mr Süleyman Karaman, Director-General of TCDD, UIC Middle-East Chairman. The meeting was attended by Mr François Davenne, Secretary General of OTIF, who was invited as a guest.

On behalf of Iranian Railways, Mr Mohsen Pour Seyed Aghaie warmly welcomed all participants and highlighted that regional forums are particularly important to boost railway cooperation at a time where rail transport has to cope with many challenges. In this respect the Regional Assembly for the Middle-East (UIC RAME) was one of the first regional forums to be set up within UIC and became active from 2007. It produced a number of important achievements both at strategic level – with the publication for the first time of a strategic Action Plan for UIC Middle-East – as well as on a technical, operational and educational level with a number of successful conferences, seminars, technical workshops and training programmes.

He also underlined the importance of railways for the transport and economic system of his country, the I.R. of Iran, as well as neighbouring countries. He gave an overview on projects and priorities including the high speed rail system, electrification, doubling lines, ETCS signalling on the whole network. Priority is given to connecting railways with ports with the participation of the private sector. The next important achievement in Iran will be the inauguration in December of the new railway line (900 km) linking Iran to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan and on to China. Future railway links also include the North/South corridor passing through Iran, the rail corridor linking Iran-Afghanistan-Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan to China as well as Iran-Iraq links.

UIC Director General Jean-Pierre Loubinoux reminded the meeting of the strong messages delivered at the last UIC General Assembly in Portoroz, Slovenia, in June.

He emphasised that UIC's initial mission consisted of forming bridges between railway systems, between countries and continents, bridges between economy and society, between generations. At global level seven million of railway men and women serve seven billion inhabitants on the planet.

Among the most important achievements Jean-Pierre Loubinoux mentioned the finalisation of the Strategic Visions for the six UIC Regions including the Middle-East. This set of strategic documents will enable UIC and the rail sector to effectively promote the advantages of rail transport at global level.

Another very positive result for UIC is the enhancement of its profile and credibility vis-à-vis leading international organisations, and first of all at the United Nations. UIC was invited to present the rail sector's commitments at the recent UN Climate Summit in New York and the UIC Director General was personally appointed member of the High-level Advisory Group to UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki-moon on Sustainable Transport.

Mr Loubinoux also invited Members of the Middle-East to be actively involved in the railway global communications campaign that will be coordinated by UIC on the occasion of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in December 2015 in Paris.

Reports on the latest railway developments were presented by the Heads of Iranian Railways (RAI), Turkish Railways (TCDD) and Afghanistan (AfRA).

Action Plan for UIC Middle-East in 2015

Mr Abbas Nazari, Director of the UIC Regional Office for the Middle-East located in Tehran, reported on all the main activities completed by the region in 2014. Highlights in 2014 were the update and dissemination of the *"Strategic Action Plan for the Middle-East"* complemented by the updated version of the report *"Regional and Supra-Regional Rail Transportation Linkages in the Middle-East"*, as well as a series of successful and well-attended conferences, seminars and workshops organised under the umbrella of UIC Middle-East:

- TCDD/UIC RAME Seminar on Security and Safety related to High-Speed (Ankara, May 2014)
- UIC / RAI Workshop on Passenger Activities and High Speed Rail (Tehran, August-September 2014)
- 2nd Rail Safety Working Group (Tehran, September 2014)
- A training course on RAMS and LCC at MERTCe Training Centre (UIC / TCDD) (Eskisehir, October 2014)
- Conference on the COTIF convention jointly organised by OTIF, ECO, UIC Middle-East, RAI (Tehran, November 2014)

Paul Véron, Director, UIC Coordinator for the Middle-East, presented the Action Plan for the Region in 2015. Activities will include the dissemination of the Strategic Vision for the Middle-East towards international organisations, governments and all kinds of stakeholders and potential partners, as well as the organisation of a number of conferences on issues with high relevance to the region.

These events organised under the umbrella of UIC Middle-East in 2015 will include:

- The UIC Middle-East Conference on *Railway Interoperability and Standardisation* (1st quarter 2015 in Qatar), possibly in cooperation with OTIF
- UIC RAME Seminar on *Infrastructure Maintenance and ERTMS for the Middle-East* (3 – 4 May 2015 in Jordan, Dead Sea)
- UIC RAME International Conference on *Rail / Ports and Oil / Rail Cooperation* (June 2015, I.R. of Iran)

-UIC RAME *International Business Forum* (September 2015, Istanbul)

In addition, training seminars will be planned at the Middle-East Rail Training Centre (MERTCe) and prepared in close cooperation between the UIC Expertise Development Unit and Turkish State Railways (TCDD). The themes of the training programmes will be communicated in the near future.

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