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## 15th RAME Meeting and ERTMS Workshop in Jordan

**15th Meeting of the UIC Middle-East Region (RAME) held at the Dead Sea, Jordan, in conjunction with a workshop on Signalling and ERTMS and Asset Management for Middle-Eastern Railways – Mr. Ömer Yıldız, newly appointed President and Director General of Turkish Railways TCDD, succeeds Mr. Süleyman Karaman as the UIC Middle-East Chairman.**

*The UIC Middle-East Action Plan includes a 1st Rail/Ports and Oil/Rail International Conference in November 2015 in Iran, a High Speed Rail Workshop in Saudi Arabia as well as the 1st International Business Forum in Istanbul in the first half of 2016.*

(Paris, 5 May 2015) The 15th Meeting of the UIC Regional Assembly for the Middle-East (UIC RAME), which brings together 15 railways and railway authorities from 9 countries within UIC, was held on 3 May at the Dead Sea in Jordan, in conjunction with the UIC RAME Workshop on “Signalling and ERTMS, Possible Solutions for the Middle-East – Asset Management”.

The 15th UIC RAME Meeting in Jordan was held under the High Patronage of Dr. Lena Shabeb, Minister of Transport of the Kingdom of Jordan, and at the kind invitation of Mr. Salah Al Louzi, Director General of Jordan Hejaz Railways (JHR). National railway delegations included Mr. Ömer Yıldız, President and Director General of Turkish Railways (TCDD), HE Eng. Mohammed Khaled Al Suwaiket, President of Saudi Arabia Railway Organisation (SRO), Eng. Al Muhannadi, CEO of Qatar Railway Company (QRC), Mr. Mohammed Shams, CEO of Afghanistan Railway Authority (AfRA), Mr. Ebrahim Mohammadi, Vice President Movement of Iranian Railways RAI, CEOs of both Jordanian Railways Jordan Hejaz (JHR), Host of the UIC Meetings, and Aqaba Railway Corporation (ARC), as well as the Director of the UIC Regional Office based in Tehran, and delegations from member railways as well as from UIC.

Eng. Hussein Krishan who has been managing Aqaba Railway Corporation (ARC) as Director General over the past twelve years and was UIC RAME Vice Chairman, announced that he had been recently appointed as the CEO of a Committee for economic development of the Ma'an Region in Jordan. All participants from the UIC Middle-East Region warmly thanked him for his commitment and personal involvement since the creation of the RAME Region in 2007.

In her opening address, Dr. Lina Shabeb, the Minister of Transport of the Kingdom of Jordan put the focus on the following aspects:

“Transport is a vital sector for the Jordanian economy and an important component of daily life of Jordanians, and Jordan is on its way to implement a sustainable, long-term, demand-driven, multi-modal transport system as its unique geographical key position and political stability is one of the main privileges that attracts investments and fosters business opportunities in the region.

The creation of a new railway network in Jordan is of strategic importance for the development of the transport sector and the consolidation of the country's role in the region. Indeed a new, state of the art railway system in the country, if connecting major origins and destinations of freight commodities, could capture a significant share of medium to long-haul freight traffic, easing road traffic on major highways, in a synergic way with the oil pipeline from Iraq to Aqaba.

The Jordan National Railway Project aims at developing a modern and reliable freight railway network (942 km), linking the nation's key cities (i.e. Amman, Mafraq, Zarqa, Ma'an) integrating main logistic centres, the country's gateway port (the Port of Aqaba on the Red Sea) and the largest phosphate mine (Shidiya Mine).

This project will be designed completely in accordance with UIC Standards".

After a warm welcome to all participants, Mr. Salah Al Louzi, Director General of Hejaz Railways (JHR) referred to the important content of the meetings and workshops and he described the latest developments in the rail situation and projects in Jordan.

In a video message broadcast live to all participants, UIC Director General Mr. Jean-Pierre Loubinoux summarised some of the main challenges for railway cooperation in the Middle-East Region:

"From a general viewpoint, the Middle-East has become within a few years one of the most active and successful regions in terms of railway achievements, compared to the rest of the world. Let us just mention the rapid railway expansion in Turkey, new corridors connecting Turkey or Iran with Central Asia, the high speed and rail freight projects in Saudi Arabia, the ambitious GCC project or project in Jordan ...

All these projects realised at national level, also raise new challenges in terms of interconnections and international cooperation, of harmonisation and interoperability, and more generally in terms of international solidarity.

These challenges were perfectly highlighted during the recent conference successfully organised in March in Doha by UIC, OTIF and CIT together with Qatar Railways.

Currently, UIC as the global railway organisation, provides a unique framework for coping with all these challenges of interoperability and harmonisation, in the technical, operational, and managerial fields".

An important issue in the UIC RAME Regional Assembly was related to the governance of this UIC Region. Mr. Süleyman Karaman, President and Director General of TCDD was in charge of chairing and steering activities of the UIC Middle East Region since its creation in 2007.

Mr. Karaman had to resign because of his plans to stand as candidate in the elections in Turkey. This was an opportunity to warmly thank him and his team on behalf of all UIC Members for the strong leadership and monitoring of the Middle-East Region by TCDD during these last nine years. Considering the continuous commitment and involvement of TCDD in regional as well as global UIC international cooperation activities, it was proposed and unanimously approved that the successor of Mr. Karaman, Mr. Ömer Yildiz, previously CEO of the Public Transport System of Istanbul, and recently appointed President of the Board and Director General of TCDD, was elected Chairman of the UIC Middle-East Region for the rest of Mr. Karaman's mandate running until end of 2015.

The governance of the UIC Middle-East Region for the 2016-2017 term (Chairman and 3 Vice Chairmen) will be defined at the 16th UIC RAME Meeting in November 2015.

Mr. Ömer Yildiz delivered the following message on behalf of Turkish Railways: "The developments about the rail sector in our region are very well known by all of us. Our region is one of the most active regions in rail sector in terms of projects. I think you will be explaining the details in your presentations. We are aware of the importance given to rail sector by Jordan with a new master plan. We also track Iran's strengthening its rail transport by adding new connections to its neighbours, such as the one recently inaugurated with Turkmenistan. The connection of the Holy Places with High Speed in Saudi Arabia, local and international connection projects in Gulf Countries like Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates together with Saudi Arabia also are all praiseworthy.

Reconstruction and revitalisation studies of railways in Iraq and Afghanistan and of course the projects that have been accomplished in Turkey within the last 12 years along with the investments made in rail sector are all indicators for the utmost importance given to the rail sector in our region.

Along with the projects, I also would like to underline the significance of the interconnectivity and interoperability of projects to one another in an increasingly globalised world. In this context, it is also crucial to come together to discuss how we can take our industry further and exchange know-how and experiences even though we may have different rail systems. Taking into account that the leaps and developments in our region are for the benefit of us all, I would like to express that TCDD has always been and will be in the future as well welcome and willing to closely cooperate.

I also would like to thank UIC – International Union of Railways, acting with the motto Unity, Solidarity and Universality”.

### **UIC Middle-East Action Plan for 2015-2016**

Priority actions for 2015-2016 will include among others:

- an update of the strategic Vision document “Strategic Action Plan for UIC Middle-East 2013-2020” with the objective of integrating the most recent railway projects and achievements in the Region,
- a development of cooperation and joint activities between UIC, OTIF, CIT, ECO, UNESCAP, UNECE, regional banks, and organisation of joint workshops, etc.
- the 1st “International Rail / Ports and Oil / Rail Seminar” on 9-11 November 2015 in Tehran
- a follow-up of the Railway Interoperability-Standardisation-Harmonisation after the successful conference with OTF, CIT and QRC held on 30-31 March in Doha (DVD produced)
- a UIC RAME “Signalling - ERTMS and Asset Management” Workshop on 4-5 May at the Dead Sea, Jordan
- a High Speed Rail seminar in Saudi Arabia with SRO in the first half of 2016, in connection with the achievements in this country related to high speed rail development
- a 1st UIC RAME “International Business Forum” also in the first half of 2016 in Istanbul with the objective of promoting stronger partnerships between railways, investors, business partners, international organisations and financial institutions,...
- training programmes for the Middle-East jointly prepared with the Middle-East Rail Training Centre (MERTCe) of TCDD in Eskisehir, Turkey. Next training is Eskisehir (2-4 June 2015) will address “Carriage of dangerous goods: Legal framework and challenges for employee training”.

This Region Assembly for the Middle East also served as an opportunity to remind participants and current CEOs that future railway generations have to be specifically prepared to meet railways needs, through educational programs such as the Railway Executive MBA.

UIC warmly thanks Jordan Hejaz Railways (JHR) for their kind hospitality and excellent organisation of the meeting.

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