

PRESS RELEASE N°22 / 2010

UIC (International Union of Railways) Regional Assembly for 'Africa' held in Tripoli

Reinforcement of ties between the African Union and the Union of African Railways at the heart of discussions during the Regional Assembly. Mr Mohammed Khlie, Director General of Moroccan Railways voted new Chairman of the Regional Assembly for Africa of the UIC.

(Paris, 3 August 2010). The UIC (International Union of Railways) Regional Assembly for Africa was held in Tripoli in Libya, hosted by M. *Rasheed Saeed*, Secretary of State for Rail Transport, Director of Libyan Railways on the 29 July in parallel with the 37th Union of African Railways General Assembly gathering representatives from 35 members.

The UIC Regional Assembly for Africa was chaired by Mr *Mohamed Nejib Fitouri*, CEO of SNCFT (Tunisian Railways) and current chairman of UAR (Union of African Railways) and Mr *Jean-Pierre Loubinoux*, UIC Director General.

The agenda covered the following main points:

- Governance in the UIC Africa Region and election of the new chairman (given that Mr Gama was no longer CEO of Transnet Rail in South Africa),
- UIC membership of UAR,
- Cooperation between UIC and the Chair of the African Union (AU),
- An overview of a series of seminars held in the Maghreb region, with participation from UIC and African networks.

One of the major decisions taken during the course of this meeting was on the election of a new Chairman for the UIC Regional Assembly for Africa, namely Mr *Mohammed Khlie*, Director General of ONCF (Moroccan Railways). Mr *Khlie* is closely involved in UIC international cooperation activities and was in fact recently nominated as a new member of the UIC Executive Committee at the UIC General Assembly held in Tokyo.

Mohammed Khlie, born in 1963, graduated from the Mohammadia School for Engineers (EMI) as a State Engineer in the field of electronic engineering specialising in Industrial Automation (1987). He joined the Moroccan Railways (ONCF) in 1988 as an Operations Inspector and then moved onto other management roles including Marketing Director (1996-1999), Director of Centre for Operations (1999-2002), Director of the Centre for Business (2002-2003) before taking on the role of interim Director General (2002) when his predecessor Mr Karim Ghellab was appointed Minister for Transport in the Moroccan Government. Mohammed Khlie was made Director General of ONCF in July 2004 on appointment by HM King Mohammed VI. In addition to this, Mr Khlie takes an active role in the governing bodies of UIC and in particular now as new member of the Executive Committee representing the Africa/Maghreb region (June 2010).

Jean-Pierre Loubinoux listed the main UIC priorities for action concerning the Africa region. A first outcome of this had been the drafting of a "Vision 2025" for the development of railways in Africa, a document which was recognised by the African Union as being the cornerstone to a development strategy for railways in the region.

The UIC Director General's visit to the African Union Commission Headquarters in Addis Ababa in March of this year, in the company of his Legal Affairs and Labour Relations Director *Jean-Pierre Lehman*, also marked an important new step, as they met with H. Excellency Dr *Elham M.A. Ibrahim*, Commissioner for Energy and Infrastructure. This meeting prepared the way for reinforcement of ties between the AU Commission and UIC as part of the Memorandum signed in April 2007. It was also decided that the UAR, as specialised agency for railways for the AU would have a larger role in implementing projects carried out in close cooperation with UIC.

A proposal was also made to make the UAR a member of UIC as a regional association, alongside direct UIC membership of several of its own major African networks, in order to facilitate broader cooperation with other smaller African railways.

The Regional Assembly for Africa held in Tripoli was also an opportunity to present the outcome of seminars recently held in Tunisia, to which UIC and the UAR participated along with African railway companies. These seminars covered areas such as *"Track maintenance – technical aspects, cost and maintenance standards"* (6 October 2009), *"Railways as an integrating factor in the Maghreb region"* (28 May 2010), and also included an EU hosted symposium in Naples on *"Transport Infrastructure in Africa"* (22 November 2009).

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