



INTERNATIONAL UNION
OF RAILWAYS

PRESS RELEASE No.33 / 2010

UIC Regional Office for Africa officially inaugurated in Tunis

(Paris, 18.11.2010). The headquarters of the UIC Regional Office for Africa were inaugurated on Friday 12 November in Tunis with Mr. Abderrahim Zouari, Tunisian Minister of Transport, Mr. Mohamed Rabi Khlie, Director-General of Moroccan Railways (ONCF) and Chairman of the UIC African Region, Mr. Mohamed Nejib Fitouri, President and Director-General of Tunisian Railways (SNCFT) and Chairman of the Union of African Railways (UAR), Mr. Naffati El Ghoul, Secretary-General of UAR, Mr. Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, UIC Director-General and Mr. Jean-Pierre Lehman, UIC Legal Director and Coordinator for Africa.

The opening of the UIC Regional Office for Africa is the result of a decision adopted by the African Regional Assembly last summer in Tripoli (during the same meeting, Mr. Mohamed Khlie was elected as the new Chairman of 'UIC Africa'). The Tunis Office (similar to the UIC Regional Offices already in operation in Delhi for Asia and in Tehran for the Middle-East), will be working under the course of action set out by the Regional Assembly (composed of UIC African Member railways) and the assembly Chairman. The office will benefit from the organisational and logistic support of the Tunisian Railways for a period of 18 to 24 months and will be managed by Mr. Mokhtar Essadok. Its main task will consist in overseeing the implementation and follow-up of the Action Plan of the UIC African Region and encouraging the development of cooperation links between African members and international bodies with competence in transport and railways issues in the region.

Transport Minister Mr. Abderrahim Zouari underlined how Tunisia is proud to host the opening of the UIC Regional Office and that this inauguration demonstrates his country's keen interest in transport issues, particularly in the railways. The Tunisian government considers rail transport as an engine for growth and an efficient tool for sustainable development. Among the priorities, the minister mentioned the development of public transport to reduce traffic jams, the project to develop a line as part of the trans-Maghreb high speed rail system, as well as the project to shift freight from road to rail by developing intermodal transport. He also reminded those present how urgent and essential it is to develop railway infrastructure for Africa and recalled the signing of the Brazzaville Declaration for an efficient rail transport system in 2006, during the 1st conference of the Ministers from the African Union in charge of railway transport.

Mr. Mohamed Nejib Fitouri, SNCFT President and Director-General, and Chairman of the African Union of Railways, warmly welcomed all participants from railway organisations and from individual African railways. He also underlined how much Tunisian Railways are committed to fostering international cooperation in the region through his chairmanship of the UAR, his vice-chairmanship of the Arab Union of Railways (AUR) and the active participation

of SNCFT in the Maghreb Railway Transport Committee (CTFM), illustrating a willingness to simultaneously promote the development of rail transport at African, Arab and Maghreb level.

UIC Director-General Jean-Pierre Loubinoux stressed that the inauguration of the 'UIC Africa' Office here in Tunis is of great symbolic importance. On one hand, it demonstrates the willingness of Maghreb Railways – ONCF as the chair railway of 'UIC Africa' and SNCFT as the host railway of the Regional Office – to play a decisive role in joining the efforts of all African railways towards modernising and expanding their networks; and on the other it shows that Maghreb Railways, situated at the crossroads between Europe and Africa – and as a gateway to Europe – will become increasingly vital players in the development of economy and trade in the Mediterranean region. Two important railway events involving UAR and UIC have already been held in Tunis recently: one on Track Maintenance and the other on Rail as an Integration Factor for the Maghreb Region. The involvement of both railways (ONCF and SNCFT) marks a new dynamic in the development of a specific Action Plan for the African Region within UIC. The signing of the MoU in 2010 between UIC and the African Union Commission (AUC) in Addis Ababa also demonstrates how much UIC is committed to making the modernisation and consolidation of African railways a success.

CONTACTS:

Liesbeth de Jong
Media Relations : dejong@uic.org

Jean-Pierre Lehman
UIC Coordinator for Africa: lehman@uic.org