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1st International Conference on Railway Interoperability, Standardisation and Harmonisation for Middle East Railways successfully held in Doha, Qatar:

Interoperability and Harmonisation, the keys to development of an integrated, competitive, rail transport system for the Middle-East

(Doha, 31 March 2015) The 1st International Conference on Railway Interoperability, Standardisation and Harmonisation in the Middle East was successfully held in Doha, Qatar, at the kind invitation of Qatar Railway Company QRC on 30 and 31 March 2015.

The conference was jointly organised by UIC, the worldwide association of railways, the UIC Middle East Region in close cooperation with OTIF, the Intergovernmental Organization for International Rail Transport, CIT, the International Rail Transport Committee and Qatar Railway Company, a UIC Member since 2012.

This first conference on interoperability and standardization was held as a priority action in the framework of the Vision and Strategic Action Plan for the Middle East that was approved in 2013 by all UIC Members from the Region. The aim was to address all determining issues for the development of a coherent regional rail transport system in particular in the technical, operational and legal fields.

Participants represented the Transport Authorities and Railways from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Sultanate of Oman, Kuwait, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, as well as Morocco (Chair Railway of the UIC African Region), together with participants from the rail supply industry, universities, media.

Key note opening addresses were given by Eng. Abdulla Abdulaziz Al Subaie, Qatar Rail's Managing Director, Mr. Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, UIC Director General, and Mr. François Davenne, OTIF Secretary General.

The conference focused on three major topics that discussed "legal interoperability framework", "railway harmonisation and standardisation", and "Railway Safety".

Eng. Abdullah Abdulaziz Al Subaie, Managing Director of Qatar Rail QRC said in his opening statement: "By bringing together local, regional and international experts from the railway industry at UIC RAME, Qatar Rail aims to contribute to Railway Interoperability, Standardisation and Harmonisation in the Middle East in general and the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) region in particular".

He added: "In commitment to Qatar's National Vision 2030, our company adheres to Qatar's national transportation objectives enunciated in the Qatar National Development Framework (QNDF). In addition to the Doha Metro and the Lusail City Light Rail Transit, Qatar Rail envisages the development of a Long Distance Rail that will form part of the planned GCC cross-border railway network that will enable a higher level of cooperation between the member states, and play a crucial role in the sustainable development of each country's economy".

Mr. Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, UIC Director General, underlined in his opening speech: "Currently, the Middle-East Region is the part of the world with the most ambitious projects and most advanced achievements in the field of rail transportation. In nearly all countries, high performance railway systems for passenger and freight as well as for urban public transport are planned or in construction".

He added: "The presence of multiple perspectives underlines the imperative need to use common standards, common rules for operations, and common legal systems. With interoperability and seamless cross-border operations, railways will be able to offer all the advantages of the rail system to the markets".

He concluded: "What the diversity of the railway world needs more than ever is Unity, Universality and Solidarity which are the values of UIC at the service of its Members".

An example of action to link railways on a global scale in a universal dimension is a Railway Executive MBA that will contribute to create future generations of cross-border international managers and executives.

Mr. François Davenne, OTIF's Secretary General, addressed the legal interoperability framework, with a focus on OTIF's role aiming to harmonise international rail transport law and rail contract law in an expanded geographical coverage.

Presentations and following debates focused on:

- the legal interoperability framework (presentations by OTIF)
- the railway harmonisation and standardisation framework (presentation by UIC and Qatar Rail on GCC)
- the railway safety (presentations by OTIF and UIC)
- harmonisation and interoperability of the GCC Railways (presentation by World Bank / GCC Secretariat General)
- harmonisation of cross border passenger and freight transport (presentation by CIT)
- UIC activities to harmonise rail freight operations
- interoperability in handling customs and immigration (by DB International on behalf of Qatar Rail)
- views of suppliers on interoperability (presentations by Huawei, sponsor of the event, and Alstom Transport)
- interoperability of data exchange (presentation by railML)

In his concluding remarks the UIC Director General warmly thanked Qatar Rail for their hospitality and announced among the next opportunities to continue this expertise sharing the 2nd UIC Conference on Railway Standardisation to be held on 9 June at UIC Paris Headquarters.

The content of this Conference with all presentations will be available in the near future.

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