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Marrakesh: ONCF and UIC hold international seminar on "Railways past, present and future" to mark Moroccan Railways' fiftieth anniversary

UIC Strategic Regional Visions presented as round-tables discuss future challenges facing railways

(Paris/Marrakesh, 6 March 2014) On 6 March 2014, Moroccan National Railways (ONCF) marked the twin anniversaries of 100 years since the building of the first railway in Morocco and 50 years since ONCF's founding with an international seminar entitled "Railways: past, present and future", held in collaboration with UIC under the high patronage of His Majesty Mohamed VI.

Attended by 200 participants from 25 countries across five continents, the seminar was opened by the Moroccan Minister of Transport, Mr Mohamed Najib Boulif, alongside the Cameroonian Minister of Transport, Mr Robert Nkili.

Upon opening the international seminar, Mr Mohamed Rabie Khlie, Chief Executive of Moroccan Railways (ONCF) and Chairman of UIC's African Region, stated that:

"Whilst this historic event – this double anniversary – has been celebrated with all Moroccans, we wished to round celebrations off with this ideal opportunity for you and the international rail community together to review the technical, technological, normative and indeed managerial changes which have characterised the development of rail systems across the world, and to discuss the issues associated with the revitalisation of the railways. The opportunity is a timely one, given the general consensus today on the need to further develop rail as a mode of transport offering incontestable advantages for society. In this sense, we believe that the diverse range of important subjects covered today will be for us an opportunity to deepen and share our thinking on the basis of the visions defined by UIC, in order to boost the standing of railways and strengthen their key role in the socio-economic development of our countries".

UIC Director-General Jean-Pierre Loubinoux told the seminar that:

"An anniversary such as this one, which we today celebrate in Morocco, is a source of pride for all of us. It is an opportunity for us together to pay homage to the genius, creativity, boldness and bravery of those pioneers who, 50, 100 or 180 years ago, developed a new mode of transport which was innovative and efficient, often displaying spectacular feats of technical and human skill, and who opened up vast potential for the economic and social development of the countries in which they did so".

He added: "Today, the railways and their supply-industry partners are making huge strides to innovate and adapt the rail sector to the challenges of the present and future: the challenges of sustainability, energy efficiency, economic and social development, globalisation of markets, and management. [...] UIC, the global organisation with 240 members across five continents, has defined outline strategies and work programmes which take on board these major challenges, addressing them in particular through the six UIC Regions".

The seminar also defined priorities and threw up a wealth of innovative ideas of potential benefit to the rail community as a whole.

The railways currently possess a range of advantages, but must also meet the challenges posed by the market, demographic and economic developments and far-reaching changes in society, sustainability, as well as by human resources and management issues.

The first round-table session during the seminar brought together many institutional players and provided an opportunity to present for the first time the Strategic Regional Visions coordinated by UIC. The visions of the various regions (Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America, Europe, and the Middle-East), which have now for the first time been given coherent shape and are accompanied by core strategic foci, are henceforth available for consultation by decision-makers and all railway and other transport stakeholders.

A second round-table discussion attended by representatives of OTIF, UNIFE, Alstom and UIC centred on the inter-railway progress needed in terms of legal and administrative harmonisation, the interoperability and innovation challenges they face, the need for global standards and products suitable for use worldwide.

Other challenges the railways will have to face in future, such as funding, security and sustainability, as well as training young workers and readying the next generation to meet the societal and managerial challenges of the railways in decades to come, were discussed during a third round-table attended by delegates from the EIB, EM Lyon and UIC.

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