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Statement

by

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at

**International Road Transport (IRU)
General Assembly**

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Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address you at this IRU General Assembly.

At the outset, I would like to thank the IRU for their continued collaboration with the UNECE in further promoting the cause of road transport facilitation which is increasingly important in today's globalized world.

I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to inform you about the outcome of the recent Ministerial meeting "Making the Euro-Asian Transport Network Operational" held in February this year on the occasion of the 75th jubilee session of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

The historic example of Silk Road demonstrates that economic relations, trade and tourism cannot flourish successfully without an adequate infrastructure. Transport

movements between Europe and Asia today are in many places blocked by dilapidated roads, non-existing or insufficient railway links, and very often trapped by complicated border controls or stuck in congested ports. This is why the idea of a Euro-Asian Transport Links is so appealing – it is seen as necessary to improve transport connections and expected to enhance opportunities for the land-locked countries of Central Asia and Eastern Europe to reap the benefits from these improved transport connections.

Current efforts to promote infrastructure links between Asia and Europe are facing formidable challenges. Ensuring the necessary financial support for infrastructure development is just one among many such challenges involving also those originating in the sphere of politics, transport regulations and transport operations.

UNECE was a pioneer in recognizing the need to connect countries in Europe and Asia with a comprehensive and harmonized road, rail, inland navigation and intermodal transport infrastructure network. Through the UN transport

conventions, the UNECE has provided not only a framework for systematic development of transport services and infrastructure, but also a way forward for facilitating border crossing procedures and thus reducing trade and transport costs for countries along the Euro-Asian transport links.

The need for and the benefits of regional cooperation in development of transport services and infrastructure, facilitation of international transport and other collaboration on building safe, sustainable and environmentally friendly transport links have been recognized by countries along the Euro-Asian links as well as those at its both extremes.

Wishing to claim the ownership as well as responsibility for the future development of Euro-Asian transport links, Ministers of Transport or other high-level representatives from 32 countries from Europe and Asia, signed the Joint Statement on Future Development of Euro-Asian Transport Links in February 2013 in Geneva. The Statement endorsed priority projects identified through a joint work of UNECE and 27 countries from Europe and Asia, carried out between 2008 and 2012. The objective of

this joint undertaking, to identify and improve inland transport routes between Europe and Asia was materialized in 311 priority transport infrastructure projects along the main Euro–Asian routes for a total cost of US\$ 215 billion. Out of these priority projects, 188 - amounting to 78 billion USD - are of high priority. These projects aim to overcome infrastructure bottlenecks which currently limit trade between Europe and Asia and could seriously hamper its expected expansion in the future. Furthermore, these projects also envisage reconstruction and maintenance work on neglected roads, scarce rail links, congested ports, and cumbersome border crossing procedures.

The commitment demonstrated during the Ministerial session, will however not suffice in bringing the development of transport systems along the Euro-Asian links to desired level. For this to happen, countries along the route will, in addition, have to continue working closely among themselves as well as with the international community and strengthen the implementation of the key international transport legal instruments as well as consider acceding to those in which they have not yet become

contracting parties.

High-quality transport infrastructure is necessary not only to foster trade and promote economic development, but also to ensure that traffic of goods and people is carried out under safe and secure conditions and in an environment where the conditions of fair competition prevail.

Without key UN international transport instruments, road transport and trade would not have achieved such an impressive growth. However, in order to make transport conventions and agreements really beneficial, two significant conditions need to be met - countries should join these legal instruments and then take the responsibility to implement their provisions.

In this respect, I have to mention two major challenges we are facing today. First, not all countries along the Euro-Asian transport links have become Contracting Parties to the key transport facilitation conventions and agreements. For example, we are looking forward to China's accession. The importance of that cannot be overestimated, given the key role

of China in the Euro-Asian trade. Second, the implementation of these legal instruments in certain countries leaves much to be desired. Let me stress here that the UNECE is always ready to provide assistance in training and capacity building activities, but, at the end of the day, it is up to the countries to ensure the smooth application of legal provisions.

I am also aware that these instruments do not address all problems and concerns that carriers continue to face today. These include significant increase of fuel prices, problems with visas, congestion at frontiers, quota restrictions, i.e. limited number of road permits, etc. These challenging problems are well known, but their eventual solution stays with the national governments.

The UN family, UNECE in particular, will continue to provide the necessary platform for transport policy dialogues, and for regulatory, technical and other assistance to countries also along the Euro-Asian links helping them achieve developmental goals and facilitate their integration in the world market. In addition, our working party meetings offer a unique possibility for networking and overall for multilateral

transport diplomacy, both in the official meeting room and in “the corridors”. Thus I would like to encourage you to liaise with your government to make the most use of these facilities.

As you know, we are committed to continue to work towards reaching consensus for all those unsettled issues which are in our area of responsibility and competence. These include further facilitation of border crossing and harmonisation of rules in road transport practically for the whole world.

In this regard, the UNECE will continue to cooperate with the IRU and other stakeholders. Sometimes we might have divergent views on certain issues, but I am confident that a common solution can always be found through an open dialogue in the spirit of mutual respect and true public-private partnership.

Speaking about public-private partnership, shortly PPP, I would like to underline how important it is to bear in mind its co-operative nature. Successful partnerships are built on

the specific expertise of each partner so that the public needs are met in the best and most efficient way. Naturally, it must also include appropriate public control. Translating the general principles into the challenges for the future of the TIR system, I would like to point out that mutual confidence is critical for long lasting results and the reward of increased transparency is in increased confidence. In addition, even the most modern systems can become obsolete one day and to avoid it one needs to constantly innovate and the eTIR project is exactly about this. I sincerely hope that now, in the “finish”, the progress with eTIR will be accelerated with substantive contribution by and partnership with IRU.

Similarly, the geographic expansion of the TIR system requires not only good compliance by the newly acceding countries, but also flexibility by the TIR system to meet the demands of countries with different needs. This is one of the key feedbacks we learn when we promote the TIR Convention. We continue to count on IRU cooperation and your support in other related activities of common interest such as: sustainable development of road transport and road safety,

especially the UNECE implementation Plan of the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011–2020. Here I would like to announce and invite you to the UNECE Inland Transport Committee events organized to commemorate the 2nd UN Global Road Safety Week from 6 – 12 May 2013. The UNECE programmes will take place on May 6-7, and all details are available on UNECE web site.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

I wish that your discussions and exchange of ideas during this Assembly will provide an additional impetus and reinvigorate efforts of all stakeholders to ensure that road transport continues to provide a link, particularly between economies of Asia, Europe, Middle East, and further with other parts of today's globalized world. Safe, secure, environmentally friendly road transport is one among the necessary preconditions to enhance economic development, secure prosperity and poverty eradication, as well as peaceful co-existence between regions and nations. Your contribution to this challenging but admirable task will be welcome.