

**Opening of the 3rd UIC Global Rail Freight Conference (GRFC)  
Tangier, Morocco**

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Your Excellencies  
Ministers  
Representatives of the Moroccan Authorities  
Colleagues and Friends  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to be here today in Tangier, in the Kingdom of Morocco, for the opening of the 3rd Global Rail Freight Conference (GRFC), which ties in with a host of prestigious events dedicated to the success and prospects of rail freight transport. The first two editions brought together several hundred stakeholders from the economic, transport and logistics sectors, as well as institutional decision-makers, first of all in Delhi in 2007, and then in Saint-Petersburg in 2010, as part of a congress organised with Russian Railways.

After Asia and Russia – at the confluence of Europe and Asia – it is a great pleasure to meet again for this third edition of our global congress in the Kingdom of Morocco, not just in North Africa but also at the gateway to Europe, the Middle-East and, slightly further on, to Asia. The Global Rail Freight Conferences, the GRFCs, are designed to be held in regions of the world where there are genuine prospects for rail freight and for logistics services combining rail and other transport operators. North Morocco and the city of Tangier are an example of a rapidly developing region, full of prospects, a hub of industrial activity and trade between several continents.

But above all, it is my pleasure and duty, on behalf of UIC and the international rail community, to express our gratitude to His Majesty the King of Morocco, for agreeing to grant his High Patronage to this major international railway meeting. We are convinced that hosting this congress on Moroccan soil – and in a particularly dynamic region of your country – will be an inspiration to the wave of conferences and sessions which aim to highlight how the railways, by involving other operators in the area of logistics, maritime transport, ports and intermodal transport, can effectively contribute to promoting a country or a region. We therefore, on behalf of the international railway community represented within UIC, ask the representatives of the Moroccan Authorities here today to give His Majesty a message of respectful recognition and gratitude.

Organising this global congress in Tangier has been made possible, first and foremost, by the excellent cooperation established with the Moroccan National Railway Office (ONCF), its CEO Mohammed Rabie Khlie, and the directors and staff of ONCF in Rabat, whom I address my warm thanks. Organising this conference has required over a year of hard work in addition to the everyday tasks of our freight departments at UIC and ONCF, and I therefore take this opportunity to thank, on behalf of UIC, all the teams that have worked tirelessly to prepare this major event.

As I mentioned earlier, this is the first conference of this scale dedicated to freight issues that is being organised on African soil. This is also an opportunity for me to mention the role held by ONCF's CEO, Mohammed Khlie, as Chairman of the UIC African Region. We moreover welcome the presence of some of the UIC African members in Tangier, who have been holding a meeting outside this conference. Mohammed Khlie, it must be stressed, is personally very committed to defining a strategy and implementing an action plan for African regional cooperation within UIC. I would also like to thank him for that.

The overarching theme for this 3rd Global Rail Freight Conference is *Rail Freight: what role does it play in the development of global logistics?* This question and related discussions will obviously include all stakeholders, not just from the railways but all those involved in the global logistics system: logistics operators, maritime transport, ports, intermodal operators, the supply industry, forwarders, and commercial intermediaries – not forgetting all the authorities such as customs and international institutions which address transport issues. We are particularly pleased to welcome representatives from all these business sectors, from regions across the world, to Tangier, and I would like to thank them for attending.

It is vital to put this debate in the context of possible developments in the economy and trade. As we know, the world economy is currently hit by the crisis, particularly the financial crisis, which is affecting several regions in the world. But this should not conceal the very positive long-term outlook for changes in transport demand worldwide. Moreover, forecasts up to 2050 point to renewed growth in transport demand, at 80% for freight and 50% for passenger transport. Rail freight transport is expected to grow eight times, with passenger transport forecast to grow 12 times.

This impressive growth forecast is due to rail freight's major advantages in terms of performance – particularly over long distances – its large capacity, safety and reliability, and contribution to sustainable development. These advantages are set to be complemented by stronger integration with other operators in the logistics chain, the building of new inter-continental freight corridors, the introduction of new innovative technologies to optimise the global supply chain, and the creation of hubs that perform effectively with other modes and services.

All these issues and challenges will be the main focus of debate during this two-day GRFC in Tangier. We will also discuss more specific developments for freight and logistics in the Moroccan region and more generally in the Mediterranean.

Finally, allow me to warmly thank – in addition to the participants and speakers in the various sessions – all our sponsors and exhibitors from Tangier, Morocco and elsewhere, whose support is vital to ensure that this international meeting is a success and that GRFC continues to be the platform of global reference for exchanging views on the latest innovations in the areas of railways and freight.

I wish you all – your Excellencies, Colleagues and Friends, an exciting congress and fruitful debate.