



Speech

by

Mr. Christian Friis Bach

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

**Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for
Europe**

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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to present here today and also a pleasure that I could come by train from Geneva – it was a fine trip and only slightly delayed. I would like to extend a special thanks to Mr. Loubinoux (UIC) for inviting me to speak today.

2016 is a significant year for transport. This year, we begin to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The inclusion of transport issues in the Sustainable Development Goals is testament to the growing recognition that transport is essential for sustainable development. Railways play a major role in this regard: poverty eradication, zero hunger, good health, sustainable cities and communities and climate action are but some of the SDGs where railways can make a difference. We are fortunate that Mr. Loubinoux forms part of the UN Secretary-General's High Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport. I am confident that he will bring strong added value to ensure achievement of the SDGs as well as promoting the important role of railways.

To achieve the SDGs, governments will need to invest in a transport system that enhances our quality of life and meets our current and future mobility needs. This system should provide seamless mobility, transport and multimodal solutions between sea, air, road and rivers to urban areas where more and more of our citizens live. The future transport systems must be ready for the fourth industrial revolution where products, services and information technology merge and move together. We must increasingly integrate public transport as well as biking and walking – I started my morning biking to the station. We must make full use of multiple transport modes to facilitate the safe

movement of people, goods, and information nationally and internationally.

Modern transport systems must have users at their core. They must give due consideration to mobility, accessibility, affordability, safety, sustainability, equity, efficiency, livability and environmental protection. It is a tall order. For example, to ensure mobility, the users must have reliable, integrated, and flexible travel choices. Transport systems should enhance public safety and security in all modes of travel; they must avoid a disproportionately adverse impact on low-income, elderly, minority, or disabled populations, and provide equitable levels of funding and transportation services to all areas, communities, and socioeconomic groups. In the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals: We must leave no one behind. And when talking about transport solutions this has a very concrete meaning.

Transport systems must also support livable community concepts and efforts and reflect community values while integrating land use and transportation planning. We must push for new innovations for railways – from smart cards, ticket-free travel, virtual ticket agents, entertainment and internet access to high-speed trains, ergonomic train stations and digital signals that facilitate access. I had a fine train trip here to Milan, but the internet did not work and I had a paper ticket, so when changing it I had to buy a new ticket and send it back for a refund. I am sure there are smarter solutions available but we must speed up our efforts to make them available to all passengers. There is room for further innovation.

In addition, such transport systems will need to facilitate the development and economic viability of communities in ways that reduce trips and travel distances; preserve aesthetic resources; promote environmental enhancement; protect important farmland, valuable habitats, and natural resources; and reduce

energy consumption and emissions to tackle climate change.

At the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) hosted by UNECE, member States have been working extensively on sustainable transport for a number of years. We host no less than 58 transport conventions and legal agreements covering roads, rivers and rail – everything from traffic signs and signals, traffic rules to vehicle standards and transport of dangerous goods.

The ITC has a fruitful collaboration with UIC. We recently launched the global study “Transport for Sustainable Development: the Case of Inland Transport”, which was prepared in collaboration UIC, as well as the five UN Regional Commissions and IRU. The study examines global issues, progress and challenges for transitioning to sustainable inland mobility, both for people and freight. It is the first study of its kind with a global perspective. The study highlights the five defining dimensions of sustainable transport – accessibility, affordability, safety, security and environmental performance.

One of the main challenges ITC and railways face today is the Unified Railway Law (URL). In 2013, 37 Transport Ministers and other high-level government officials signed a Joint Declaration that could pave the way towards negotiation of a URL. This would make rail freight transport easier, faster and cheaper, between Asia and Europe to begin with and later, throughout the world. In the Declaration, countries along the Euro-Asian rail transport lines committed to working together to establish unified legal conditions for railways. Such conditions already exist for road, air, inland water and sea transport. But for rail, many countries are currently obliged to operate with two different rail legal systems (COTIF Convention and SMGS Agreement). Due to this multiplicity, countries without a harmonised legal and administrative system for international rail freight spend additional time and incur higher costs. The

process is further hampered by other administrative obstacles and by a high probability for mistakes and errors. These in turn translate to further delays, and potentially to return of cargo back to customs. If we are to create a truly sustainable and efficient silk rail connecting Europe and Asia we need a Unified Railway Law.

The UNECE Group of Experts Towards a Unified Railway Law has so far done excellent work by preparing the first step of the URL: the legal provisions for the contract of carriage, liability, settlement of claims and the relations between carriers. These legal provisions make it possible to move goods by rail from China to Europe with one consignment note and one liability system. What is still needed is political will and support, to make these legal provisions an international rail regime. We hope you will all work with us to ensure this. The Group of Experts will meet again in two weeks.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ITC will continue to be at the forefront of policy, technical and regulatory development, to help governments create the smartest and most sustainable transport systems for their citizens. We look forward to continued cooperation with UIC to accomplish these objectives together.

Let me end here by thanking you again for the opportunity to speak today, and by inviting you all to attend the 70th anniversary session of the Inland Transport Committee in February 2017.

Thank you.
