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Press Release

UNESCAP News Services

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Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network Enters into Force

114,000 km railway links 28 countries in Asia and to Europe



Bangkok (UN/ESCAP Information Services) – Countries throughout Asia committed to coordinate the development and operation of international rail routes linking 28 countries, as the [Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network](#) entered into force today.

This momentous step forward for regional integration was marked with a ceremony at the regional arm of the United Nations – the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)) – featuring video messages from Ministers of Railways from the eight countries who have ratified the agreement.

“Modern economies cannot generate long-term growth and employment without highly efficient transport networks that are developed with a high level of integration,” says Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary-General of the UN and Executive Secretary of ESCAP. “The timing of this agreement is particularly significant as leaders from our region promote intra-regional trade to stimulate recovery from the economic crisis. It will provide a more cost effective way of doing business and ensure the benefits of trade are more evenly distributed across the region.”



The network comprises 114,000 km of rail routes of international importance linking 28 countries in the region. The aim is to offer efficient rail transport services for the movement of goods and passengers within the region and between Asia and Europe. The network will also provide improved access for landlocked countries to major ports.

“The entry into force of the agreement today carries more significance because it finally lays the groundwork after the launch of the project – led by ESCAP half a century ago –in the 1960s,” said Mr. Jang Hyun Choi, Vice Minister of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs, Republic of Korea. “The agreement will provide the institutional foundation for this historic project. I believe this is a great achievement of ESCAP Member States.”

The Agreement comes into effect ninety days after China became



the eighth country to have ratified the treaty. The other parties to the agreement are Cambodia, India, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Thailand.

The Agreement provides an important framework for the coordinated development of major rail routes across Asia. Under the terms of the Agreement, a working group comprising ESCAP member states will be established, meeting regularly to discuss policies and issues relating to the development of the rail network. As secretariat of the agreement, ESCAP will organize the first meeting of the working group in December 2009.

“Promoting the Trans-Asian Railway is indeed a step taken in the right direction by ESCAP for the overall benefit and prosperity of the region,” said Mr. S. S. Khurana, the Railway Board Chairman of India. “The Government of India is committed to early implementation of the Trans-Asian Railway Network, particularly the missing link with neighbouring countries.”

Since the agreement opened for signatures in 2006, the expansion of the Trans-Asia Railway has been progressing at a steady pace. For example, projects have been completed in Uzbekistan, where construction of the 227-km Tashguzar-Baysun-Kumkurgan line has sped up rail movements to Tajikistan. The 5 March inauguration of a line spanning from Nongkhai, Thailand, to Thanaleng, Lao PDR, provides landlocked Lao rail access to the port of Laem Chabang.

The Agreement also identifies stations of international importance, most of which are located inland and have similar functions to ports in the coastal areas. These so-called “dry ports” will act as consolidation / distribution centres in the hinterland, creating new opportunities for growth and help bring the benefits of economic and social development to a wider population.

Implementation of the Agreement will also provide countries with an opportunity to shift from road transport to more environmentally-friendly rail transport.

“Countries worldwide are now realizing that rising demand for transport services can no longer be met by roads alone,” said Dr. Heyzer. “The recent fluctuation in the oil price, growing concern over energy-dependency and the environmental impact of the transport industry are pushing policy-makers to promote more environmentally-friendly and sustainable rail transport solutions.”



The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network is the second treaty to have been developed under the auspices of ESCAP and deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The other is the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network which entered into force in July 2005. The two networks are major building blocks towards the realization of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system for the region.

More information on and maps of the Trans-Asian Railway Network are available at: <http://www.unescap.org/ttdw/index.asp?MenuName=TheTrans-AsianRailway>

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Headquartered in Bangkok, United Nations ESCAP is the largest of the UN's five Regional Commissions in terms of its membership, population served and area covered. The only inter-governmental forum covering the entire Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP works to promote sustainable and inclusive economic and social progress. More information on ESCAP is available at www.unescap.org

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