



**PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Statement**

**by**

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**at the**

**71<sup>st</sup> session of the Administrative Committee of the TIR Convention**

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**Palais de Nations, Room XII**

Dear delegates, dear friends,

It is my honor and privilege to address you today. We are at an important moment, if not a turning point, when it comes to the survival of the TIR Convention.

The TIR Convention of 1975 is one of the most important conventions for United Nations Member States. It has 76 contracting parties, covering four continents, and the TIR system is operational in 62 of them. In the last five years, many new countries have acceded to the convention, including Argentina, China, India, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The system has also become operational in China, India and Pakistan, providing huge potential for growth.

However, in strong contrast with these positive developments, there is a dramatic decrease in the number of TIR Carnets used every year. 3 million TIR Carnets were issued in 2012. A maximum of only 800,000 is forecasted for 2020.

There are two main reasons for this situation. One, the absence of computerization. Two, the lack of flexibility in providing facilities to operators in applying the TIR system.

Happily, right at this moment, you have the opportunity to address both of them. Let me start with computerization. Contracting parties agreed on the necessity of computerization already twenty years ago. Serious work on the technical and conceptual aspects started in 2003, with the Expert Group finishing its initial mandate in 2015. That same year, work on the legal aspects of computerization started, leading to the draft Annex 11 that you have in front of you today. This text is the outcome of intense discussions between legal and customs experts. Delegations have reiterated their readiness to move forward with computerization and adopt Annex 11, while stressing that the text is not carved in stone and can be adjusted whenever required. But, at the same time, delegations have kept raising new, often minor points to finetune the text that has hampered readiness to adopt.

I thus encourage delegations to really reflect on what they want for the future of the TIR system. Our choices are either to adopt the text without further ado and move forward with computerization, or to further delay it, thus letting the TIR system die, slowly but surely. Respectfully but firmly, I have to say: If no viable solution is found soon, the TIR system will have no future. Without wanting to sound alarmist, I have to note: One might even wonder if it is not too late already: Even in the most positive scenario, the entry into force of the amendments and the practical implementation of eTIR will take another one or two years.

In the meantime, various successful projects have been conducted, showing the positive effects and results of the computerization of the TIR Convention. Furthermore, the secretariat has responded to the urgent need for a functional and secure eTIR system by strengthening its IT capacities. I am afraid that TIR staff cannot continue working for much longer if there are no clients.

Therefore, I would like to appeal to you: Let us be bold and forward looking. I encourage you, at this session, to finalize the text of Annex 11 so that Contracting Parties can take the necessary steps to formally adopt the text at the February session of AC.2 and send it to the depositary in New York.

Parties adopting the text also should be aware of their joint responsibility not to have the proposals blocked by countries that object to their entry into force. Instead of blocking the proposals, countries that are not ready or interested in implementing eTIR can use a newly created possibility and inform the UN Secretary-General that they will not apply Annex 11 until further notice. This will allow interested Contracting Parties, which are the majority, to move forward.

I now move to my second point, about opening up the TIR Convention for greater facilities. Contracting Parties have repeatedly indicated a wish for the Convention to meet the logistical standards of the 21st century. At the same time, any effort to do so meets with recurring opposition. I remind you that discussions on the use of

subcontractors have been conducted for two decades, with still no result. The same applies to allowing countries to authorize, on their territory, the facilitation of authorized consignee or, more importantly, authorized consignor. In my view, the argument that such facilities would weaken the position of customs does not hold. On the contrary: Employing an intricate set of conditions and requirements for the users, including the use of advanced electronic tools, allows customs to even increase their supervision over the system. At this session, you will be asked to endorse a comment to introduce subcontractors, as well as an Explanatory Note and comment on the use of authorized consignors and consignees in accordance with the provisions of the TIR Convention. You have a historical possibility here to let the TIR become a global customs transit system. I urge you to use this opportunity.

I know, Madam Chair, that AC.2 has a very heavy agenda in front of it. In fact, thanks to WP.30, you even have been given two days to discuss. I urge you all to spend these two days wisely. By the end of this week, I hope we can look back at a meeting where historical decisions were taken, signifying a turning point in the existence of the TIR Convention and giving it a new lease of life for decades to come.

I wish you successful deliberations.

Thank you.