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UNECE calls for renewed efforts to increase inland transport security

Full-body scanners are the latest security gadgets at airports and millions of containers may soon need to be scanned before they are boarded on ships. But what is currently being done to secure transport on roads, rail and inland waterways? How will the responsibilities for securing inland transport be divided between the public and private sectors?

When it comes to security, inland transport is the weakest link in global supply chains and, compared to other modes of transport, inland transport security has not received adequate attention.

These issues were discussed during the "Inland Transport Security Discussion Forum" organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) on 28-29 January 2010, in partnership with the Service Public Fédéral Mobilité et Transports of Belgium, the International Road Transport Union (IRU), the International Union of Railways (UIC) and the Transport Asset Protection Association (TAPA).

The security challenges facing inland transport range from terrorism, smuggling and trafficking to organized crime, petty theft and vandalism. To combat these problems, participants highlighted the need for freight security standards, driver training on security matters, government legislation and cooperation and the sharing of best practices across borders.

But this is, of course, easier said than done. With the global economic crisis, transport security has not been a priority. Furthermore, the issue of who will pay for increased security measure remains contentious: should it be the carrier, the producer, the consumer or governments? Some even suggest that inland transport crime is treated as "victimless" because it is assumed the companies who are hit the hardest can afford to foot the bill.

Not so, argued participants, who claim the costs of such crimes include loss of market share for those involved, loss of credibility for carriers as well as for countries, loss of customers and sales, insurance problems and poor health and safety conditions for staff members.

Furthermore, though increased security measures may be seen as obstacles to trade facilitation, they can in fact complement each other with a robust framework and proper implementation.

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"The UNECE's objective is to improve the security of transport systems by reducing the likelihood of transport being a target or used as a vehicle for terrorism. The way we go about that is by modifying legal instruments administered here and by making the UNECE platform available to national authorities to exchange information and co-ordinate actions," said Ján Kubiš, Executive Secretary of UNECE in an opening address.

The two day meeting brought together around 100 representatives of governments, international organizations and the private sector to raise awareness for the issue, share experiences and discuss risk analysis and economic cost-benefit challenges.

For more information, please visit www.unece.org/trans or contact Mr. Robert Nowak on infotransport@unece.org, or on +41 (0) 22 917 1267

Note to editors

UNECE legal instruments which contain security provisions include the carriage of dangerous goods, railways, vehicle regulations, infrastructure agreements and border crossings.