



## At UN forum, Asian ministers agree to set up inland transport hubs for landlocked States



18 December 2009 – Transport ministers from across Asia agreed today to work on a treaty to develop so-called dry ports – inland transport and logistics hubs – as part of a United Nations-backed network of more than 250,000 kilometres of railways and roads to spur intra-regional trade and growth, especially for landlocked countries.

The accord on dry ports, which will play a major role in integrating modes of transport, reducing border and transit delays, facilitating energy-efficient means of transport and creating new clusters of economic growth and jobs in local areas, came at the end of the first session of the Forum of Asian Ministers of Transport at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (**ESCAP**) in Bangkok.

In the Bangkok Declaration on Transport Development in Asia, the ministers agreed to develop an intergovernmental pact on such ports “to provide connectivity and integration of the Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway networks, creating an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system,” ESCAP said in a **news release**.

Under ESCAP auspices, countries in the region have already adopted two intergovernmental agreements – on the Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway networks – to promote the development and standardization of 141,000 kilometres of roadways and 114,000 kilometres of railways, linking the continent with Europe and serving as arteries for international trade, in particular for landlocked countries.

The first session of the Forum brought together 27 countries. In his opening message on Monday, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed that “enhanced regional connectivity is especially important” in addressing development issues. ESCAP Executive Secretary Noeleen Heyzer spoke of the vital role of the transport sector in providing the physical connectivity needed to promote domestic demand and intraregional trade as new sources of growth.

“The economic crisis has shown that relying mainly on exports to Western markets comes with inherent risks,” she said. “Our region will need to diversify the drivers of growth. This

must include strategies for promoting increased intra-regional trade and domestic consumption.”

The Forum was created by ESCAP member governments at their annual meeting in April. During the week-long session, delegates discussed issues pertaining to transport development, including implementation of the 2006 Busan Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, which seeks to enhance competitiveness of exports and reduce cost of imports by setting up an efficient, reliable and cost-effective transport services.

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