THE IMEC VISION

By Prof. Micheline Ishay

From the vanished tracks of the Hejaz Railway, laid across desert sands with the audacity to imagine a region connected rather than divided, emerges a lesson for our own era. That early railroad, wounded by conflict and memory, remains a spectral reminder that transportation can be more than mechanics. It can be the poetry of possibility, binding diverse peoples under a single rhythm of movement.

This story reaches further back still, to the Ancient Golden Road, circa 300 BCE, which linked India to Europe through the spice trade routes of Oman, Yemen, the Nabatean cities, Gaza, and the Mediterranean. Centuries later, Ottoman railways, including the Baghdad line toward Mesopotamia and the Hejaz line from Damascus to Medina, with its Haifa branch, were joined by Mandate era networks across Sinai and Palestine, forming a lattice of movement that once hinted at regional integration now sought anew.

In the mid twentieth century, the Syrian writer Al Tantawi mourned their decline: “The track is there, but no train in motion… every block at every station weeps.” His lament was not only for stalled trains, but for a horizon of shared futures prematurely stilled.

The India Middle East Economic Corridor, IMEC, seeks to revive this interrupted promise. Proposed in New Delhi in 2023, it sketches a geography of hope rather than hostility, stretching from India’s ports through the Gulf, Jordan, and Israel toward Europe. More than a sequence of railways and maritime links, IMEC envisions shared channels of exchange. These include supply chains that uplift rather than extract, trade that values inclusion, and employment that offers dignity and participation. Along its stations and hubs, digital pathways and trusted data spaces would advance

climate resilience through green industrialization, renewable energy zones, solar grids and desalinated water networks.

IMEC offers a path beyond old rivalries, drawing together communities long separated by war and mistrust. Where borders harden identities, corridors can soften them, not by erasing difference, but by rewarding cooperation. It thus echoes the post war European insight that as economies intertwine, peace becomes natural and war untenable.

Such a corridor could reshape the Middle East, restoring mobility and opportunity, extending from Amman northward toward Syria, westward from Amman to Haifa, onward to Palestinian cities, and in time toward Baghdad and Tehran. Not as a revival of vanished empires, but as the renewal of an ancient crossroads where commerce, culture, and justice flow freely.

MENA2050 is committed to translating this historical longing into pragmatic action, building on existing rails and agreements while forging durable, just, and cooperative pathways toward a shared regional future.