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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

## **REPORT**

### **EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON TRANSPORT AND TRADE FACILITATION IN THE ESCWA REGION BEIRUT, 7-8 DECEMBER 2009**

#### **Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held an expert group meeting on transport and trade facilitation in the ESCWA region in Beirut, on 7 and 8 December 2009.

The discussions focused on the following topics: (a) follow-up on the establishment and activation of the national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the countries of the ESCWA region by analysing the outcome of the questionnaire prepared for that matter; (b) follow-up on the implementation of components of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM); (c) discussion of the draft proposal prepared by ESCWA concerning the formation of a working group on the harmonization of institutional frameworks and legislation in the transport sector in the ESCWA region, to be submitted for adoption, after introducing amendments thereto, to the Committee on Transport at its eleventh session which will be held in Beirut in the first quarter of 2010.

Participants in the meeting issued a set of recommendations including mainly the adoption of some proposals related to the development and activation of the role of national committees for transport and trade facilitation, the adoption of the document containing the proposal for the formation of the working group on the harmonization of institutional frameworks and legislation in the transport sector in the ESCWA region after incorporating the agreed amendments, in addition to other recommendations related to achieving the implementation of ITSAM.

This report, which was adopted at the final session of the meeting, contains those recommendations and a brief account of the discussions held by participants.

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## **Introduction**

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized an expert group meeting on transport and trade facilitation in the ESCWA region, which was held at Bristol Hotel in Beirut, on 7 and 8 December 2009.
2. Participants discussed the following three main topics: transport and trade facilitation; harmonization of institutional frameworks and legislation in the transport sector in the ESCWA region; and the implementation of components of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM).
3. This report contains the recommendations made by participants and outlines the primary topics that were subject to discussions in respect of each agenda item.

## **I. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. TRANSPORT AND TRADE FACILITATION IN THE ESCWA REGION**

4. Participants called upon member countries:
  - (a) To answer the questionnaire on the establishment and activation of national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the ESCWA region and submit it to ESCWA no later than 20 December 2009 in order to include its outcome in the follow-up report which will be presented to the Committee on Transport at its eleventh session;
  - (b) To take the necessary measures for the implementation of the requirements of transport and trade facilitation, answer the yearly questionnaire prepared for that matter and submit it to ESCWA no later than 30 October of each year, and submit periodic reports on the main achievements recorded by those committees and the challenges they face;
  - (c) To use, as a guidance, the Manual for the establishment of national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the ESCWA region prepared by ESCWA in 2003, and benefit from the technical support provided by ESCWA for the establishment of those committees;
  - (d) To expedite the activation of the committees already established by adopting respective implementation action plans, and benefit from the technical support provided by ESCWA in the preparation of action plans and activation of the committees.
5. Participants called upon ESCWA:
  - (a) To continue the monitoring of the work of national committees through the questionnaire prepared for that matter by analysing its outcome and outlining good experiences and lessons learned, and maintain the provision of technical support to member countries with respect to the establishment and activation of national committees, with a view to facilitating transport and trade according to available resources and upon the request of member countries;
  - (b) To coordinate between member countries in the area of transport and trade facilitation, including by encouraging member countries to organize meetings for the countries of the region, in particular neighbouring countries, and sharing information in order to reach common decisions and follow up their implementation;
  - (c) To enhance existing coordination between ESCWA and the League of Arab States for the establishment of a committee on transport and trade facilitation in the Arab region and follow up its work;

(d) To provide member countries with technical support for finding the necessary financing from financing parties in order to implement the measures required for facilitating transport and trade and activating the work of national committees in that field.

B. HARMONIZATION OF INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND LEGISLATION  
IN THE TRANSPORT SECTOR IN THE ESCWA REGION

6. Participants adopted the document relating to the formation of a working group on the harmonization of institutional frameworks and legislation in the transport sector in the ESCWA region after incorporating amendments thereto and decided to submit it to ESCWA no later than 30 December 2009 with a view to presenting it to the Committee on transport at its eleventh session for adoption.

C. IMPLEMENTATION OF ITSAM COMPONENTS

7. Participants stressed the importance of the transport sector as an industry that contributes to increasing the national product, and the need to examine ways of providing facilitating means necessary for this sector which is vital to the industrial, agricultural and trade sectors and a major agent of economic and social development.

8. Participants invited member countries to present follow-up reports in the form of visual presentations comprising illustrative maps and quantitative follow-up criteria.

9. Participants endorsed the ESCWA programme of work, in particular holding an expert group meeting on financing transport infrastructure with the participation of financing parties.

10. Participants called for enhancing the existing coordination between ESCWA and the League of Arab States and developing it into a mechanism that covers all areas of cooperation in the field of transport in the Arab region, taking into consideration efforts and studies undertaken by Arab unions, institutions and organizations in that field.

1. *Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq*

11. Participants called upon member countries:

(a) To speed up their accession to the Agreement (Oman);

(b) To speed up their ratification of the Agreement and start implementing the adopted Plan of Action (Iraq and the United Arab Emirates).

12. Participants called upon States parties to the Agreement:

(a) To continue the implementation of the Agreement according to the adopted Plan of Action;

(b) To implement the recommendation relating to informative signs on international roads.

2. *Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq*

13. Participants called upon member countries to speed up their accession to the Agreement (Oman and Qatar).

14. Participants called upon member countries to speed up their ratification of the Agreement and start the implementation of the adopted Plan of Action (Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates).

15. Participants called upon States parties to the Agreement to start the implementation of the adopted Plan of Action.

3. *Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport Cooperation in the Arab Mashreq*

16. Participants called upon member countries to speed up their accession to the Memorandum (Bahrain and Kuwait).

17. Participants called upon member countries to speed up their ratification of the Memorandum (Egypt and Qatar).

4. *Road safety*

18. Participants called upon member countries to work towards achieving the road safety goals agreed upon, in particular those relating to the establishment of national councils or committees engaged in ensuring effective road safety.

19. Participants called upon member countries to formulate a national strategy as of 2009 with a view to reducing traffic casualties by 30 per cent by 2015, as agreed in the workshop for setting regional and national road traffic casualty reduction targets in the ESCWA region (Abu Dhabi, 16-17 June 2009).

## II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

20. Participants discussed the progress achieved in the establishment of national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the countries of the ESCWA region.

21. They were presented with the draft document for the formation of a working group on the harmonization of institutional frameworks and legislation in the transport sector in the ESCWA region.

22. Participants reviewed the progress achieved in the implementation of the following ITSAM components: (a) the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq; (b) the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq; (c) the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport Cooperation in the Arab Mashreq; and (d) Road safety.

### A. TRANSPORT AND TRADE FACILITATION

23. Mr. Nabil Safwat, Director of the Economic Development and Globalization Division (EDGD) at ESCWA, gave a presentation on the experience of ESCWA in the areas of transport and trade facilitation and the establishment of national committees for transport and trade facilitation in member countries of the ESCWA region. He outlined the basic goals of transport and trade facilitation in the Arab region and the efforts exerted by ESCWA since 1984 in that area, including in particular the expert group meeting on the coordination of transport policies (17-19 November 1998) and ITSAM (1999). He pointed to the main issues and policies addressed by ITSAM and the major problems faced in implementing the measures aimed at facilitating transport and trade in the Arab region and their main causes. He also presented the study entitled "Facilitation of International Freight Transport in the ESCWA Region" (2001) and the recommendations contained therein which were adopted by the Committee on Transport at its third session (Beirut, 5-7 March 2002) and by ESCWA at its twenty-first session (Beirut, 10-11 May 2001). Mr. Safwat referred also to the sessions of the Committee on Transport in which the Committee made relevant recommendations: (a) the second session (Beirut, 6-7 February 2001) in which the Committee recommended to start the establishment of national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the countries of the Arab Mashreq; (b) the fourth session (Beirut, 14-16 January 2003) in which the Committee adopted the final version of the "Manual for the establishment of national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the ESCWA region". He also outlined the recommendations made by the Regional Seminar on Trade and Transport Facilitation in

ESCWA East Mediterranean countries (Cairo, 15-17 November 2005). He recalled the national workshops on transport and trade facilitation and the study prepared by ESCWA on the “Status of the transport system in the Arab region, how to improve it and strategies for developing an integrated multimodal transport system”. He also reviewed the proposed actions in the strategy for the establishment and activation of the national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the ESCWA region. He commended the coordination between ESCWA and the League of Arab States for a unified text of the Convention on Multimodal Transport of Goods in the Arab States (2008) and proposed future action to activate transport and trade facilitation in the region.

24. Ms. Naela Haddad, First Economic Officer at the Transport and Trade Section of the EDGD at ESCWA, gave a visual presentation on the outcome of the questionnaire concerning the establishment and activation of national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the ESCWA region, which was circulated by the secretariat to member countries at the conclusion of the tenth session of the Committee on Transport (Beirut, 31 March-2 April 2009). She reviewed the targets of establishing such national committees and summarized the status of those committees in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. She gave an overview of responses to the questionnaire by country and main sections of the questionnaire, and the recommendations relating to the role of ESCWA in supporting the establishment and activation of those committees.

25. The status of the national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the ESCWA region was discussed and member country representatives presented the status of those committees in their respective countries with proposals aimed at activating them.

26. The delegation of Saudi Arabia presented the status of its national committee for transport and trade facilitation, the functions of which are carried out by the General Association for Investments. The delegation addressed the procedure of establishing such committee, its organizational structure and rules of procedure, which are based on the recommendations made by ESCWA and the “Manual for the establishment of national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the ESCWA region”. The delegation also tackled the problems encountered in the transport and trade sectors, in particular those related to working procedures in the organizational structure, and other challenges facing the establishment of the national committee, such as sources of support and financing. The delegation presented a proposal for the committee’s organizational structure and an overview of the studies prepared in that regard, in particular those related to major performance indicators that can be used to monitor progress in transport and trade facilitation initiatives.

27. The representative of Iraq presented the structure and membership of the national committee for transport and trade facilitation in Iraq and the plans to be presented by the Ministry of Transport to activate the work of the committee.

28. Participants discussed the issues of establishing, activating and financing national committees for transport and trade facilitation in the ESCWA region.

#### B. HARMONIZATION OF INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND LEGISLATION

29. Ms. Mona Fattah, Associate Economic Affairs Officer of EDGD at ESCWA, gave a visual presentation on the draft proposal for the formation of a working group on the harmonization of institutional frameworks and legislation in the transport sector in the ESCWA region. She highlighted the nature of the group, its functions, framework and goals which include raising awareness of the concept of harmonization, and examining the current status of the institutional structures and legislation in the transport sector in the region. She also reviewed the membership, formation, convening and chairmanship of the working group, as well as the article related to its budget, which is proposed to be provided by financial contributions from member countries and contributions in kind by ESCWA secretariat. She stressed the importance of

discussing that proposal and forwarding it to the Committee on Transport at its eleventh session after incorporating the agreed amendments.

30. Mr. Woolf Schwippert, ESCWA consultant, gave a visual presentation on a proposed plan of action for the working group. He addressed the issue of defining the harmonization frameworks and their objectives, and the transport sector areas that mostly need them, and outlined a proposed agenda for the working group. He focused on road transport between countries of the region, as being the sector that mostly needs harmonization of its legislation and institutional frameworks, in particular with regard to licensing drivers, technical specifications and United Nations conventions. He addressed the issue of commercial vehicles and stressed the importance of standardizing the specifications of licensed cars with regard to safety, environment, drivers and customs clearance. He also covered other aspects related to roads, railways and air and maritime transport. He finally proposed a schedule for the working group.

31. Member country representatives gave their initial comments on the first draft proposal for the formation of the working group. They agreed to send written comments to ESCWA by no later than 30 December 2009 in order to incorporate the amendments in the draft and present the amended version to the Committee on Transport at its eleventh session for adoption.

### C. IMPLEMENTATION OF ITSAM COMPONENTS

32. Participants reviewed the progress achieved in implementing some ITSAM components, namely the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq, the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq, the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport Cooperation in the Arab Mashreq, and road safety. Representatives of Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen gave summaries on projects that have been implemented and those that will be implemented in their respective countries in the near future.

33. The secretariat noted to member country representatives the need to provide ESCWA with the required reports on implementing the recommendations made by the Committee on Transport at its tenth session and the major developments recorded in that regard in 2009, in preparation for the eleventh session of the Committee on Transport to be held in the first quarter of 2010.

## III. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

34. Participants in the Expert Group Meeting on Transport and Trade Facilitation in the ESCWA Region adopted this report at their final meeting, held on 8 December 2009.

## IV. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

### A. VENUE AND DATE OF THE MEETING

35. The Expert Group Meeting on Transport and Trade Facilitation in the ESCWA Region was held at the Bristol hotel in Beirut, on 7 and 8 December 2009.

### B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

36. At the opening of the meeting, Mr. Nabil Safwat, Chief of EDGD at ESCWA, made a statement in which he welcomed the participants and highlighted the goals of the meeting. He summarized the goals achieved by ESCWA in the development and implementation of ITSAM components, including the Agreements on International Roads and on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq, the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport Cooperation in the Arab Mashreq, the national committees for transport and trade facilitation, and road safety. He stressed the importance of facilitating the movement of individuals and goods, and the harmonization of institutional frameworks and legislation among countries of

the region, given the importance of regional integration and cooperation in the field of transport. He reviewed the efforts exerted by ESCWA since 2003 in the field of transport and trade facilitation. He noted the need to discuss the draft proposal for the formation of a working group on harmonizing institutional frameworks and legislation in the transport sector in the ESCWA region.

### C. PARTICIPANTS

37. Invitations were sent to parties concerned with the transport sector in general, and transport and trade facilitation and the harmonization of institutional frameworks and legislation in that sector in particular, namely officials, professionals, legal consultants and experts in roads, railways, maritime and multimodal transport, road safety and transport and trade facilitation in the countries of the ESCWA region, as well as Arab organizations and unions concerned with that sector. The list of participants is provided in the annex to this report.

## Annex

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