



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION
FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

REPORT

**FOURTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT,
BEIRUT, 14-16 JANUARY 2003**

LIBRARY & DOCUMENTS SECTION

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction.....	1-2	2
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. PARTICIPANTS AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK.....	3-13	2
A. Venue and date of the session.....	3	2
B. Participants.....	4-5	2
C. Opening of the session.....	6-11	2
D. Election of officers.....	12	3
E. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.....	13	3
II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.....	14-40	4
A. General discussion.....	14-21	4
B. Review of action taken since the third session of the Committee on Transport.....	22-36	5
C. Proposals concerning the programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2004-2005 in the field of the facilitation of trade and transport.....	37	7
D. Other business.....	38-39	7
E. Adoption of the report of the Committee on Transport on its fourth session.....	40	8
III. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	41	8
<i>Annex. List of participants.....</i>		10

Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) secretariat held the fourth session of the Committee on Transport pursuant to the provisions of resolutions 213 (XIX) of 7 May 1997, concerning the establishment of a Committee on Transport in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, and 229 (XXI) of 11 May 2001, concerning frequency of the sessions of the ESCWA Committee on Transport.
2. This report outlines the most significant points raised during the discussions on each agenda item. The Committee adopted the report at its final meeting on 16 January 2003.

I. PARTICIPANTS AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE OF THE SESSION

3. The fourth session of the ESCWA Committee on Transport was held at United Nations House in Beirut from 14 to 16 January 2003.

B. PARTICIPANTS

4. Representatives of the following 10 ESCWA member countries participated in the session: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
5. Also attending as observers were representatives of the League of Arab States, the Arab Sea Ports Federation and the Arab Federation of Chambers of Shipping.

C. OPENING OF THE SESSION

6. Ms. Mariam Al-Awadhi, Deputy Executive Secretary, delivered the inaugural statement of the Executive Secretary. She referred to the importance to regional integration of the facilitation of transport and trade, which was one of the major goals of the Arab region. She said that regional integration was normally determined in the light of the relative features of the parties concerned, by an increase in commercial exchange, the movement of goods and persons, and capital and information. Ms. Al-Awadhi said that the session would discuss what had been achieved by ESCWA since the third session of the Committee on Transport, which was held in Beirut from 5 to 7 March 2002 and, in particular, with respect to follow-up to ratification of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq, the adoption of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq, executive measures for the establishment of national committees for the facilitation of trade and transport, the draft memorandum of understanding concerning cooperation in the field of maritime transport and current and future ESCWA programmes in the field of the facilitation of transport and trade.
7. The Deputy Executive Secretary expressed her satisfaction at the fact that, as of that date, 11 ESCWA member countries had signed and three had ratified the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq. She noted the significance of the adoption of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq and of the willingness of member countries to sign it during the twenty-second ESCWA session, which was scheduled to be held in Beirut from 14 to 17 April 2003. She also referred to the most important issues to be considered at the fourth session of the Committee.
8. Mr. Najib Mikati, Minister of Public Works and Transport of Lebanon and sponsor of the session, then made a statement in which he thanked ESCWA for the endeavours that it was exerting in order to develop the transport sector. He said that because transport had become one of the main pillars of national economies, continuous action to develop and update systems of transport was essential if goods and passengers were to be transported by the most desirable means, with the greatest expedition and at the lowest cost possible; security, safety and efficiency were to be ensured, together with the complete integration of all means of transport and the confidence of the public; transport efficiency and availability were to be improved; and its

contribution to social and economic development were to increase, while ensuring that the environment was protected from the impact of transport.

9. Mr. Mikati said that globalization was bringing about extensive changes and posed serious challenges that must be faced by all the Arab countries through cooperation and integration in all economic, social and service-related fields, including that of transport. He stressed that cooperation between the Arab countries could take place through genuine action to remove impediments at border centres, and commended the endeavours of ESCWA in preparing a study on the economic feasibility of the interchange of goods through the ports of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. He concluded his statement by wishing the Committee on Transport every success during its fourth session.

10. The session was opened by Mr. Yahya Ahmad Al-Kahlani, Deputy Minister for the Air and Maritime Transport Sector of the Ministry of Transport and Maritime Affairs of Yemen, in his capacity as Chairman of the bureau of the third session of the Committee. Mr. Al-Kahlani gave a brief account of the achievements of the Committee since its first session in February 1999, and requested that greater attention should be given to air transport, in order to ensure the necessary integration between all methods of transport. He also made reference to the principle subjects that would be discussed by the Committee at its fourth session. In conclusion, he thanked ESCWA and its transport officials for their endeavours to develop the transport sector in the region and wished the session every success.

11. Mr. Elias Zakhour, President of the International Chamber of Navigation in Beirut, also made an inaugural statement, as did Mr. Mahmoud Hatem El Kady, Chairman of the Arab Federation of Chambers of Shipping.

D. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

12. Pursuant to resolution 226 (XXI) of 11 May 2001 concerning the election of officers for the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, which provides that members shall assume the chairmanship of the sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, on a rotating basis, in Arabic alphabetical order,* Mr. Alaa Batayneh, the representative of Jordan, assumed the chairmanship of the session bureau. In accordance with the measures applied at the third session, Mr. Yahya Ahmad Al-Kahlani, the representative of Yemen, and Mr. Abdul Rahman Al-Marzouki, the representative of the United Arab Emirates, were elected as Vice-Chairmen and Mr. Ali Jabra Al Ghabban, the representative of Saudi Arabia, was elected as Rapporteur, in view of the absence of the representative of Bahrain.

E. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND PROGRAMME OF WORK

13. At its first meeting, the Committee adopted the agenda and programme of work in the form in which they appear in documents E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/L.1 and E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/L.2. Set forth below is the agenda in the form in which it was adopted:

- “1. Opening of the fourth session of the Committee on Transport.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Proposed organization of work.
5. General debate.
6. Review of action taken since the third session of the Committee on Transport.

* The Arabic alphabetized list of ESCWA member countries is as follows: Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

- (a) Implementation of the recommendations of the third session of the Committee on Transport:
 - (i) Executive measures for the establishment of national committees for the facilitation of trade and transport in the countries of the ESCWA region;
 - (ii) Measures taken towards the preparation of a draft memorandum of understanding concerning cooperation in the field of maritime transport in the Arab Mashreq;
 - (iii) Follow-up of the implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq;
 - (iv) Completion of reports on the international roads in the Arab Mashreq;
 - (v) Follow-up of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq;
 - (b) Progress made in implementing the activities covered by the regular programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003; consultancy services and technical cooperation; activities funded by extrabudgetary resources.
7. Proposals concerning the programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2004-2005 in the field of the facilitation of trade and transport.
 8. Other business.
 9. Adoption of the report of the Committee on Transport on its fourth session.”

II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

A. GENERAL DISCUSSION (Agenda item 5)

14. The aim of the Committee in devoting one agenda item to general discussion was to give the representatives of member countries the opportunity to express their views on a variety of subjects relating to the agenda and to refer to the latest developments in their countries concerning the issue of transport and the facilitation of trade, with a view to exchanging information and expertise and improving the performance of the transport sector in the ESCWA region.

15. The representative of Egypt presented a paper in which he set forth the role played by his country in the field of transport by virtue of its position astride the two continents of Asia and Africa. He reviewed maritime transport projects and those that are helping to locate road and rail thoroughfares between Egypt and the countries with which it is linked by network routes. He also dealt with the obstacles that make it difficult to facilitate the movement of goods and passengers and reviewed the most significant of the solutions put forward with respect to road and maritime transport. He stressed the willingness of Egypt to provide member countries with assistance and to consult with them in that regard.

16. The representative of Jordan presented a paper in which he discussed the tripartite cooperation with respect to transport between Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Such cooperation aimed to strengthen economic cooperation, facilitate the movement of goods, persons and vehicles and remove obstacles to cooperation in the field of transport. He described the executive mechanism, which included a meeting every quarter between the respective ministers of transport, the formation of a joint technical committee and the taking of a number of simplification measures. Action was being taken with a view to standardizing the documents required for the transport of goods, and ESCWA was being instrumental in preparing a comprehensive report on cooperation between the three countries in respect of the transportation of goods on their thoroughfares.

17. One of the delegates raised the issue of assigning the same importance in the ESCWA programme of work to air transport as was given to road and maritime transport.

18. The representative of the United Arab Emirates said that ESCWA should occasionally inform member countries of the latest developments with respect to the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq. His country, for its part, was ready to exchange information with all the other member countries, should they so desire, on port-related developments and the use of new technology in carrying out operations.

19. The representative of the secretariat explained that the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq would not enter into force until it had been ratified by five member countries. To date, only three had done so, namely, Jordan, Qatar and Yemen. The secretariat urged all member countries to ratify the Agreement forthwith.

20. One delegate stressed that sufficient time must be given to discussion of the draft memorandum of understanding concerning cooperation in the field of maritime transport in the Arab Mashreq.

21. In conclusion, the secretariat representative welcomed the useful proposals that had been put forward in the course of the general discussion, which would serve the facilitation of transport and trade and contribute to regional integration.

B. REVIEW OF ACTION TAKEN SINCE THE THIRD SESSION
OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT
(Agenda item 6)

1. *Follow-up of implementation of the recommendations of the third session
of the Committee on Transport*

22. The secretariat presented this item in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/3, and reviewed the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the third session of the Committee on Transport, most of which were on the agenda of the fourth session.

(a) *Executive measures for the establishment of national committees for the facilitation
of trade and transport in the countries of the ESCWA region*

23. The secretariat presented this item in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/3/Add.1 and E/ESCWA/TRANS/2002/3, and reviewed the progress made in the course of the meetings held over the past two years. Similarly, it reviewed follow-up to the proposal concerning the establishment of national committees for the facilitation of trade and transport, their importance, objectives, composition, subcommittees and coordination between them at regional level.

24. A number of the participants wondered why several of the activities related to the facilitation of trade had been included as part of the work of the national committees that were to be established in order to improve the efficiency of transport and trade, pointing out that the remit of the Committee on Transport was limited to transport. The representative of the secretariat therefore explained that there was a close relationship between transport and the facilitation of trade, and that transport was one of the most important of the interlinking sectors that comprised the basic components of efficient trade. The previous and current programmes of work in the field of transport and trade were related to trade and transport facilitation issues, including crossing points and transit and the relevant agreements; the electronic interchange of transport documentation; customs procedures; and the handling of trade.

(b) *Measures taken towards the preparation of a draft memorandum of understanding
concerning cooperation in the field of maritime transport in the Arab Mashreq*

25. The secretariat presented this item in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/3/Add.2 and E/ESCWA/TRANS/2002/4, and reviewed the progress made in that respect. It explained the significance of

maritime transport to foreign and interregional trade and to the economic and social integration of the countries of the ESCWA region and the Arab area. There was a need for the countries of the region to cooperate and coordinate in the priority areas relating to maritime transport and ports. The draft memorandum of understanding concerning cooperation in the field of maritime transport in the Arab Mashreq was reviewed. Its articles cover the principles and objectives of such cooperation. The reasons were outlined for the concern of ESCWA with maritime transport and the experiences were reviewed of other regions, including the European Union, with respect to cooperation in the field of maritime transport and ports.

26. Jordan and Yemen both made written observations on the issue, for consideration when the draft memorandum was being discussed. Those observations were duly considered and adopted once they had been approved by the session. There was an exchange of views on whether the document should be entitled "memorandum of understanding" or "regional agreement". After discussion, and because it was simple to do so, the Committee adopted as the memorandum of understanding the recommendation of the Expert Group Meeting on Transport and Trade Facilitation for Regional Integration that was held in Cairo from 24 to 26 September 2002.

27. The articles of the memorandum of understanding were then discussed, and the following main points were raised:

(a) The articles of the memorandum should not conflict with World Trade Organization Agreements; Definitions should be prepared of the technical terms used in the memorandum, including, for example, "coastal transport";

(b) There should be agreement as to an executive mechanism that included the practical application of the articles of the memorandum;

(c) The articles of the memorandum should not conflict with the international agreements to which the countries of the region had become parties;

(d) With respect to maritime transport between the ports of the ESCWA region, priority should be given to vessels flying the flags of countries parties to the memorandum;

(e) The Committee should include the Lebanese ports of Tripoli, Sidon and Tyre within the network of shipping routes and maritime ports and harbours.

28. In order to save time and complete discussion of all the articles of the draft memorandum of understanding, the Committee decided to form a working group comprising representatives of the ESCWA secretariat and members of the delegations of Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

29. The working group met in order to consider and review in detail the articles of the draft memorandum of understanding and make the necessary additions and amendments. The amended form of the draft memorandum was issued in document E/ESCWA/TRANS/2002/4/Rev.1 and submitted to the fourth session of the Committee on Transport for its consideration and appropriate action.

(c) *Follow-up of the implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq*

30. The secretariat presented this item in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/3/Add.3 and stated that, as of 31 December 2001, 11 ESCWA member countries had signed and three had ratified the Agreement. Country representatives reviewed the current position with respect to the completion of measures in each country, while the secretariat urged all countries to complete ratification and accession procedures.

(d) *Completion of reports on the international roads in the Arab Mashreq*

31. The secretariat presented this item in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/3/Add.4 and referred to the reports that had been submitted by certain member countries, remarking specifically on some of them, and

noting that reports should be prepared along the lines of the model adopted by the third session of the Committee on Transport.

32. On this matter the secretariat also presented a paper on the methodology of using such reports in adopting a strategic instrument, by means of which could be formulated a follow-up programme on the status of the international road network in the Arab Mashreq.

33. The following points were raised on this issue:

(a) The feasibility of sending report tables to countries electronically and of translating such tables into Arabic;

(b) The need to keep ESCWA continually updated on changes in the network of international roads;

(c) The need to develop a special system for the maintenance of the network;

(d) The need to amend certain articles of the reports relating to speed and axis loads.

(e) *Follow-up of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq*

34. The secretariat presented this item in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/3/Add.5 and explained the progress that had been made. The Commission had translated the Agreement into English and French and sent copies to member countries in preparation for the adoption and opening for signature of the Agreement at the twenty-second ESCWA session, scheduled to be held from 14 to 17 April 2003. The secretariat also reviewed the legal amendments proposed by the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs in New York, of which the most important were the articles relating to the time during which the Agreement would be open for signature in Beirut and the mechanism whereby countries not members of ESCWA could accede thereto.

35. With respect to that issue, the representatives of member countries reviewed the arrangements that had been made concerning the preparation of powers of attorney in accordance with the model that had been distributed to them. It was affirmed that ESCWA would address the specialized bodies in member countries with respect to the Agreement, which had been amended in accordance with the advice of the Office of Legal Affairs.

2. Progress made in implementing the activities covered by the regular programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003; consultancy services and technical cooperation; activities funded by extrabudgetary resources

36. The secretariat presented this item in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/4 and reviewed the progress that had been made and the activities that were still in the course of implementation.

C. PROPOSALS CONCERNING THE PROGRAMME OF WORK AND PRIORITIES FOR THE BIENNIUM 2004-2005 IN THE FIELD OF THE FACILITATION OF TRADE AND TRANSPORT
(Agenda item 7)

37. The secretariat presented this item in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/5 and reviewed proposals concerning the programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2004-2005 in the field of the facilitation of trade and transport. The programme was adopted in the form in which it was submitted to the Committee.

D. OTHER BUSINESS
(Agenda item 8)

38. Under this item, some representatives of member countries requested that the issues of safe passage, the transportation of dangerous goods and the safety of transport in general should be accorded the appropriate importance in future ESCWA programmes.

39. The secretariat stated that the question of the transportation of dangerous goods and the safety of transport was considered important in achieving effective transport and trade. The Commission would certainly address the issue in its activities related to the facilitation of transport and trade.

E. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT
ON ITS FOURTH SESSION
(Agenda item 9)

40. Once the necessary amendments had been made, the Committee adopted the report on its fourth session.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

41. At the conclusion of its fourth session, the Committee adopted the following recommendations:

A. THE AGREEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL ROADS IN THE ARAB MASHREQ

(a) Member countries are urged to complete forthwith measures for the ratification of the Agreement on International Roads, with a view to ensuring that it enters into force as soon as may be possible. The Commission should report, no later than 15 March 2003, on the progress made in that regard;

(b) Member countries that have not yet signed the Agreement are urged to accelerate their ratification procedures;

(c) Thanks should be proffered to the Ministry of Communications of Saudi Arabia for specifying the dimensions of the sign for international roads. The same Ministry is urged to complete the specifications for all the dimensions, including the radius of curves, the materials to be used and the thickness of the sign, in order to complete all the executive designs required for producing the signs, and to inform ESCWA thereof no later than by the end of March 2003.

B. THE AGREEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL RAILWAYS IN THE ARAB MASHREQ

(a) The amendments proposed by the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs in New York to the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq, which are included in the amended text of the Agreement as it appears in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2002/1/Rev.1, should be approved, given that the third session of the Committee on Transport, held from 5 to 7 March 2002, approved the original form of the Agreement;

(b) The Commission should address member countries concerning the preparation, in accordance with the model that has been sent to them, of documents giving power of attorney to sign the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq. Those documents should be sent to ESCWA by no later than 20 March 2003, in order to permit the Commission to obtain the approval of the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs in New York. It should be noted that the Agreement will be open for signature during the twenty-second ESCWA session, which is scheduled to be held in Beirut from 14 to 17 April 2003. Thereafter, it will be open at United Nations Headquarters in New York until 31 December 2004.

C. NATIONAL COMMITTEES FOR THE FACILITATION OF TRADE AND TRANSPORT
IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE ESCWA REGION

(a) The name "national committee for the facilitation of trade and transport" should be amended to "national committee for the facilitation of transport and trade";

(b) Article 6 of the guidelines on establishing national committees for the facilitation of trade and transport, concerning the executive steps to take when establishing a national committee for the facilitation of trade and transport, should be amended in the manner set forth in the document;

(c) The Commission should be given the task of following up with member countries the application of the executive steps that have been adopted in order to establish national committees, and should submit a report on the outcome of the follow-up to the fifth session of the Committee on Transport, which is scheduled for the first quarter of 2004.

D. DRAFT MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING CONCERNING COOPERATION IN THE
FIELD OF MARITIME TRANSPORT IN THE ARAB MASHREQ

(a) The draft memorandum of understanding concerning cooperation in the field of maritime transport in the Arab Mashreq should be adopted in the amended form agreed upon in which it appears in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2002/4/Rev.1. The Commission should be responsible for sending copies to member countries for comment and suggestions by no later than 20 March 2003;

(b) A working group comprised of maritime transport experts should be established, if necessary, with responsibility for studying the comments and proposals of member countries, and should hold a meeting on 2 April 2003, the outcome of which should be submitted to the twenty-second ESCWA session, scheduled from 14 to 17 April 2003;

(c) Member countries should be urged to furnish ESCWA with the names of ports and harbours that they wish to add to the network of maritime routes that appears in the draft memorandum of understanding, and supply the necessary information and data thereupon.

E. REGIONAL ROAD TRANSPORT INFORMATION SYSTEM

(a) The tables of the international roads in the Arab Mashreq should be amended in the manner set forth in the schedule distributed to member countries;

(b) Member countries should be urged to review and complete the data on the international roads in the Arab Mashreq by no later than 15 April 2003, using the amended form of the schedule annexed to E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/3/Add.4, that was distributed during the session.

F. PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 2004-2005 IN THE FIELD
OF THE FACILITATION OF TRADE AND TRANSPORT
AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) The draft programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2004-2005 in the field of the facilitation of trade and transport should be adopted in the form in which it appears in E/ESCWA/TRANS/2003/IG.1/5;

(b) The Commission is urged to include the field of air transport and transport safety in its future programmes of work;

(c) Thanks are due to the ESCWA secretariat for its sustained endeavours with respect to the facilitation of trade and transport in the countries of the region with a view to increasing Arab regional integration.

Annex

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

Egypt

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Supreme Customs Council
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Mr. Joseph Zaky Abu Samra
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Directorate General of Roads and Buildings
Ministry of Public Works and Transport
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Mr. Samy Aoun
Judge and President of First Chamber
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