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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

Committee on Transport  
Fourth session  
Beirut, 14-16 January 2003

**AIDE-MEMOIRE***Background to the session*

The fourth session of the Committee on Transport continues the efforts exerted by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) with a view to developing an integrated transport system in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM), thereby facilitating trade and transport between the countries of the region and effecting regional integration. Pursuant to the recommendation of the Committee on Transport, that scheme was adopted by member countries in the Declaration issued by the twentieth session of ESCWA, which was held in Beirut on 27 and 28 May 1999.

There is no doubt that the success of ITSAM will require rapid and well-considered action to be taken. Issues related to the integration of transport and facilitation of trade must also be identified and recommendations made regarding general trade-related policies at regional level. That will require consideration of a large number of issues, including such infrastructure-related questions as implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq, completion of the procedures for signature of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq and the adoption of a memorandum of understanding concerning cooperation with respect to maritime transport in the Arab Mashreq; issues related to increasing the efficiency of movements and use; the harmonization of laws, systems and standards; and the conclusion of regional and international agreements on such matters as the application of recommendations for the facilitation of transport and trade in the region and, in particular, the establishment of national committees for the facilitation of trade and transport, with a view to facilitating transport movements and trade both regionally and internationally and at all land, sea and air border points in the region.

As part of its programme of work for the 1998-1999 biennium, the Transport Section of the ESCWA Globalization and Regional Integration Division initiated efforts to begin work on the development of ITSAM. It continued those efforts as part of its programme of work for the 2000-2001 biennium, and will sustain them as part of its programme of work for the current biennium, namely, 2002-2003. The forthcoming meeting will consider what has been achieved in this regard since the third session of the Committee on Transport, which was held in Beirut from 5 to 7 March 2002.

*1. Preparations for the fourth session of the ESCWA Committee on Transport*

Pursuant to the recommendations of earlier sessions of the Committee on Transport and the consensus of member countries embodied in the above-mentioned Agreement, and in preparation for the fourth session of the Committee on Transport, the Transport Section of the ESCWA Globalization and Regional Integration Division prepared studies and organized meetings of experts at which those studies were considered and discussed. Possibly the most significant outcomes of those studies and meetings have been condensed in the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Transport and Trade Facilitation for Regional Integration which was held in Cairo from 24 to 26 September 2002. Arguably the most important of those recommendations concerned the establishment of national committees for the facilitation of trade and

transport and the formulation of a memorandum of understanding concerning regional cooperation in the field of maritime transport. These will be submitted to the fourth session of the Committee on Transport for discussion, adoption as appropriate and completion of the administrative steps for their practical application.

## *2. Participants*

In view of the variety of concerns and activities related to the facilitation of transport and trade at ESCWA, which arise from the range of means and systems of land, sea and air transport and the number of parties involved, the relevant authorities in the Governments of member countries may consider the formation of a delegation that comprises members with expertise in various related fields and, in particular, trade and customs, in order to discuss and resolve upon, in their capacity as members of the Committee on Transport, the administrative steps involved in establishing national committees for the facilitation of trade and transport and to adopt a memorandum of understanding or regional agreement concerning cooperation in the field of maritime transport. In accordance with the system adopted by the United Nations, member countries will of course be responsible for the travel and subsistence expenses of their representatives with respect to such Governmental meetings. A limited number of representatives of relevant regional and international organizations will also be invited.

## *3. Time and venue*

The fourth session of the Committee on Transport will be held in Beirut from 14 to 16 January 2003.