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

## **REPORT**

### **EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL MULTIMODAL TRANSPORT IN THE ESCWA REGION CAIRO, 4-6 SEPTEMBER 2007**

#### **Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held the Expert Group Meeting on International Multimodal Transport in the ESCWA Region in Cairo from 4 to 6 September 2007. The experts considered the items on the agenda of the Meeting. This report contains a brief review of the conclusions and recommendations made at the Meeting, a section on the principal subjects that were discussed and a section on the opening session. This review was adopted by participants at the closing session of the meeting on 6 September 2007.

Discussions concentrated on the second draft of the proposed agreement on international multimodal transport of goods in the Arab Mashreq. The meeting also reviewed and discussed the implementation of some components of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM), namely, the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq, the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq, national transport and trade facilitation committees and road traffic safety.

The meeting adopted a number of recommendations, the most important of which may be the request to ESCWA to prepare the final text of the proposed agreement for presentation to the ninth session of the Committee on Transport, which is to be held in February 2008, for approval and subsequent adoption and signature at ministerial level at the twenty-sixth ESCWA session, which is to be held in April 2008.

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## **Introduction**

1. As part of the United Nations work programme, ESCWA covered a meeting on international multimodal transport in the ESCWA region which was held in Cairo from 4 to 6 September 2007. The meeting agenda was based on recommendations made by the Committee on Transport at its eighth session, which was held in Beirut from 27 to 29 March 2007.

2. The principal subject of the meeting was the proposed agreement on international multimodal transport of goods in the Arab Mashreq. ESCWA submitted the first draft of that agreement to the eighth session of the Committee on Transport, which requested that the draft be sent to member countries in order to allow them to comment thereon before 30 June 2007. On 10 August, ESCWA produced a second draft of the agreement which incorporated those comments. That draft was exhaustively discussed at the meeting and every comment, whether written or oral, on the articles of the agreement was taken into account.

3. This report covers the opening session of the meeting, its main recommendations and the principal subjects discussed by participants.

### **I. MEETING RECOMMENDATIONS**

4. The meeting made the following recommendations to the relevant parties:

(a) The participants expressed their gratitude to Egypt for so generously hosting and sponsoring the meeting;

(b) Agreement on International Multimodal Transport of Goods in the Arab Mashreq:

(i) Participants praised the ESCWA Transport Team and experts for their efforts to prepare the first and second drafts of the proposed Agreement on International Multimodal Transport of Goods in the Arab Mashreq; organize the positive and constructive meeting; review and discuss all the articles of the Agreement; take into account the comments of member countries, Arab organizations and unions, experts and advisers; and answer all related inquiries. Participants stressed the need to fully implement the recommendations of the eighth session of the ESCWA Committee on Transport concerning that Agreement and, in particular, to request the ESCWA Transport Team to prepare the final text of the draft Agreement, send it to member countries and subsequently submit it to the ninth session of the Committee on Transport, which is to be held in February 2008, for approval and subsequent adoption and signature at the ministerial level at the twenty-sixth ESCWA session, which is to be held in April 2008;

(ii) Participants seconded the ESCWA request to address the League of Arab States at the earliest opportunity and circulate a copy of that address to member countries and to the relevant Arab organizations and unions. Participants also urged member countries to inform them through ESCWA of the efforts exerted and progress achieved in the study, preparation and discussion of the aforementioned draft Agreement, including recommendation (i) above and results expected in the near future with regard to the adoption of the final text of the proposed Agreement. The importance was underlined of harmonizing efforts in order to avoid any duplication: a technical committee is currently being formed by the secretariat of the League of Arab States in order to prepare the draft of a similar agreement. The secretariat has requested to be kept informed of country efforts and those which are expected to be completed shortly by ESCWA, in the hope that a decision will be taken by the Council of Arab Ministers of Transport in support of those efforts, which should be completed before the Agreement is adopted. Subsequently, the Agreement may be expanded to include all Arab countries, as has been the case with several Council decisions in the past. The Council

has welcomed earlier ESCWA achievements related to the methodological framework for the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM), the agreements on road, rail and maritime transport and national committees for the facilitation of transport and trade, and called for the activities to be extended to non-ESCWA member Arab countries;

(c) Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq:

- (i) Member countries that have not yet acceded to the Agreement are requested to accelerate accession procedures;
- (ii) Member countries that have signed but not yet ratified the Agreement are requested to accelerate ratification and begin implementing the adopted plan of action;
- (iii) Countries that are parties to the Agreement are requested to follow up on implementation of the adopted plan of action;

(d) Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq:

- (i) Member countries that have not yet acceded to the Agreement are requested to accelerate accession procedures;
- (ii) Member countries that have signed but not yet ratified the Agreement are requested to accelerate ratification and begin implementing the adopted plan of action;
- (iii) Countries that are parties to the Agreement are requested to follow up on implementation of the adopted plan of action;

(e) National transport and trade facilitation committees:

- (i) Member countries are requested to take the measures necessary for transport and trade facilitation;
- (ii) Member countries who have not yet established national committees are requested to consult the 2003 ESCWA Manual for the establishment of such committees and to make use of the relevant technical support offered by ESCWA;
- (iii) Member countries who have established national committees are requested to accelerate their activation by developing and adopting action plans and making use of the technical support offered by ESCWA for the preparation of such plans and activation of the committees;

(f) Road traffic safety:

ESCWA member countries should cooperate with the United Nations Development Programme project for the improvement of road safety.

## **II. PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING**

5. At the meeting, a presentation was made on the law on international multimodal transport of goods in Jordan and the importance of a regional agreement on that matter. The meeting focused on the presentation and discussion of the second draft of the proposed Agreement on the International Multimodal Transport of Goods in the Arab Mashreq and the detailed review of its 54 articles. Representatives of member countries and Arab organizations and unions, and experts made comments and suggestions on all the articles, in

cooperation with the ESCWA Transport Team and consultants, and responses were given to all enquiries on the articles and paragraphs of the Agreement.

6. There was also a review and discussion of implementation of a number of components of ITSAM, namely, the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq, the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq, national trade and transport facilitation committees and road traffic safety.

### **III. PARTICIPANTS**

7. Invitations were extended to all those concerned with the transport sector in general and with the issue of the international multimodal transport of goods in particular, including officials, professionals, legal advisers and experts in roads or railways, road safety and the facilitation of transport and trade, in ESCWA member countries and the relevant Arab organizations and unions. The list of the participants is set forth in the annex to this report.

### **IV. OPENING SESSION**

8. Mr. Nabil Safwat, ESCWA representative and Chief of the Transport Team, delivered an opening statement in which he welcomed all participants to the meeting and expressed his thanks to the Minister of Transport of Egypt, Mr. Mohammed Mansour, for his generous sponsorship of the meeting and for delegating Mr. Hassan Al-Salim, First Deputy Minister of Transport and Vice-Chairman of the Planning Authority for Transportation Projects of the ministry, to attend the opening session and deliver the Minister's statement on his behalf. Mr. Safwat reviewed the historical background of efforts made worldwide since the 1960s at the global, regional and national levels to prepare international, regional or national agreements on the international multimodal transport of goods. He highlighted the efforts made by ESCWA to provide technical support to Jordan in preparing a draft law on the international multimodal transport of goods, and the stages the proposed Agreement on the International Multimodal Transport of Goods in the ESCWA region has passed through, from the preparation of the first draft and its presentation to the eighth session of the Committee on Transport, to the second draft and the organization of the meeting. He reviewed the main developments in the implementation of ITSAM components, including 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, the national committees for trade and transport facilitation and road traffic safety.

9. Mr. Hasan Selim, First Deputy Minister of Transport of Egypt and Vice-Chairman of the Planning Authority for Transportation Projects of the Ministry, delivered a statement on behalf of Mr. Mohammed Mansour, the Minister of Transport of Egypt, in which he welcomed ESCWA and meeting participants to Egypt. Mr. Selim stressed the importance of the meeting and the activities undertaken by ESCWA in the field of transport. He then reviewed transport conditions and projects currently being undertaken in Egypt in the field of land, sea and river transport. He also informed participants of studies undertaken by ESCWA on laws and legislation pertaining to transport and, in particular, multimodal transport. He finished by once again welcoming the audience and praising the continued efforts of the ESCWA Transport Team for the implementation of ITSAM.

Annex\*

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