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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION****FOLLOW-UP TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED  
BY THE COMMISSION AT ITS TWENTY-SECOND SESSION**

*Adoption of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq:  
resolution 243 (XXII)*

**Summary**

At its twenty-second session, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 243 (XXII), dated 17 April 2003, concerning adoption of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq.

Pursuant to that resolution, the secretariat undertook a number of activities. Railways are an important form of transport, given their low cost compared with such alternatives as road and air transport, and because they are safer and more environmentally friendly. Nonetheless, most of the countries of the ESCWA region have failed to include railway-related projects in their successive development plans. However, since 1998, the ESCWA secretariat has devoted particular attention to that issue: the international rail network in the region was included in the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM), which was adopted by member countries in 1999. A number of drafts were prepared of the agreement on international railways in the Arab Mashreq and its articles and annexes were discussed at several expert group meetings and successive sessions of the Committee on Transport. The Agreement was adopted at the twenty-second ESCWA session, which was held in Beirut from 14 to 17 April 2003.

This report contains a brief review of the procedures that were taken by the secretariat pursuant to resolution 243 (XXII).

## **I. GOALS AND BENEFITS OF THE AGREEMENT**

### **A. GOALS**

1. The Agreement aims to achieve the following goals:

(a) To develop the international rail network in order to link the countries of the Arab Mashreq (the ESCWA region) to each other and to all other Arab, Asian, African and European countries;

(b) To encourage the countries of the region to adopt the routes of this network and accord them the appropriate priority in national development plans;

(c) To standardize the technical specifications that must be met by network routes.

### **B. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO THE REGION OF THE AGREEMENT**

2. The benefits that the Agreement is likely to bring to the region include the following:

(a) The reduction of transport costs and the improved efficiency and safety of traffic flows;

(b) The facilitation of land and multimodal transport;

(c) The increased exchange between member countries of goods and tourists;

(d) The improvement of regional linkages and integration between member and all other Arab countries and the rest of the world.

## **II. THE STAGES BY WHICH ADOPTION OF THE AGREEMENT WAS REACHED AND FOLLOW-UP OF RESOLUTION IMPLEMENTATION**

3. The final version of the Agreement was issued in document E/ESCWA/TRANS/2002/1/Rev.2, and adopted at the twenty-second ESCWA session, which was held in Beirut from 14 to 17 April 2003. It was open for signature with immediate effect.

4. In October 2003, ESCWA wrote to the relevant ministries in member countries, urging those countries which had signed the Agreement to ratify it and those which had not yet signed it to do so.

5. In December 2003, ESCWA prepared a brochure and coloured map on the Agreement, in order to illustrate its goals and benefits, the routes involved and their length, condition and gauge, and to show which routes already exist or are under construction and their operational status.

6. ESCWA followed up with member countries the procedures for signature and ratification of the Agreement, with a view to its entry into force. At the fifth session of the Committee on Transport, which was held in Beirut from 2 to 4 March 2004, countries which had signed the Agreement were advised to accelerate completion of ratification procedures, while those which had not signed were advised to do so at United Nations headquarters in New York by 31 December 2004 at the latest.

7. To date, nine member countries have signed the Agreement, namely, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Iraq, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have not signed.

8. To date, four member countries have ratified the Agreement, namely, Jordan (16 April 2004), Lebanon (26 April 2004), Egypt (5 May 2004) and the Syrian Arab Republic (22 February 2005).

9. The Agreement will enter into force on 23 May 2005, 90 days after its ratification by the last of those countries.

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