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Item 6 (c-v) of the provisional agenda

**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-FIRST SESSION**

*Adoption of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq:  
resolution 235 (XXI)*

**Summary**

1. The member countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted by consensus the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq,\* pursuant to ESCWA resolution 235 (XXI) dated 11 May 2001, concerning adoption of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq. Set forth below are the stages through which the Agreement has passed:

- (a) Eleven ESCWA member countries have signed the Agreement;
- (b) Four ESCWA member countries have ratified the Agreement;
- (c) Three ESCWA member countries have deposited articles of ratification with the Secretary-General of the United Nations;
- (d) A road sign has been designed for international roads in the Arab Mashreq;
- (e) The Commission is developing the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq.

**A. SIGNATURE AND RATIFICATION OF THE AGREEMENT**

2. During the period ending on 31 December 2002 in which the Agreement was open for signature, it was signed by 11 ESCWA member countries, namely, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

3. By the end of February 2003, three countries had ratified the Agreement and deposited the articles of ratification with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, namely, Jordan (on 18 January 2002), Qatar (on 28 June 2002) and Yemen (on 15 November 2002). In Lebanon, the National Assembly has ratified the Agreement and procedures are currently being completed for depositing the articles of ratification with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

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\* See text of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq, which was adopted by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on 10 May 2001 and opened for signature on the same day, in document E/ESCWA/TRANS/2001/3.

4. On 13 September 2002, ESCWA communicated with the ministers of member countries, urging those countries that had not yet done so to sign the Agreement while it was still possible, namely, before 31 December 2002, and urging those that had signed to complete ratification procedures, in order to enable the Agreement to enter into force.

5. The issue is put before the Commission for its information and for its consideration of the following:

(a) With respect to the countries that have signed the Agreement: consideration is required of the current status of each with regard to ratification procedures, prior to depositing the articles of ratification with the Secretary-General of the United Nations;

(b) With respect to the countries that have not yet signed the Agreement: consideration is required of the current status of each with regard to the completion of accession procedures.

#### B. THE DESIGN OF A ROAD NUMBER SIGN

6. Annex III, part 5, of the Agreement reads as follows:

“The routes of the Arab Mashreq international road network are designated by the letter M followed by the road number. For this reason, one must make certain that this symbol is not used to identify roads in accordance with the national numbering system.

Road number signs must be repeated at intervals of approximately 10 km on first-class freeways and expressways and every 20 km on second-class roads. The road number should be indicated before and after every point of entry or exit to or from the international road, whether at interchanges or at-level intersections.

The shape, design and colours of the sign shall be determined subsequently, prior to the entry into force of the Agreement.”

7. On the basis of the foregoing, ESCWA prepared five road sign design proposals, that were submitted to the Expert Group Meeting on Harmonization of Transport Norms, Regulations and Legal Instruments for Regional Cooperation, which was held in Beirut on 15 and 16 October 2001.

8. Amendments were made in accordance with the recommendations of the aforementioned Expert Group Meeting, and three proposals were selected.

9. Those proposals were then submitted to the third session of the Committee on Transport, which was held in Beirut from 5 to 7 March 2002. A choice was made of the best design and colour (see annex I) and the Committee requested ESCWA to prepare the technical specifications for the sign.

10. The Ministry of Communications in Saudi Arabia prepared those technical specifications (see annex II) and submitted them to the fourth session of the Committee on Transport, which was held in Beirut from 14 to 16 January 2003.

11. The Committee on Transport expressed its gratitude to the Ministry of Communications in Saudi Arabia and requested it to complete all the executive designs necessary for the production of the sign, and to supply them to ESCWA by March 2003 at the latest.

12. This issue is placed before the Commission for its information.

#### C. EXECUTIVE MECHANISM FOR THE AGREEMENT

13. By implementing the Agreement, it may be possible to achieve the objectives that led to its formulation, namely, to link the countries of the Arab Mashreq and encourage commercial and tourist

exchanges between them; to strengthen Arab linkages and regional integration; and to harmonize the technical specifications for roads, authorized masses for vehicles and signs on the axes of the network, with a view to increasing security and safety; facilitating, increasing the speed and reducing the cost of movement flows; and according to the development of this network the appropriate priority in the national development plans of member countries.

14. In view of the fact that, once it has entered into force, any amendments to the articles or annexes of the Agreement must, in accordance with article 7 thereof, be effected through the ESCWA Committee on Transport; and given the importance of cooperation between all the Government and private sector parties involved in implementing the Agreement, a mechanism for follow-up of implementation must be created at regional level, through the ESCWA Committee on Transport.

15. In the light of the foregoing, the secretariat proposes to delegate to the Committee on Transport responsibility for following up implementation of the Agreement.

16. The matter is submitted to the Commission for an appropriate decision concerning the delegation to the Committee on Transport of responsibility for following up implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq.

#### D. DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTEGRATED TRANSPORT SYSTEM IN THE ARAB MASHREQ AND THE FACILITATION OF TRANSPORT AND TRADE IN THE REGION

17. Resolution 235 (XXI) concerning adoption of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq includes a request to the secretariat of ESCWA to intensify its endeavours and give the requisite priority to the development of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq and facilitation of international commercial and passenger traffic in the region, with a view to benefiting from the increased volume of commercial and tourist exchanges between member countries and between the countries of the region and every country in the world.

18. In response to that request, ESCWA supplemented its activities in that field, as was set forth in the reports of the Committee on Transport on its third and fourth sessions. Those activities are summarized in the paragraphs below:

(a) At its third session, the Committee on Transport adopted the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq. The Agreement was amended at the fourth session of the Committee, which was held from 14 to 16 January 2003, and referred to the twenty-second ESCWA session for adoption and signature;

(b) The Commission prepared guidelines on establishing national committees for the facilitation of transport and trade and sent them to member countries to use as a reference when establishing such committees. At the date on which this document was issued, three member countries had responded, namely, Palestine (2003), the Syrian Arab Republic (2003) and Yemen (1999);

(c) The Commission prepared a draft memorandum of understanding concerning cooperation in the field of maritime transport that was considered at the fourth session of the Committee on Transport before being sent to member countries in order to solicit their views thereupon. At the date on which this document was issued, Jordan had approved the draft. Responses must be received from all member countries before the final text of the memorandum of understanding and its annexes can be issued and approved, firstly, by the Committee on Transport at its fifth session, and then by member countries;

(d) The ESCWA Committee on Transport approved the preliminary table of international roads in the Arab Mashreq on the basis that it was part of the Regional Road Transport Information System. The requisite information is being gathered from member countries;

(e) The Commission has prepared the Methodological Framework for the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq and published two volumes on the subject that contain a general description of the Framework and details of the model for predicting freight flows. Preparations are currently being made for the publication of a third volume that will cover the preliminary outcomes of application of the Methodological Framework in analysing regional policies for the facilitation of transport and trade in certain countries of the region;

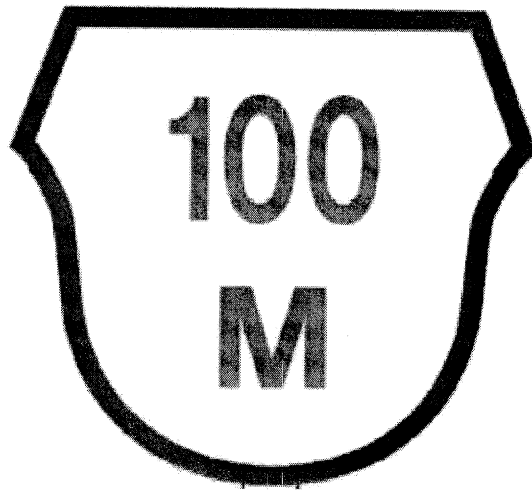
(f) In response to requests made by the ministers of transport of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic at the beginning of October 2002, ESCWA is currently conducting a study on the economic feasibility of facilitating the exchange of goods through the ports and territories of those three countries. A draft version of the study is expected by the end of April 2003 and will be submitted to those ministers for their review and the adoption of its recommendations;

(g) Since 2002, ESCWA, in cooperation with the other four United Nations regional commissions, has been implementing a project for capacity-building in developing interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages, between Asia, Europe and Africa in particular. The five-year project runs from 2002 to 2006 and is funded by a grant of US\$ 1.25 million from the United Nations Development Fund;

(h) Since 2002, ESCWA, in partnership with the Economic Commission for Europe and the Economic Commission for Africa, has been implementing a project for capacity-building in trade facilitation and electronic business in the Mediterranean. This is a two-year project running from 2002 to 2003, funded by a grant of US\$ 600,000 from the United Nations Development Fund.

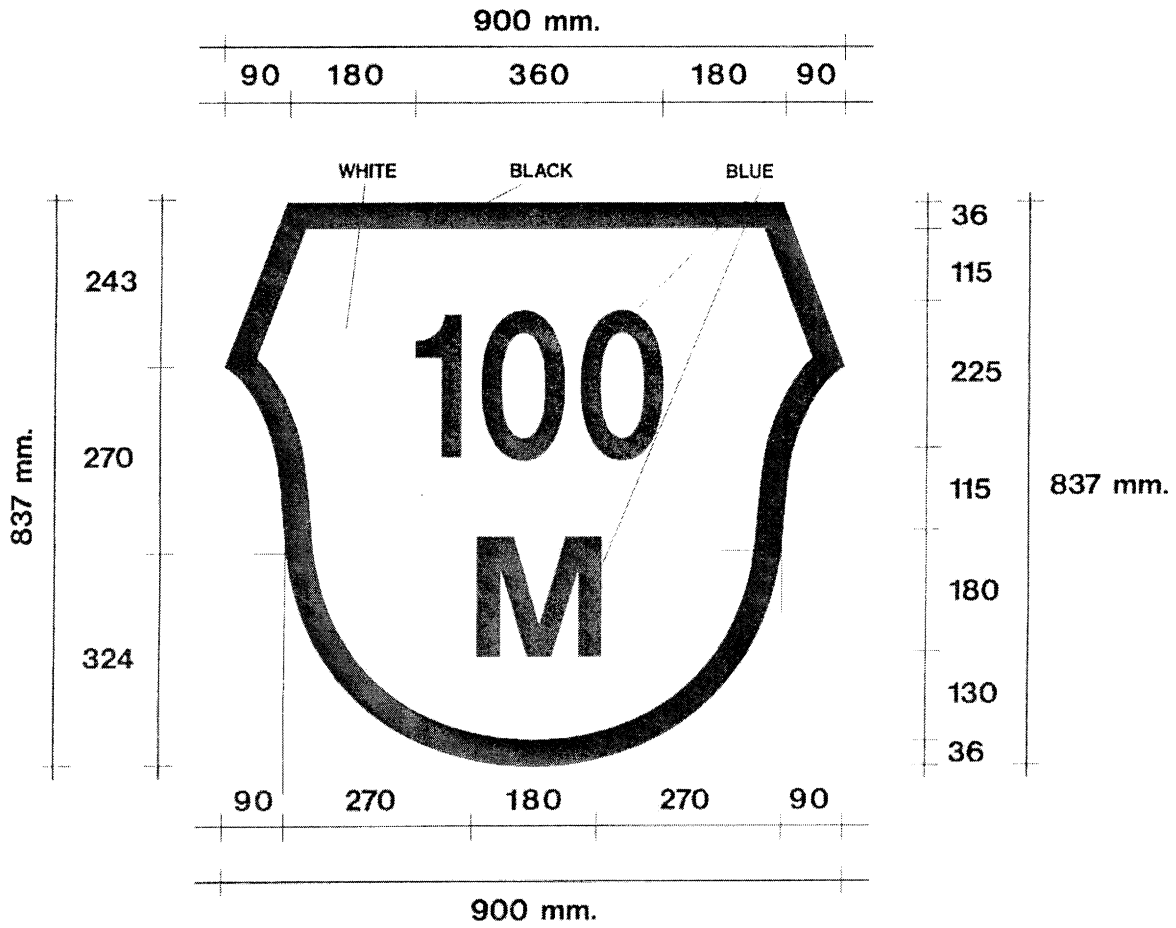
Annex I

**DESIGN OF ROAD NUMBER SIGN**



Annex II

**TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS FOR ROAD SIGN**



900 X 837

