



IRF inches towards its first local office in Cairo

Mr Tony Pearce, Director General of IRF Geneva/Brussels met with HE Dr Essam Sharaf, Minister of Transport of Egypt in Cairo and discussed a wide range of issues concerning the relations between the IRF and Egypt and the ways in which the IRF can collaborate with the Egyptian road sector. The main focus of the discussions was on the establishment of an IRF office in Cairo. Dr Sharaf expressed his support and enthusiasm for the establishment of the IRF office and the work that it would do.

Setting up the Cairo Office:

Mr Pearce briefed the Minister on the progress made on establishing an IRF office in Cairo. Dr Sharaf, an IRF Fellow, said that he would support the process of applying for permission to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Social Affairs to establish the office.

He hoped that the process would be completed quickly and that the office would be fully functioning in about 2 months.

The office will be under the roof of the Arab Road Association which has just signed up as an IRF member.

A major issue for the Cairo office would be road safety, and Mr Pearce felt that it is important to bring international experience to help tackle the problem of the "War of the Roads".

Mr Pearce said that the Cairo office would be working with governments, companies and universities in the region to provide good information, education and training, and coordination on issues such as the quantity and quality of roads and technical issues, besides the key concern of road safety.

The Cairo office would organise seminars and training programmes, translate training materials and other publications and would

respond to the demands of the Egyptian, North African and Middle East market.



A North African programme for the IRF was proposed by Tony Pearce's keynote speech at the Libyan National Roads and Bridges Conference in October 2004. Originally it has been foreseen that this would be in Tripoli, Libya, but it could be held in Cairo.

When the Minister expressed his enthusiasm for this, Mr Pearce suggested holding a ministerial session, inviting ministers from the area to discuss certain topics such as road safety, road maintenance and missing links. It was agreed that Eng. Alaa Mostafa would liaise with the IRF on the organisation of this conference and the issues to be addressed.

Black Sea Transport Working Group:

Attending the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) Transport working group in Thessaloniki, Tony Pearce took the opportunity to present the IRF and its plans for a Black Sea Ring Programme, to be launched at a conference in Istanbul in November. The programme was welcomed, particularly as it could provide the impetus for concrete action in developing transport projects in the region. The BSEC Business Council expressed its willingness to work with the IRF and suggested IRF be a permanent partner in the forum and also that a Memorandum of Understanding be established.

For details of IRF events see www.irfnet.org

INTERNATIONAL ROAD FEDERATION

17-19 rue de la Tourelle bte 1, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium Tel : +32 2 234 6630 Fax : +32 2 230 7907

2 chemin de Blandonnet, 1214 Vernier Geneva, Switzerland Tel : +41 22 306 02 60 Fax : +41 22 306 0270

1010 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Floor, Washington, DC 20001, USA Tel: +1 202 371 5544 Fax: +1 202 371 5565



Whilst in Greece, Pearce took the opportunity to meet with representatives from Egnatia Odos, motorway operator Attiki Odos and the National Technical University of Athens and discussed the possibilities of IRF membership. National Technical University of Athens and Attiki Odos have now signed up as members of the IRF.

Contact-building in Lebanon:

Mr Pearce also paid a one-day visit to Lebanon to meet with the Lebanese Ministry of Public Works and Transport and the Council for Development.

Abdel Hafeez Kayssi, the Director General of the Lebanese Ministry of Public Works and Transport, said that the Directorate General of Land and Maritime Transport was responsible for the construction, safety and maintenance of roads.

They are partners with the European Union in projects financed through Euro-Med for the organisation of land transport. With the World Bank certain studies have been carried out on

passenger and freight movement and others will be launched in the coming weeks.

Mr Pearce said that the IRF's World Road Statistics were rather poor on coverage from Lebanon, and Mr Kayssi promised that if the IRF sends him a questionnaire, he will make sure someone in government fills it out. He also said that he believed that the Government should be a member.

For him, the major transport issues in Lebanon are the organisation of passenger transport, identifying zones for passenger transport in Beirut, and upgrading the quality of minibuses and small taxis.

Another major concern are border crossings. They established 3 years ago a unit for improving border crossings. Stressing that the issue of transit was an area of interest for the IRF, Mr Pearce said that he thought it would be interesting for them to be in touch with the Iranians, who share similar problems.

Dr Alain Cordahi, Vice-President of the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) said that for Lebanon the road sector is very important. The CDR was established after the civil war to coordinate the reconstruction efforts. Through several development plans transport (mainly road transport) has taken 30-40% of the budgeted amount, but in fact 60-70% of the actual expenditure.

One of the problems that the Lebanese government faces is that because of its government debt it cannot borrow any more.

IRF proposed to hold a one-day seminar on the financing of the Lebanese roads. Mr Cordahi welcomed this.

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