



LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES

Establishment: By the *Pact of the Arab League* on March 22, 1945.

Secretary General: Nabil Elaraby, elected in May 2011; in office since July 2011.

Member States: The LAS has 22 Member States and 4 Observer countries. Member States: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen – 1945; Libya – 1953; Sudan – 1956; Morocco and Tunisia – 1958; Kuwait – 1961; Algeria – 1962; Oman, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates – 1971; Mauritania – 1973; Somalia and the State of Palestine – 1974; Djibouti – 1977; Comoros – 1993. The Observer countries are Brazil, Eritrea, India and Venezuela.

Areas of Work: Its main objective is to strengthen bonds between Member States, coordinate their policies and help them reach a common welfare.

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BACKGROUND

The initiative of creating an Arab League was first proposed in 1942 by the British, who wanted to mobilize Arab countries against the Axis powers. The League of Arab States (LAS) is a regional organization composed of Arab states located in North and Northeast Africa, and the Middle East. On 7 October 1944, in Alexandria, five Arab countries (Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon) agreed to form a joint Arab Organization, which led to the creation of the League of Arab States the following year, in 1945 under the Alexandria Protocol.

This organization promotes economic, cultural and social interests of the estimated 340 million people living in its Member States, more than 90 percent of whom are of Muslim faith. The LAS only admits countries whose peoples are mainly Arabic speaking or where Arabic is an official language.

Members of the LAS have adopted a mutual defense treaty (League of Arab States Treaty of Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation) under which they promise to provide protection by all suitable means in case of an aggression against a Member State and its sovereignty.

In 1979, Egypt's membership was suspended because it agreed to sign the Camp David Accords. Egypt was not readmitted into the Organization until 1989, under the Mubarak reign.

Libya has been suspended from the League of Arab States as of February 22, 2011 as a result of the Libyan uprising and the use of military force against civilians. LAS Secretary General, Amr Moussa, stated that: "the Organization has decided to suspend the participation of the Libyan delegations from all Arab League sessions". Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi replied the League was illegitimate and he strongly criticized the position of the League members, who have supported a no-fly zone¹.

In November 2011, the Arab League decided to suspend the Syrian membership and brokered a peace agreement they had signed with the Assad regime. The LAS requested the end of unlawful aggressions against protestors and civilians, and that the Assad regime undertakes immediate negotiations with opposition groups. The League sent a team of observers to Syria in late December to monitor the evolution of the situation and the application of their plan to end the violence.

On February 23rd 2012, the United Nations and the League of Arab States decided to appoint Kofi Annan as Joint Special Envoy in Syria in order to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Mr. Annan's mandate is to propose measures to resolve peacefully and to suggest political solutions to end the current violence in Syria.

OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of the League is to strengthen relations between the Arab states and "draw closer the relations between member states and co-ordinate collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab Countries."

The League uses economic and social policies in order to promote common actions and to provide countries the tools for cooperative development, security, liberation, and economic integration. The LAS has the mandate to defend the interests and national causes of the Arab world through:

- a) the implementation of common action plans at the regional and international levels,
- b) coordination with regional and international organizations,
- c) the resolution of disputes that may emerge between members by adopting resolutions and measures necessary in order to settle these disputes peacefully.

The Alexandria Protocol is a key legal text that establishes the main objectives and fundamental legal basis of the League. Two other legal documents are complementary to the Charter; namely, the Treaty for Joint Defense and Economic Co-operation, concluded on 13 March 1950, and Charter for National Economic Action, ratified on 26 November 1980. All members are parties to both of these legal instruments.

¹ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2011/03/12/libya-arab-league-legitimacy-239.html>

THE CHARTER OF THE ARAB LEAGUE

The **Charter of the Arab League** is the main legal framework of the League. It states the principle that guides the League actions. The Charter reiterates the importance of safeguarding the independence of Member States and respecting their sovereignty. According to the Charter, the founding members of the Arab League are Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Yemen and they decided to seek "close cooperation" on various matters such as economics, communication, culture, nationality, social welfare, and health.

The Arab League has no mechanism to compel members to comply with its resolutions. Article VII of the Charter stipulates that decisions reached by a majority "shall bind only those [states] that accept them" and that "unanimous decisions of the Council shall be binding upon all member-states of the League". This article exemplifies the primacy of national sovereignty and undermines the League's capability to take concerted action.

The Charter enounces the internal regulations of the Council of the League and other committees which were agreed in October 1951. The Charter institutes five governing bodies ensuring that the LAS fulfill its role and mandate.

Article II clearly states that independence and sovereignty of each member states are fundamental pillar principles of the League. Moreover, the Charter of the Arab league is the result of compromises between regional and national governments in order to reach an agreement that will best suit the majority. In that optic the rules that govern the LAS are a clear indication of this reality. For instance, the rule that requires unanimity in voting and the optional cooperation between Member States are obvious evidence.

The charter has a separate annex on the Palestinian issue. This annex asserts Palestinian independence and states that "even though the outward signs of this independence have remained veiled as a result of *force majeure*," an Arab delegate from Palestine should "participate in its [the League's] work until this country enjoys actual independence."

LAS SECRETARY GENERAL



of the LAS.

The Secretary-General is appointed by a two-thirds majority of the Council. The prime responsibility of the Secretary-General is to supervise and manage the *Secretariat*, which is the administrative body of the League and the executive organ of the Council. The Assistant Secretaries-Generals assist the Secretary-General and administrate various departments and agencies

Egypt's Foreign Minister Nabil el-Araby (75) was elected unanimously as new Secretary General of the Leagues of Arab States (LAS) on 15 May 2011. He took office in July 2011. Nabil el-Arabi is successor of Amr Moussa who held office for a decade and resigned after announcing presidential candidacy in Egypt. Elaraby holds a J.S.D. (1971) and an LL.M. (1969) from New York University School of Law and a law degree from Cairo University's Faculty of Law (1955)

LAS SUMMITS, ANNUAL MEETINGS AND GOVERNING BODIES

Summit Conferences:

Every March, the League of Arab States holds its annual Summit. The 23rd Summit was held in Baghdad, Iraq on March 29th, 2012. The first Summit conference was held on January 13th, 1964 in Cairo, Egypt. The heads of state and government attend these summits to discuss important issues affecting the Arab world. The conclusions of these summits are transmitted by communiqué, a type of resolution that states the general position of the leaders. These communiqué form the basis from which the other bodies work. The Charter does not provide any legal framework for the summit conferences; still the League's members believe they are critical in order to ensure the advancement of the League.

Council of the League:

The Charter states that Council is the League's supreme body. The Charter establishes its formation, scope of authority, rules of procedure, and voting procedure. All Member States are members of the Council withholding each one vote. Unanimous Council decisions are binding for all members as stated in article VII of the Charter and majority decisions are binding only on those members that have accepted the majority decision. In the case that the Council is discussing hostilities between two or more members; the aggressor nation is not allowed to vote on the resolution as stated in article VI of the Charter.

In addition, the Council is the only body of the League that has the power to amend the Charter by a two third majority of the Members States as declared in article XIX of the Charter. The council the appoints the Secretary-General "by a majority of two thirds of the states of the League" as mentioned in article XII. Moreover, "The Secretary-General, with the approval of the Council, shall appoint the Assistant Secretaries and the principal officials of the League".

Article XI establishes that the Council shall meet twice a year—in March and September—in regular session and may "convene in extraordinary session upon the request of two member-states of the League whenever the need arises".

Technical Committees:

The Charter allows for technical and specialized committees to be created in order to assist Members States in discussing technical matters related to Arab cooperation. Three technical committees exist to date: Administrative Court, Investment Arbitration Board, and Higher Auditing Board.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

The Arab League resembles the Organization of American States, the Council of Europe, and the African Union, in that it is primarily a political organization. However, membership in the League is based on linguistic affinities rather than purely geographical location. The Arab League is based on principles that support and promote a unified Arab nationalism, and the development of common positions among Arab states on various issues. All Arab League members are also members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. In turn, the memberships of the smaller Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Arab Maghreb Union organizations are subsets of the League.

Also, the Arab League itself is an Observer to several International and regional organizations, such as the African Union and the United Nations, and has observed several summits of the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN).

COOPERATION WITH LATIN AMERICA

A strong incentive to strengthen inter-regional growing cooperation is the complementary nature of Arab and Latin American economies; while Latin America has developed high-tech skills and agricultural production that may find ready markets in the Arab world, it is also an energy-hungry market for Arab oil and petrochemicals. It is no surprise then that, for the most part, Arab-Latin American relations have been focused mainly on Energy and Trade, rather than cooperation for democratic development.

The results so far, have been quite promising in terms of increasing trade, and no country has benefitted the most from this bond than Brazil, whose accumulated exports to the Arab countries add up to US\$ 3.2 billion in the period from January - March 2012, representing an increase by 3.33% in relation to the same period in 2011. Imports of Brazilian goods and services from the Arab countries also registered a significant increase, reaching US\$ 2 billion in the period which accounts for an increase by 18% in relation to the previous year².

ISSUES

The League of Arab States has been effective in areas such as foreign policy, including supporting literacy, shaping school curricula and promoting education as well as Arabic language and cultural heritage. It has also helped to create a regional telecommunications union.

ARAB CHARTER ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The League of Arab State (LAS) adopted a first version of the Arab charter on Human rights in 1994 coinciding with its 50th anniversary of creation. The adoption of this Charter was the symbol that the LAS recognized Human Rights as one of its principles. Of course, the Charter of 1994 resembles other international and regional instruments as it proclaims universal human rights. However, it is important to note that the Charter of 1994 does not incorporate any enforcement mechanism as the one integrated within the European and American Conventions on Human Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The Council of the Arab League passed a resolution in 2002 advocating for the modernization of the Charter in regard to international human rights standards. On January 10th, 2003, the Arab Commission on Human Rights adopted, a resolution inviting Arab States to propose observations in order to improve the Charter. This resolution also contained a guarantee that the Commission would study the Charter in January 2004. In the meantime, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) conducted a meeting with Arab experts, in Cairo, in December 2003, to exchange on methods that would ensure that the Charter meet international norms. At last, on May 23, 2004, the LAS adopted a revised version of the Charter at the Arab Summit in Tunisia.

² According to the Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce

The Charter of 2004 encloses 53 articles and a Preamble. Article 2 of the Charter mentions the right to self-determination of the people, the right to control their natural wealth and resources, to freely determine the form of their political structure and to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. After words, the Charter can be divided into four categories which are individual rights, rules of justice, civil and political rights, and the last category concerns economic, social and cultural rights. It is important to point out that article 1 and 3 of the Charter of 2004 stipulates the equality between men and women in the Arab World which represents a step forward for the women condition in the Arab States. However, it must be noted that there is still no effective enforcement mechanism incorporated in the Charter 2004 nor does it create an Arab Court on Human Rights. The expert Committee, composed of seven Member States, is still the only system embodied in the Charter to monitor State observance with the Charter. Although, this Committee receives periodic reports from Member States, the Charter does not establish a petition system in order to allow Members States or individuals to draw the attention of the Committee to a violation of the Charter.

The Arab Charter on Human rights of 2004 does not create any legally binding obligation in regard of international law for Member States. The final provisions of the Charter require seven ratifications in order to enter into force. The Charter entered into force on March 16, 2008 after seven Member States ratified the document; these States are Algeria, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Libya, Palestine and Syria.

COOPERATION WITH OAS

On October 27 and 30, 1980, the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States approved a resolution to authorize the Secretary General to extend invitations for the League of Arab States to attend the OAS General Assembly;. This resolution was approved with twenty-five votes in favor in conformity with article 9, paragraph (d) of the Rules of the General Assembly.

Many Arab countries that are permanent observers to the OAS, such as Morocco and Qatar contribute to OAS programs. These contributions enhance the ever-growing bond between both our Organizations. The Moroccan government contributed to the SER/DIA – Lecture Series of the Americas in 2009 and Qatar contributed to the Art Museum of the Americas and to the Youth Orchestra Program in 2012.

SOURCES

[LAS Website](#)

Columbus Memorial Library Permanent Council meeting minutes
Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce

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