

Arab League Wishes to Reopen Its Offices in Brazil

Contributed by Alexandre Rocha
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The reopening of the representation office for the League of Arab States in Brazil may be one of the subjects dealt by the entity's secretary general, Amr Mussa, with president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the minister of Foreign Relations, Celso Amorim, during his visit today to Brasília, capital city of Brazil.

"We hope the subject is discussed. This is the right time to reopen the office," says the dean of the Council of Arab Ambassadors in Brazil and Palestinian ambassador, Musa Odeh.

According to him, the office of the League in Brasília was closed at the end of 1994 for economical reasons. Since then the ambassadors council has been acting as the entity's representative in the country.

According to the counsellor Rodrigo Amaral, of the Middle East department at the Itamaraty, the Brazilian Foreign Office, the reopening of the office has already been "mentioned" in conversations between Brazilian authorities and representatives of the organization. "There have already been signals showing interest in the establishment of this space," he said.

The main objective in Mussa's journey, however, is to deal with the organization of the summit for South American and Arab countries, which will take place in May in the Brazilian capital.

In an interview last week, Amr Mussa said the summit will have solid results in many areas where cooperation between the two blocs is possible, such as diplomacy, economics and culture. He also believes the relationship between the Arabs and South Americans may, in the future, evolve to the creation of a free trade zone.

"This visit is important exactly because it is happening right after the summit of League of Arab States (on the 22nd and 23rd of March in Algiers) and just before the meeting for Arab and South American countries," highlighted Odeh.

"The secretary general's presence demonstrates the importance the League is giving to the summit," added the president of the Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce (CCAB), Antonio Sarkis Jr. "A good political relationship will be reflected in the trade relations," said Sarkis.

Mussa is in Brazil also to get to know the Arab community living in the country, estimated in 12 million people. He wishes to strengthen the relationship between the League and the immigrants and descendants. "We will try to optimize this," stated the CCAB president. "We are very proud to receive him here," he added.

Agenda

The secretary general will have a full agenda in Brasília. In the morning he will give a lecture at the Rio Branco Institute, the Itamaraty academy. The Egyptian Mussa is a career diplomat and was the Egyptian minister of Foreign Relations during 10 years, before taking the position in the League in 2001.

After that he will have a meeting with Celso Amorim, followed by a luncheon offered by the Itamaraty and a press conference. In the afternoon he will visit the House of Representatives, where he will meet with the representative Jamil Murad, general secretary for the Brazil-Arab Parliamentary League.

Mussa will meet with president Lula at the end of the afternoon, and, at night, he will participate in a dinner offered by the ambassadors council. Tomorrow the secretary general will be in São Paulo, where he will visit the headquarters of the CCAB and will meet with the state governor Geraldo Alckmin.

The League

The League of Arab States was created in 1945, after the 2nd World War, to become a permanent forum for economic, cultural, political and social cooperation between the Arab countries.

Initially seven nations were part of the League: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Based in Cairo, it currently joins the 22 Arab countries.

As well as the ones mentioned, part of the organization are Algeria, Bahrain, Qatar, Djibouti, the United Arab Emirates, the Comoro Islands, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia.

As the United Nations Organization (UN), the League is divided into a series of sectorial organizations. The maximum power is held by the Council, with representatives of all member countries, generally the chancellors, and which normally meets twice a year, in March and September.

Periodically the League also organizes a summit for the member countries heads of state, which takes place annually since 2003. The last one happened in Algiers, on the 22nd and 23rd of March. Under the Council is the secretary general, responsible for managing the entity in the administrative, financial and political areas.

In its history, the League has acted mediating regional conflicts, has promoted the formulation of documents to strengthen the economic integration in the region, participated in the creation of Arab schools' curriculum and the preservation of manuscripts and local traditions. The entity also let out campaigns against illiteracy and publishes intellectual pieces.

Under the League there are many other councils, committees and sectorial associations. There are, for example, councils for ministers in various areas, such as housing, justice, communications, health and tourism.

Amongst the organizations operating parallel to the entity are the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (Oapec), the Arab Monetary Fund, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development and the Arab Academy for Science and Technology.

Amongst the sectorial associations acting with the League is the General Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, of which the CCAB and other chambers of commerce from countries around the world are part.

Translated by Silvia Lindsey

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