

## MEA Receives Its First A330-200 Aircraft Directly Purchased From Airbus

Contributed by EADS  
Monday, 28 July 2008

Lebanon's national carrier, Middle East Airlines (MEA) has taken delivery of its first A330-200 aircraft directly purchased from Airbus. The aircraft was handed over to Mohamad El-Hout, Chairman and Director General, MEA, by Habib Fekih, President, Airbus Middle East, in a delivery ceremony in Toulouse.

The aircraft is part of an order for four Airbus A330-200s placed in 2006 to replace an existing fleet of three leased A330s. MEA has chosen a spacious cabin layout consisting of 44 seats in Cedar Class and 200 in Economy. The A330 is powered by Rolls Royce Trent 772 engines.

Lebanon - MEA - LBCi report - Abdo Helo - 20/06/2008  
{youtube}mcA-dUilfzc{/youtube}

"This is the first A330-200 being delivered to MEA with a new livery reflecting the Lebanese flag. With its efficient fuel economy and passenger comfort, the A330-200 will enable MEA to meet and respond to the rising demand for passenger services between Lebanon, the middle East, Africa and Europe", said Mohamad El-Hout.

MEA flies an all Airbus fleet including six A321s and three leased A330-200s on non-stop routes to Europe, within the Middle East and Africa. The new directly purchased A330s will be deployed to increase capacity on existing routes.

"Airbus's partnership with MEA is an amazing success story. It dates back to the early days when MEA operated the A300s and A310s - and today as the airline embarks on a future with the world's most efficient, operationally cost effective and most comfortable aircraft in its class, all of us at Airbus wish MEA the most prosperous future", said Habib Fekih.

With a true wide-body fuselage allowing very high comfort standards, the A330-200 is able to accommodate seat and class configurations to suit diverse customer requirements. It has a range of up to 6,750 nm / 12,500 km with a full passenger load. Its large under-floor cargo holds can also carry standard pallets and containers side-by-side.

It also has the excellent operational flexibility necessary to serve a wide range of route structures, providing operators with very low operating cost per seat. Its proven record of economy and superior passenger comfort provides operators with a significant competitive advantage in the market today.

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### Contact

Airbus Press Department  
31707 Blagnac Cedex  
France  
[www.airbus.com](http://www.airbus.com)  
mailto: [media@airbus.com](mailto:media@airbus.com)

### Middle East Airlines steps up expansion with new Airbus

Middle East Airlines acquired a new Airbus 330-200 this week as part of a plan to expand its fleet to 16 aircraft and open more routes.

"The Airbus 330 is the largest plane in our fleet and this move demonstrates the company's determination to grow and

prosper," MEA Chairman-Director General Mr. Mohamad El-Hout told a news conference at the Airbus delivery center in Toulouse, France, on Thursday.

The Airbus 330 is officially priced at \$185 million with the engines but El-Hout said MEA acquired the aircraft at a discount price, which he refused to disclose. The Airbus 330 carries 253 passengers in a typical three-class arrangement and has a range of 12,500 kilometers.

The new aircraft will make direct flights from Beirut to Paris and Riyadh.

"The MEA fleet will consist of four Airbus 330s, six Airbus 321s and six Airbus 320s and we hope to acquire all these planes gradually until 2010," El-Hout said.

The chairman, who implemented a wide-ranging restructuring program of the national carrier, also disclosed that MEA recorded a net profit of more than \$60 million in 2007.

"Yes we made a very good profit and I project that the profits will climb to \$70 million in 2008 if the political situation remains stable. This is good news to some people and bad news to others," El-Hout said.

He suggested that certain quarters, which he did not name, did not want to see MEA to grow and prosper, alluding to attempts by some officials to create their own aviation firm.

Responding to a question, El-Hout and the head of Airbus in the Middle East and North Africa, Habib Fekih, denied vehemently that the firms made commissions out of this transaction.

"I say bluntly and clearly that MEA is clean, clean and clean. Any firm which collects or pays a commission will pay a penalty at least 10 times the size of the original contract," Fekih said.

El-Hout said that MEA is studying proposals from many banks, including six Lebanese ones, to finance the acquisition of Airbus more 330s.

"Bank Audi is a major bank partner for MEA in several businesses, including financing of planes. But now we are dealing with more than one bank, including Audi," El-Hout said.

He stressed that MEA must get support in order to maintain business in the long run.

"Look at other countries like the UAE and Qatar. These countries did not issue new licenses to compete with Emirates and Qatar Airways," El-Hout said. MEA has a right to operate exclusively until 2012.

"If anyone wanted to cancel MEA's exclusive rights then he should go through the legal procedures. But if the Lebanese cabinet takes this decision then we will resort immediately to the justice department and the Shura Council [the highest judicial body] to challenge this decision," El-Hout warned.

MEA plans to float 25 percent of its shares on the Beirut Stock Exchange in the near future.

"We wanted to list the shares two years ago but these plans were scrapped due to the political situation," El-Hout said.

MEA's new aircraft flew over Beirut at low altitude several times on June 19 to mark the arrival of the Airbus 330.