

Arabs, Middle East and Maghreb

Arabs, name originally applied to the Semitic peoples of the Arabian peninsula; now used also for populations of countries whose primary language is Arabic, e.g., Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, and Yemen. In the 20th cent., Arab leaders have attempted to unite the Arab-speaking world into an Arab nation. Since 1945 most Arab countries have joined the Arab League; its purpose being to consider matters of common interest. The original charter members were Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan (now Jordan), Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was granted full membership in 1976. Other current members include Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea (pending in 1999), Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Middle East, term applied to a region that includes SW Asia and part of NE Africa, lying W of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. It includes the Asian part of Turkey; Syria; Israel; Jordan; Iraq; Iran; Lebanon; the countries of the Arabian peninsula, that is, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait; Egypt; and Libya. The region was the site of great ancient civilizations, e.g., Mesopotamia and Egypt, and it was the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The term *Middle East* is also sometimes used in a cultural sense for that part of the world predominantly Islamic in culture, in which case Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the remaining countries of North Africa are included.

Maghreb or **Magrib**, Arabic term for NW Africa. It is generally applied to all of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania and Libya but more specifically it pertains only to the area of the three countries that lies between the Atlas Mts. and the Mediterranean Sea. Isolated from the rest of the continent by the Atlas Mts. and the Sahara, the Maghreb is more closely related in terms of climate, landforms, population, economy, and history to N Mediterranean areas than to the rest of Africa.