Showcasing regional innovations, assets and talent in the steel industry made Cairo, Egypt, the ideal setting for the first in-person AIST Middle East North Africa (MENA) Steel Forum. The two-and-a-half-day event took place at the Royal Kempinski Hotel Cairo on 6–8 June 2023. The AIST MENA Member Chapter has hosted the forum twice virtually, and the first in-person event was received with enthusiasm as no event of its technical and professional caliber had occurred previously in the region. The topics of regional strengths and challenges, economic outlook, and green steel were interwoven throughout the keynote presentations and the six sessions.
MENA Member Chapter chair Karim Badr, technical director, RHI Magnesita, opened the conference with an overview of the chapter’s goal of providing an opportunity for professionals in the Middle East and North Africa region to collaborate and share technical knowledge and experiences while strengthening their connections within the industry.

Ezz Steel generously served as the host sponsor for this year’s forum. El Sayed Ibrahim, division director for Ezz Steel, provided an outlook for the industry and the market in the region. He highlighted regional production, current capacity, and the potential for green steel and renewable growth.

Rafic Daou, vice chairman and chief executive officer, Suez Steel Co. SAE, also addressed the nearly 180 professionals in attendance, sharing the company’s history, upcoming projects, and commitment to corporate social responsibility. The event left a favorable impression on Daou.

“I would like to thank AIST for this very worthwhile conference that included very important subjects discussed by industry leaders, as well as sharing the youth and letting them speak in front of experts.”

Mahmoud Taha, Plant Manager, Ezz Steel, Sadat City Plant
“The AIST MENA Steel Forum was a valuable opportunity to meet steel industry experts and professional network, sharing with them my experience in Egypt,” Daou said. “In addition, the rich discussion of the latest technologies and innovations was inspiring, giving insight to the future of the industry. It was also important to come closer to many topics such as the development and implementation of green steel plants across the globe.”

The technical programming began with a panel discussion titled The Future of Green Steel moderated by Jürgen Cappel, managing director, Cappel Stahl Consulting. Panelists representing Siemens Energy, SMS group, Primetals Technologies and Danieli Green Technologies presented their companies’ efforts to provide steelmaking technologies that impact carbon reduction through the use of hydrogen, hybrid technologies and carbon capture. Following that session, chapter programming chair Ashraf Hanna, director technical marketing, RHI Magnesita, led the Modern Electric Arc Furnace (EAF) Operation discussion with input from Altech Group, Egyptian Steel, Maghreb Steel, Danieli Green Technologies and EZDK. Topics covered in the EAF discussion were how EAFs are pushing the limits on the amount of virgin iron units charged and how operations are adjusting their practices to accommodate the changing charge mixes. The final session of the day, Innovations in Continuous-Continuous Casting Through Rolling Technologies, moderated by Gamal Megahed, general manager for technical affairs, Egyptian Steel, focused on the latest applications of continuous-continuous casting and rolling technologies. EZDK, Egyptian Steel, Danieli MIDA Technology, Ezz Steel and RHI Magnesita contributed presentations.

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The second day of programming held a mix of economic, workforce development and technology discussions. Hany Genena, adjunct faculty, The American University in Cairo, opened the day by leading the discussion on Economic Challenges of the Steel Industry in Egypt. With the ever-changing economic conditions post-pandemic, challenges in supply chain, currency, material transportation, and delivery all impact the operations and economic viability of production. Supply chains, business development, operations and sales are all impacted by these conditions. Representatives with backgrounds in those areas participated in the discussion from companies such as RHI Magnesita, Misr Measurement and Control, Ezz Steel, Elmarakby Steel and Suez Steel. The resulting discussion prompted many questions from members of the audience. Following the economic panel, El Sayed Ibrahim, division director, Ezz Steel, moderated the next session, Innovations in the Direct Reduction Production Route. As the MENA region contributes to a large percentage of global direct reduced iron (DRI) production, many DRI projects are either underway or have already been commissioned in the MENA region with technology constantly improving in terms of raw material availability and production. Midrex Technologies, EZDK, UNICAT, Ezz Steel and Metal Consulting LLC all partook in presenting the latest in improvements and challenges for increasing DRI demand in the region as well as globally. The day concluded with a focus on workforce development, specifically with engaging and promoting the next generation. The Future of Young Professionals and Industry Support panel discussion facilitated by Iman El Mahallawi, professor, University of Cairo, and Karim Alshurafa, president, Vollmer America Inc., provided an opportunity for students from four local universities to showcase industry-related projects they’ve worked on during their academic careers. The session also focused on technical and vocational training in Egypt to fulfill the employment needs of the steel industry.
The forum concluded with an informative tour at Ezz Steel’s Al Sokhna Plant. After a light reception and overview by Ayman Fathy, quality and product development executive manager, Ezz Steel Al Sokhna Plant, attendees were provided with a driving tour around the DRI module and plant premises as well as a walking tour of the meltshop, caster, quality control and rolling facilities.

The AIST MENA Member Chapter is grateful for the success of the forum and wishes to thank the host sponsor, Ezz Steel; event sponsors Primetals Technologies and RHI Magnesita; as well as Iron Sponsors: UNICAT, Misr Measurement and Control, TUF Group, El Marakby Steel and Egyptian Steel; and media partners Steel Orbis and AISU. Special thanks go to the chapter organizing committee, moderators, presenters and the attendees.