

REPORT**ISO DEVCO/CASCO*
workshop****Milan, Italy, 26 September 2000**

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In opening this workshop on the theme *Facilitating recognition of conformity assessment activities in the 21st century*, Fabio Tobón (Executive Director, ICONTEC, Colombia) said that the issues of accreditation, certification, testing, inspection and calibration, all covered by the term “conformity assessment activities”, were becoming increasingly urgent in a world where trade was of primary importance for world peace and prosperity.

World commerce is now underpinned by the two pillars of standardization and conformity assessment. It is frequently the repetition of testing caused by different systems of conformity assessment in different countries which leads to serious non-tariff barriers to trade. Building confidence in conformity assessment activities is therefore of high priority. It is essential that the needs of developing countries are taken into account in elaborating conformity assessment procedures if solutions to the problems are going to be found which are applicable at a global level.

Session 1: Keynote speeches

These issues were expanded upon in presentations by representatives from the European Commission, the WTO and ISO CASCO.

Session 2: Mutual recognition agreements (MRAs)

Presentations in this session covered MRAs between certification bodies and between accreditation bodies as well as bilateral, regional and international agreements, including the OIML Certificate System for Measuring Instruments.

Session 3: Facilitating access of developing countries to MRAs

The need to facilitate developing countries' access to MRAs was considered, in particular concentrating on their need for guidance documents, pre-peer evaluation programmes in order to avoid waste of resources. Other forms of assistance such as training courses and seminars were also considered.

Session 4: Panel discussion

A lively panel discussion followed the presentations. Many concerns were expressed about the proliferation and cost of certification schemes, some of which it was felt added little value for the consumer. There is also the problem of confusion amongst consumers due to products carrying a large number of certification marks.

In developed countries, use could be made of manufacturers' declarations of conformity, but developing countries still felt that the independence of a third party assessment was valuable.

Thus, a clear message which emerged from the workshop was that it is necessary to merge and harmonize conformity assessment procedures in order to reduce duplication and costs and to achieve a worldwide conformity assessment system.

Conclusion

Participants gained a broad perspective of the impact of conformity assessment activities in the global economy, the usefulness in trade promotion of the recognition of conformity assessment activities, the existence of ways to achieve it and the need to facilitate its implementation. Mr. Fabio Tobón, in summing up, said that conformity assessment had to go hand in hand with transparency, non-discrimination and the use of international standards. He thought that the workshop had drawn attention to the problems and assured participants that progress in solving them would be monitored. ■

* CASCO: ISO Committee for Conformity Assessment Matters
DEVCO: ISO Committee for Developing Country Matters

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34th ISO DEVCO meeting

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*Summary of the most significant points on the agenda:***Development manuals:**

The need for a Development Manual concerning the WTO TBT Agreement was discussed, but may not be necessary since the technical assistance needs of developing countries would be highlighted in a joint publication which is currently under preparation by the International Trade Center and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Development Manual 3 *Training of technical staff* will be reviewed this year.

Regional training seminars:

A new series of training seminars had been conducted in Columbia and Peru. There has also been an increase in train-the-trainer activities.

Documentation and information systems:

ISO's increasing application of information and communications technology to the standardization process was welcomed. The *MED 2000* project, which aimed to assist in establishing and/or upgrading the information technology and telecommunications infrastructure in the Mediterranean basin and the Horn of Africa, had produced some useful guides and tools which could be applied in other countries. Some of the contributions to ISO's Funds in Trust had also been reserved for information technology development.

Funding:

It was reported that 2000 had been a bad year for contributions to the Funds in Trust. Representatives from Australia, UK and USA indicated their intention to make significant contributions in the coming years.

Activities of CASCO:

ISO/IEC Guide 68 *Agreements for the recognition and acceptance of conformity assessment results* is currently under consideration as a Committee draft by CASCO members. The increased involvement of developing countries in CASCO working groups, especially since participation by correspondence had begun, was also welcomed.

Activities of COPOLCO:

A survey examining ways in which consumer issues are addressed in developing countries had been conducted amongst DEVCO members during the year and a report will be circulated soon. Priorities for the coming year were identified as financial services, e-commerce, ergonomics and services.

Cooperation between DEVCO and REMCO:

During the last year, a further project to upgrade analytical laboratories had been undertaken in Botswana, Mauritius and Mozambique.

Revision of ISO 9000:

It was reported that by the end of 2000, around 400 000 ISO 9000 certificates are likely to have been issued by 150 countries. The revisions of the three core documents (ISO 9000, 9001, 9004) were expected to be available by the end of 2000. Certificates based on the previous versions of the documents could be maintained for up to three years after the issue of the new ones.

SGM Forum - first meeting:

This round table will discuss programs, projects and studies in standards and related matters. Some project ideas were put forward at the first meeting which will be considered at the next one, to which development banks will also be invited. A web site is being established which will contain a database of technical assistance projects.

Collaboration with WTO TBT:

Mrs. Vivien Liu reported on this year's Workshop on Technical Assistance and Special and Differential Treatment which she said had been very practical and solutions-orientated. There had also been excellent cooperation between the WTO and ISO DEVPRO in holding training seminars.

Technical assistance:

It was suggested that a committee be formed to discuss the financing of technical assistance projects, especially in the light of the WTO's emphasis on international standardization. The possibility of cooperation between ISO and the OIML was also mentioned since the OIML has just established a list of experts available for projects in the field of metrology.

The next ISO DEVCO meeting will be held on 14 and 15 September 2001 in Sydney, Australia. ■