International Standards Organizations (ISO, IEC, ITU and UNECE)

Proposal from IEC, ISO, ITU-T and UN/ECE on "International Standards for the Information Society" at WSIS 2003

1. Background

International Standards and the voluntary consensus process upon which they are built can offer answers to some of the key questions concerning "Vision" and "Access" for the Information Society, i.e., *"how to ensure that the possible benefits of ICTs for development are maximized, while the possible obstacles and barriers are minimized…"*.

International Standards are indeed an instrument enabling the development of a harmonized, stable and globally recognized framework of technologies, best practices and agreements, which support the overall growth of the Information Society and a more equitable development.

The leading International Standards Organizations (ISO, IEC, ITU-T and UN/ECE) shall work together to ensure that, in the framework of the WSIS, there be rising awareness and understanding (among the participants and the press) on the **strategic role of International Standards for development and trade**, and that this understanding will in some way be reflected in the resolutions/declarations issued at the Summit.

The main challenge is to bring to the attention of all interested parties that standards are not just a "technical issue", but also a fundamental strategic tool for the Information Society.

A first important step in this direction has already been taken at the WSIS Pan-European conference in Bucharest, where a session dedicated to international standardization has been organized in collaboration with ISO, IEC, ITU-T and UN/ECE and the role of standards has been recognized in the final declaration (see in particular "Principle 7. Addressing global issues"). The four Organizations are now actively working to contribute in a similar way to the other WSIS regional conferences.

2. Role of Standardization for the Information Society

International Standards already have a role – and can have an ever greater one – to help maximize the possible benefits of ICTs for development, while minimizing the possible obstacles and barriers, because they:

- simplify the utilization of existing and new technologies, focusing on interfaces and interoperability, reducing costs and complexity, opening markets and fostering broader access to products and services;

- favour the emergence of rules and agreements on best practices (shared and adopted on a global scale) that will greatly help to develop consumer confidence and protection, security, and ensure respect of the legitimate interests of all stakeholders;

- being the result of a process where the six fundamental principles stated by WTO (openness, transparency, impartiality and consensus, effectiveness and relevance, coherence and development dimension) are fully recognized and implemented, International Standards developed within voluntary consensus-based processes offer the highest level of institutional recognition and global acceptance.

International Standards and the voluntary consensus process upon which they are built can offer effective answers to some of the key questions concerning *Vision* and *Access* for the Information Society, i.e. how to ensure that the potential benefits of Information and Communication Technologies for development are maximized, while the possible obstacles and barriers are minimized.

3. International Standards Organizations are willing and available to contribute to the WSIS preparation

ISO, IEC, ITU-T, in cooperation with UN/ECE, are willing and ready to offer an active contribution to the WSIS preparatory process, providing support and suggestions on contents and initiatives envisaged in the framework of the Summit. Along with this contribution, the International Standards Organizations can offer:

3.1 Information materials and case studies on, for example, technologies, applications and services which impact business and life, and on the role that standards play within those frameworks;

3.2 Information material and presentation of the concrete actions that International Standards Organizations have taken to support capacity-building in developing countries, trying to enhance their access to information and participation in the standardization process;

3.3 Support for the WSIS executive secretariat on the dissemination of information and on the collection of suggestions and contents from selected groups of stakeholders, making available the IT infrastructure supporting the exchange of information and technical committees' work on a worldwide basis.

4. Participation of the International Standards Organizations in the WSIS (Geneva, December 2003)

4.1 ISO, IEC, ITU-T, in cooperation with UN/ECE, propose to deliver a message or to organize a specific session on standardization to be included in the programme of the WSIS. Additionally, ISO, IEC, ITU-T, in cooperation with UN/ECE, are also ready to organize a side-event dedicated to highlighting the strategic role of International Standards for development and trade supporting the overall growth of the Information Society.

4. *(Continued)*

4.2 Possible title of the session proposed by the International Standards organizations:

Enabling access, removing barriers:
the key roles of International Standards
in the Information Society

4.2.1 Key concept: to highlight the essential role of International Standards (and of the voluntary, consensus-based process) as instruments to favour the development of a harmonized, stable and globally recognized framework of technologies, best practices and agreements to support access to the Information Society. A keynote speech (e.g., from a high-ranking personality from ISO, IEC, ITU or UN/ECE) should address this topic, underlining how international standards have already contributed and could have an increasingly important role.

4.2.2 Several critical topics related to the development of the Information Society could be addressed by stakeholders coming from all aspects of the Information Society including industry, government, consumers, developing countries and economies in transition, presenting an overview of issues to be faced and of the actual or potential role for standards and for International Standards organizations in this framework.

Tentative list of themes[1]:

- *Promoting universal access at affordable costs: towards a "Mobile World"* (the emergence of a global infrastructure for mobile services: Standards, and particularly International Standards, are a key element for this infrastructure, favouring the development of markets and having the potential to offer better opportunities to emerging economies to participate in economic development);

- *Setting-up an enabling environment, including a legal, regulatory and policy framework* (issues such as privacy protection, consumer trust, facilitation of e-commerce, protection of intellectual property rights should be addressed with the active participation of all stakeholders: the voluntary standardization system offers a proven, widely recognized and effective model to support open, transparent and market-relevant contributions from all the concerned parties);

- *Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs* (one of the "hottest" and most controversial issues, where technologies, legal frameworks, and the balance of interests among different stakeholders play a decisive role);

1) Taking as a reference the set of principles from the Bucharest declaration at the WSIS Pan European Regional Conference

4. *(Continued)*

- ***The "development dimension" of International Standard-**ization:* highlighting the potential benefits for local economies that can be derived from International Standards, including aspects such as:

  - better opportunities for the development of local industries and internal markets in association with classes of products having broad, worldwide market coverage and acceptance (which, in turn, means lower costs and a larger choice of partners and suppliers);

  - better opportunities to export, and to enter foreign markets with products developed by local industries that will not be faced by technical barriers;

  - the chance to play a role in the creation of the standards, supporting the views and the needs of the country's stake-holders.

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