



9 October 2008
G-2008/40 (45.46c)

**IOE SUMMARY OF THE 6TH PLENARY MEETING OF THE
ISO WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
ISO 26000**

**Santiago, Chile
30 August – 5 September 2008**

Summary

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) held the 6th plenary meeting of its Working Group on Social Responsibility (WGSR) from 30 August to 5 September 2008 in Santiago, Chile. The meeting consisted of roughly 300 experts and observers representing 84 countries and 40 liaison organizations. The WGSR reviewed over 5,000 comments on the latest version of the document – Working Draft (WD) 4.2 – and reached consensus on five “key topics” that had been identified from the comments, as well as number of other issues that were debated during the meeting.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Group decided that the document was advanced enough for it to move to a Committee Draft (CD), the next stage in ISO’s standards development process. The first Committee Draft (CD1) will be drafted over the next three months and will be distributed for comment in mid-December in advance of the 7th WGSR plenary meeting on 16-22 May 2009 in Quebec City, Canada.

Background

The objective of the WGSR is to develop an ISO guidance standard on social responsibility that is intended for all types of organization regardless of size or location. As a guidance standard, it will provide recommendations on social responsibility and will not contain any requirements. Further, the guidance standard will not be used for certification and will not be management system standard. The target date to publish the document is the third quarter of 2010.

The Working Group is comprised of six stakeholder groups: Consumer, Industry, Government, Labour, NGO and Other. Each stakeholder group is self-organized and coordinates on representing its views in the drafting of the document. Much of the drafting at this stage is done by an Integrated Drafting Task Force (IDTF), which is comprised of two experts from each stakeholder group as well as some additional members. The IDTF is responsible for developing the revised drafts in between the WGSR plenary meetings and will produce the Committee Draft (CD1).

Working Group Key Topics

Based on a review of the 5,000 comments that were received on the most recent draft, WD4.2, the IDTF identified five “Working Group Key Topics” that reflected differences of opinion that needed to be resolved in Santiago to allow further drafting to proceed. Those five key topics are summarized below.

1) International Norms of Behavior:

The principle on International Norms of Behavior generated a number of comments from industry and some other groups that it was too legalistic and complex for the average reader to understand and that even the most sophisticated organizations would have great difficulty implementing the principle. That view was not accepted by most of the experts and the principle remains in the document with some changes that are meant to clarify the meaning.

2) References to Social Responsibility Initiatives:

After a number of years debating the question of whether individual SR initiatives should be referenced in the document or not, a compromise was reached that would not allow references in the text but would create an annex where a wide range of SR initiatives would be listed.

3) References to Government:

Following serious concerns about how governments were addressed in the text, the Government Stakeholder Group has pushed for all references to “government” to be removed from the text. After discussion with the other stakeholder groups, revised text on the role of government was developed upon which consensus was reached. This issue also covered a debate over the proper text for a disclaimer stating that ISO 26000 should not be used as a trade barrier, with some governments opposing such a disclaimer.

4) Sphere of Influence:

The comments on WD4.2 revealed a clear difference of opinion on “sphere of influence” between the NGO and Industry groups over the limits of responsibility of one organization for the actions of another organization. In the end, the WGSR reached consensus that each organization is responsible for its own impacts, and that influence with another organization does not equate to responsibility for the actual impacts of the other organization.

5) Significance and Relevance:

This issue, also called “picking and choosing” by some, reflected a debate over which of the many issues covered in the document should be considered as relevant for any particular organization. The final consensus held that each of the core subjects – organizational governance, human rights, labour practices, environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues and community development – should broadly be considered relevant for any organization, but that each will have to determine for itself if any of the specific issues addressed within the subjects are relevant based on its particular circumstances.

Moving to the Committee Draft (CD) Stage

Based on the progress of the text and the results of the discussions during the plenary meeting, the WGSR decided in Santiago to advance the text to the Committee Draft (CD) stage, which is the next step in the ISO standards development process. Most of the process will remain unchanged, with the exception that comments on the CD will be consensus comments developed via national mirror committees, as opposed to the Working Draft process where individual experts could submit comments. All other key aspects of the process, including the continuity of the WGSR itself, remain unchanged.

Drafting Process for CD1

Following the 6th WGSR plenary meeting in Santiago, the IDTF prepared a drafting plan for the development of CD1 with the following main elements:

- 8 September – 28 November : IDTF Drafting of CD1
- 26-29 October : IDTF meeting in Berlin (tentative location)
- 1-12 December : Editing Committee meeting/editing
- 15 December – 13 March: CD1 distributed for comment
- 16-27 March : Comments on CD1 compiled
- 30 March – 15 May : IDTF analyzes comments to prepare key issues
- 14-17 April : IDTF meeting to develop proposed ways forward
- 16-22 May : 7th WGSR Plenary Meeting, Quebec City, Canada

Industry Involvement in the Process

The IOE has maintained its liaison status with the WGSR and its leadership role in the Industry Stakeholder Group, which ensures a voice for the IOE in the WGSR at the international level. However, the move to the Committee Draft stage makes it much more important for IOE national affiliates to participate directly in the mirror committee discussions that will take place in each participating country. These national groups will determine the national consensus comments that will be submitted on CD1, so strong participation by employers in these meetings will be required to ensure that the comments are balanced and reflect industry concerns. A complete record of the proceedings of the 6th Plenary meeting can be found on the ISO web page under www.iso.org/wgsr.

For further information on any of the above, please contact Brent Wilton, IOE Deputy Secretary-General, at: wilton@ioe-emp.org.

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