

## **Extensive debate improves consensus on future ISO 26000 standard on social responsibility**

Consensus was achieved among the multi-stakeholder participants in the ISO Working Group on Social Responsibility (ISO/WG SR) at its latest meeting on the way forward for the future ISO 26000 standard.

The group's 7th plenary meeting, held in Québec City, Québec, Canada, on 18-22 May 2009, addressed issues stemming from the more than 3 000 comments submitted in a successful vote on the Committee Draft of the standard taken before the meeting. ISO 26000 is now moving to the status of a Draft International Standard by October 2009.

Progress on how to deal with key issues stemming from the ballot comments was the main outcome of the Québec City meeting which brought together more than 300 experts from 60 countries and around 20 liaison organizations. The number of developing countries in the WG is still increasing – it now includes 221 experts from 63 developed countries and 136 experts from developed countries.

The Québec meeting stakeholder dialogue resulted in moving ISO 26000 closer to completion on complex issues such as barriers to trade, human rights and user friendliness.

Jorge E.R. Cajazeira, Chair of the Working Group Social Responsibility, commented: "This was an outstanding meeting which included some 'passionate' debates. Nevertheless, the sense of justice and the fairness has never been closer and has allowed us to move the draft ISO 26000 to another crucial step in its path to publication."

Staffan Söderberg, WG SR Vice Chair added: "All in all we worked approximately 7 000 man-hours during the week and it is small miracle to see 305 committed SR experts reach consensus on complex issues. We have really been able to enhance agreement on this draft guidance standard on social responsibility and we can see the light at the end of the tunnel."

The meeting was attended by Kevin McKinley, ISO Deputy Secretary-General, who commented: "It was a week-long effort when everything was done beforehand to prepare the stage for fulsome and transparent debate. The Working Group was able to focus intensively on resolving comments and further enhancing consensus on the document".

The 7th plenary meeting was hosted by the Bureau de normalisation du Québec (BNQ – the Québec Standardization Bureau) in collaboration with Standards Council of Canada and the Ministère des Relations internationales du Québec (the Québec Ministry of International Relations). Québec Premier, Jean Charest, and the Minister of International Relations, Pierre Arcand, made welcome speeches to the participants.

In the spirit of social responsibility, the meeting was organized to be a “zero waste–zero carbon” event, – the first of its kind for this WG. The Next meeting of the ISO/WG SR will be held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in the first half of 2010. The publication of ISO 26000 is targeted for September 2010.



**Photo Caption:**

Members of the ISO WG SR leadership team pictured at the Québec plenary meeting (from left to right): Jorge E.R. Cajazeira, Chair; Kristina Sandberg, Secretary; Eduardo Campos de São Thiago, Co-Secretary; Staffan Söderberg, Vice-Chair, with, Sophie Clivio, Technical Programme Manager, ISO Central Secretariat.

**ISO 26000 Next Steps**

The future International Standard ISO 26000, Guidance on social responsibility, has reached an important phase in its development with its publication as a Draft International Standard (DIS).

A five-month balloting period (from 14 September 2009 to 14 February 2010) has now begun during

which the national member bodies of ISO will be able to vote and comment on the text. Participating liaison organizations can also comment. The comments will be discussed at the next meeting of the ISO Working Group on Social Responsibility (ISO/WG SR), which is developing ISO 26000, in May 2010. If the DIS vote is successful, the document, with eventual modifications, will then be circulated to the ISO members as a Final Draft International Standard (FDIS). If that vote is positive, ISO 26000 will then be published as an International Standard in late 2010.

A successful vote will require that a 2/3 majority of the votes cast by the P members are in favour and no more than one quarter of the total number of votes cast by all ISO members are negative. D-liaisons backing will be taken into consideration during the WG SR Leadership's judgment of consensus.

ISO 26000 will provide harmonized, globally relevant guidance based on international consensus among expert representatives of the main stakeholder groups and so encourage the implementation of best practice in social responsibility worldwide.

The introduction to the draft standard includes the following key messages, stating that ISO 26000:

- Provides guidance on the underlying principles of social responsibility, the core subjects and issues pertaining to social responsibility and on ways to integrate socially responsible behaviour into existing organizational strategies, systems, practices and processes
- Is intended to be useful to all types of organizations in the private, public and non-profit sectors, whether large or small, and whether operating in developed or developing countries
- Is not a management system standard. It is not intended or appropriate for certification purposes or regulatory or contractual use.
- Is intended for use by those beginning to address social responsibility, as well as those more experienced with its implementation.
- 436 SR experts and 195 observers from 92 countries and 42 organizations with liaison status are participating in the ISO/WG SR under the joint leadership of the ISO members for Brazil (ABNT) and Sweden (SIS). Six main stakeholder groups are represented: industry; government; labour; consumers; nongovernmental organizations; service, support, research and others, as well as a geographical and gender-based balance of participants.

The guidance in ISO 26000 draws on best practice developed by existing public and private sector SR initiatives. It is consistent with and complements relevant declarations and conventions by the United Nations and its constituents, notably the International Labour Organization (ILO), with whom ISO has established a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to ensure consistency with ILO labour standards. ISO has also signed MoUs with the United Nations Global Compact Office (UNGCO) and with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to enhance their cooperation on the development of ISO 26000.

For more information on ISO 26000 and the ISO Working Group on Social Responsibility, see the dedicated Web site: [www.iso.org/sr](http://www.iso.org/sr). This Web site includes documents giving the background to ISO's SR initiative, documents and press releases on the progress of the work and how it is being carried out, the membership and structure of the WG SR, how to participate in the development of ISO 26000, a newsletter, development timeframe, FAQs, contacts and other information. Many are available in several languages. Working documents including the DIS can be accessed at: [www.iso.org/wqsr](http://www.iso.org/wqsr)

### **ISO 26000 Around the Globe – How IRAM Communicates about ISO 26000**

IRAM (Argentina/National Standards Body) has been broadly communicating WG SR activities since the process started. In the beginning, IRAM's activities were focused on awareness raising and increasing the effective participation in the Mirror Committee. Nowadays, they are still focused on awareness raising, but mostly on preparing future users of ISO 26000 and on communicating with policymakers.

Since 2005 more than fifty articles were published in newspapers and specialized or general-interest magazines, always adapting basic text to particular audiences. During the period 2006-2008, one press-conference and ten television/radio presentations were held.

Recognizing the importance of the selection of the adequately focused message, to assure the effective dissemination of consistent and accurate information about ISO 26000 to diverse audiences, the basic presentation was adapted for sixty different events (3500 participants).

At the educational level, graduate and postgraduate courses were delivered in 10 different public and private universities. As for the training level, IRAM delivered specific courses on ISO 26000 and introduced SR and ISO 26000 in courses on Quality and Environmental Management.

Communication targeted to build interest in SR in general and ISO 26000 in particular and to increase uptake of ISO 26000 and demand for SR from the public is achieved by uploading all the WG SR documents officially translated to Spanish to the IRAM's web page.

### **Communicating about ISO 26000**

#### **FAQ: How can my organization refer to its use of ISO 26000?**

ISO 26000 is a voluntary International Standard providing guidance on social responsibility. Organizations of all types are encouraged to acknowledge their support and use of ISO 26000 as follows:

*"Organization" recognizes ISO 26000 as a reference document that provides guidance on social responsibility.*

and/or

*"Organization" has used ISO 26000 as a guide to integrate social responsibility into our values and practices.*