

The 7th Plenary meeting of ISO 26000 increased the level of consensus

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The 7th meeting of the working group of ISO 26000 - Guidance on Social Responsibility - took place in Quebec in the end of May. The objective of the meeting was to further improve consensus by seeking to address the 3411 comments on improvement received and to find a best compromise way forward. The standard document will soon be moved to the Draft International Standard (DIS) stage and will be published in 2010.

The meeting mainly addressed received comments which were discussed in several parallel running clause specific meetings. Proposed texts or a way forward were presented at the full document meetings. Many concerns remain regarding the applicability, accessibility, and tone of the document, with numerous experts suggesting for example that the document is too long, difficult for non-experts, too negative in parts (it often lists what not to do rather than what to do) and unduly focused on large industry rather than on SMOs.

Some phrases and concepts

Some continuing concerns were raised with the definition and/or application of specific concepts and phrases, including e.g. sphere of influence, value chain and supply chain, due diligence, complicity and trade barriers.

A number of experts expressed their reservation with various aspects of the definition and principle of international norms of behaviour. Many of these were suggestions that were contrary to underlying agreed way forward that was carefully negotiated in last meeting in Chile. The Quebec meeting was thus reluctant to reopen these issues, but there was however a willingness to compromise to bring on board those countries, especially China and India, that persistently wanted to change the current text.

Yet to be solved

The annex, which clearly is not mature and needs some further development, was debated. Some comments concerned the probable incentive to certification. Tools for certification are included in the annex and can wrongly indicate that ISO 26000 also is for certification, which is not the case. Mentioning certain tools in the annex could be seen as promoting them on the expense of other. Further, most tools are mainly from developed countries and this imbalance should be corrected.

Normally, ISO standards are for sale, but it has been proposed that ISO should try to make ISO 26000 available for free. If ISO 26000 would be available for all, there has to be a clear idea of the new business model supporting this, including where the alternative revenues will come from. If the ISO price was set very low or removed totally, national bodies have less incentive to adopt and less resources to promote it.

About ISO 26000

ISO 26000 Guidance on Social Responsibility is intended for organizations of all types; both in public and private sectors, developed and developing countries. ISO 26000 will contain guidance, not requirements. It is not a management system standard and it cannot be used as a certification standard.

The move to the DIS stage is based on a vote by the National standardization bodies (in favor 46, against 19) and D-liaisons organizations (in favor 18, against 6).

The WG membership has now reached 91 participating countries and 42 liaison organizations within a total 435 nominated experts and 190 nominated observers. 300 delegates participated in the Quebec meeting.

More information and documents: [ISO](#)