

**General Council
Special Session on Implementation**

**ACTIONS TO INCREASE THE PARTICIPATION OF DEVELOPING
COUNTRY MEMBERS IN THE WORK OF RELEVANT SANITARY AND
PHYTOSANITARY INTERNATIONAL STANDARD-SETTING ORGANIZATIONS**

Second Report by the Director-General

1. You will recall that in October 2000 the General Council requested that, with respect to the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement), I explore with the relevant international standard-setting organizations and relevant intergovernmental organizations financial and technical mechanisms to assist the participation of developing countries in standard-setting activities; and further that I coordinate efforts with the relevant international standard-setting organizations to identify SPS-related technical assistance needs and how best to address these, taking into consideration the importance of bilateral and regional technical assistance in this regard.
2. As previously reported (WT/GC/42), I invited the FAO, WHO and OIE to participate in an informal meeting at the level of Deputy Directors-General, to identify ways of facilitating developing country participation in standard-setting activities and addressing their technical assistance needs. At this meeting, held on 7 February 2001, Mr. Rodriguez Mendoza met with: Dr. B. Vallat, Director-General of OIE; Dr. A. Theirmann, Chairman of the OIE Code Commission; Dr. T. Chillaud, Chief of the OIE Information Department; Ms. L. Fresco, FAO Assistant Director-General; Dr. A. Randell, Senior Officer Codex Secretariat; Dr. A. Prost, WHO External Relations; and Drs. J. Schlundt and Y. Sahara of the WHO Food Safety Unit. WTO officials from the Agriculture and Commodities Division also participated in the meeting.
3. The meeting was very useful and constructive, and permitted an open exchange of views. In general, the standard-setting organizations felt that there are substantial current and growing levels of participation and understanding of developing countries in their work.¹ They believe that the primary problem does not lie with the standard-setting process or organizations, but with (i) a perception that numerous international standards are not relevant for developing countries, and (ii) the need for better ability to use/implement international standards. Consequently, decision-makers in developing countries need to be informed of how the use of international standards helps to expand trade, while protecting health and often improving the related national infrastructure.² In this context, it was suggested that the elaboration of practical examples could be helpful in fostering the understanding of officials in developing countries. Decision-makers also need to be informed of the importance of participating in SPS Committee activities, and it was noted that there are various examples of trade concerns which have found resolution after consideration by the Committee.

¹ Specific information on participation has recently been provided by the FAO International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) in document G/SPS/GEN/227 and by the WHO in document G/SPS/GEN/231.

² The standard-setting organizations stressed that risk assessment should only be used for the protection of human, animal or plant health or life. They were concerned that some industrialized countries might too frequently use national risk assessments to justify their SPS measures, which could undermine the development, utility and use of international standards.

4. In the course of the discussions, it was observed that there is a need to identify and target countries facing particular problems, and to elaborate specific actions to assist them. Furthermore, the "regional dimension" needs to be better explored, including the possibility of channelling technical assistance and capacity-building through regional organizations. National administrations have to be encouraged to establish dialogue channels among different services/bodies and to coordinate efforts.

5. All of the organizations involved in the discussions agreed that there is a need for more assistance to developing countries, both financial and technical. At the same time, they all recognized that there is already considerable coordination of technical assistance between the standard-setting organizations and the WTO, although efforts to achieve greater consistency should be pursued. All of the relevant organizations are also committed to pursue efforts to achieve greater consistency in the technical assistance activities provided by international organizations, including the World Bank and regional organizations, including through regular inter-organizational meetings at both technical and policy levels. It was agreed that the first of such meetings should be tentatively held before the Summer break to further discuss progress. I will of course keep you informed of further progress in this matter.

6. In conclusion, all standard-setting organizations confirmed their commitment to ensure the fullest possible participation of developing countries in their work, especially in the development of international standards. At the request of the WTO, the standard-setting organizations agreed to participate in a WTO-organized workshop to provide information on their respective standard-setting processes, with a focus on maximizing developing country involvement. This workshop has been scheduled for the morning of 13 March 2001, to immediately precede the meeting of the SPS Committee.
