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Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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GSO REPORT ON SPS ACTIVITIES

GSO REPORT TO THE WTO COMMITTEE ON SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

The following communication, received on 20 February 2024, is being circulated at the request of the secretariat of the [GCC Standardization Organization](#) (GSO).

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. [GCC Standardization Organization \(GSO\)](#) is a non-profit (intergovernmental) Standardization Organization, established by the resolution of the [GCC Supreme Council](#) (22nd Session, Muscat, Oman, 30-31 December 2001) and became operational in May 2004, whose membership consisted of the governments of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, which joined GSO in January 2010.

2 GSO MISSION

2.1. The GSO mission is to assist [the States of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf \(GCC\)](#) to achieve the objectives set forth in its Charter and in the GCC Economic Agreement by unifying the various standardization activities and following up on implementation and compliance matters in cooperation and coordination with the standardization bodies in the member States to develop the production and service sectors, foster intra-GCC trade, protect consumers, the environment and public health, enhance the GCC economy and its competitiveness and meet the requirements of the Gulf Custom Union and Gulf Common Market.

3 GSO GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

3.1. **The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):** GSO is working under the umbrella of GCC as one of its organizations.

3.2. **The Ministerial Committee for Standardizations affairs (MC):** is the highest authority of GSO, vested with all powers relating to its functioning. The MC consists of respective Ministers of Commerce, Industry, and Investment in GCC member States.

3.3. **The GSO Technical Council (TC):** consists of the respective Directors of the National Standards Bodies (NSBs) of GSO member States, and reports to MC.

3.4. **The Presidency:** is headed by the President and consists of GSO Professional Staff to facilitate the activities of GSO, and reports to MC and TC.

3.5. **The GSO Steering and Technical Committees (STCs):** consist of technical experts representing each National Standards Body of the member States. The STCs report to the GSO TC and are responsible for the planning, coordination and monitoring of all the technical work of GSO in standards, conformity assessment, metrology, and notification.

4 GSO STRATEGY 2021-2025

4.1. GSO has defined its Strategic Plan for the year 2025, approved by the Ministerial Committee for Standardization, and that is to be the trusted regional organization of excellence in standardization activities, and the first enabler for the Gulf Common Market. To achieve its vision, GSO relies on the successful implementation of three main strategic themes, the first of which is organizational excellence - "Accurate implementation of GSO's activities and operations with high efficiency, lowest costs and on time, to provide value-added services to GCC member States". The second theme is being a regional organization pioneer- where GSO becomes a major and reliable reference in GCC member States for standardization activities by positioning itself within the global map of standardization organizations and bodies, and building effective strategic partnerships to support trade, industry and economy in GCC member States. Finally, the third theme is to strengthen the economic integration among the GCC member States – by way of GSO's contribution to achieving a common Gulf market and economic growth for member States through standardization activities, conformity procedures, and unified and effective control over products, as the first enablers of the Gulf Common Market. Moreover, all GSO programmes, projects, and activities have been aligned with these themes.

5 STANDARDS AND METROLOGY

5.1. GSO has developed more than 27,155 [Unified Gulf Standards and Technical Regulations](#), including about 1,242 mandatory technical regulations. Almost 55% of GSO standards are adopted from (ISO), 18% of those standards are adopted from (IEC) as endorsement, 1% of food standards are adopted from Codex Alimentarius, about 7% prepared by GSO, and the remaining percentage is adopted from other international and regional organizations. GSO adopted ISO/IEC directives for technical work as a basis for its own directives to ensure that GSO technical committees follow international practices in the standards development process. At present, there are 46 GSO/TCs and TCs sub-committees for standards development representing all GSO member States and covering most of the GCC sectors.

5.2. GSO established and hosted the Gulf Association for Metrology ([GULFMET](#)) as a Regional Metrology Organization (RMO), bringing together National Metrology Institutes (NMIs) of GCC countries. The International Committee of Weights and Measures (CIPM) in [BIPM](#) decided to grant GULFMET full membership in the Joint Committee of the Regional Metrology Organizations and the BIPM (JCRB), with a voice and the right to vote in CIPM meeting No. 110 dated on 22-24 June 2021.

5.3. The GulfMet members are GSO member States in addition to associate members (Bosnia and Herzegovina; Egypt; Türkiye; South Korea; Hong Kong, China; and Iraq).

5.4. More than 31 Interlaboratory comparisons (ILCs) were organized by GULFMET to verify that a laboratory provides correct results within the stated measurement of uncertainty.

6 CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT

6.1. GSO developed the [GCC Conformity Assessment Scheme](#) in pursuance of reducing the technical barriers of trade and facilitating the free movement of commodities across borders within the GCC member States and the rest of the world. Within the framework of the Gulf System for Safety Monitoring of Products in the GCC Common Market, GSO has issued Horizontal Technical Regulations, Vertical Technical Regulations, as well as other Technical Guides. Three Technical Regulations have been implemented with the [Gulf Conformity Marking](#), namely, the GSO Technical Regulation on Toys, the GSO Technical Regulation on Low Voltage Electrical Equipment and Appliances, and recently issued the GSO Technical Regulation for Water-Saving Products.

6.2. GSO has also developed the [Gulf Conformity Tracking System \(GCTS\)](#) which has proven to be a great success in the implementation of the GSO LV technical regulation, and helps to track both the supply chain and technical conformity.

6.3. GSO has developed the [Electronic Conformity Certificate Scheme \(ECCS\)](#) to facilitate the certifications procedures, enhance the quality of serves, to shorten the time of review and to have a detailed data for the benefit of GSO stakeholders. The main objective for the GSO Certification

Scheme is to verify the compliance of the related products with GSO technical Regulations to assure of their safety for users and to protect the environment in the region. GSO issued 458,589 conformity certificates for vehicles, tires, and motorcycles.

6.4. GSO is the notifying authority by decision of the Board of Directors, May 2013. GSO approved 89 notified bodies in many countries around the world. 100,000 products have received the G-Mark through the [GCC Conformity Tracking System](#). Additionally, 1,019 free Proficiency Testing Programs (PTs) for 688 GCC laboratories have been organized as one of the main activities of the [Gulf Association for Laboratories \(GCCLAB\)](#), which is an open network for laboratories and supporting companies operating in the GCC member States. It was established as an initiative of the GSO and the recommendations of the first GCC Conference for Laboratories Proficiency (Dubai, 13 March 2013).

7 CAPACITY BUILDING

7.1. GSO invests in strengthening the knowledge, skills, and know-how of specialists in NSBs through extensive and blended training and technical assistance programs. GSO established the [GCC Standardization Training Center](#) to meet the needs and requirements of GSO members, and to help them participate effectively in the development of international standards, as well as towards increasing their competence in good standardization practices (GSPs). An annual training plan is designed based on the needs of NSBs, and training is to be delivered through highly qualified experts in cooperation with international and regional standardization organizations.

7.2. More than 16,000 participants since 2007, and more than 600 training courses have been organized by GSO in cooperation with member States.

8 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) SOLUTIONS - INTEGRATION WITH INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

8.1. GSO has developed many [platforms and e-services](#) and continuously keeps working on its content development and improvements to meet the needs of the member States covering all standardization activities.

8.2. ISO and GSO have organized many bilateral virtual meetings and workshops related to ISO API Gateway and ISO Global Directory, Standardization Identity Federation (SIF), and Standards Authoring using XML.

8.3. GSO IT Systems are integrated with ISO API Gateway. Starting negotiations with "Inera" for using their "eXtyles" word add-in to convert GSO Standards from Word to XML. Work is still in progress on this initiative.

8.4. Within the adoption agreement signed between GSO and IEC in Shanghai 2019, the IEC provides the GSO access to the FTP server of all IEC standards with a generic watermark and via the library server. GSO and IEC have already started their discussion about using the IEC API Gateway to access the metadata and unprotected standards on behalf of GSO members, for which GSO is hosting their National Standards Stores, such as Oman and Kingdom of Bahrain.

8.5. Also, GSO signed copyright license agreements with the European Committee for Standardization and the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CEN-CENELEC), by which both sides have full access to each other's standards metadata, and integrated with the (CEN CENELEC) API Gateway. GSO IT Systems are integrated with ASTM Standard Publishing Application (SPA) API as well. Such international and regional cooperation enables GSO to develop a unified platform to search different standards catalogues and facilitate the adoption process for standards at the GCC level.

9 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

9.1. The GSO, with the objective to establish mutually beneficial cooperation with the relevant international and regional organizations, continues to promote international standards through [76 MoUs and Cooperation agreements](#) with many international and regional organizations.

9.2. GSO is an observer member in many international organizations, including, the International Standardization Organization (ISO), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the Codex Alimentarius (CAC), the World Trade Organization (WTO) TBT/SPS, the International Organization of Legal Metrology (OMIL), CEN CENELEC, Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC), Arabic Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDSMO), Pan American Standards Commission (COPANT), African Organization for Standardization (ARSO), the Southern African Development Community (SADC). GSO is a full member of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and a member of the Consultation Group to the WOHAT Observatory, and The Energy and Carbon Advisory Council (International Code Council).

9.3. GSO is participating in many key international and regional meetings within the framework of the MoUs signed with its partners.

9.4. GSO participated in the regular meeting of the SPS Committee, held virtually on 23-25 March 2022, as well as at the informal session on 23 March 2022 and the Thematic Session on trade facilitative approaches to pesticide MRLs, including substances not approved for use in an import market on 22 March 2022.

9.5. GSO participated in many SPS online meetings with other related organizations during the period (March-May 2022).

9.6. GSO submitted joint notifications of some SPS draft standards on behalf of its member States.

9.7. GSO updated the technical regulation (GSO 1016) related to microbiological standards (NOT Published Standard) which were approved by the relevant Technical Committee during the Gulf Food Week (28 March 2022) and were preceded by a workshop for the committee devoted to discussing the project in its final form (2 March 2022).

9.8. GSO organized "The 6th GCC Laboratory Proficiency Conference" under the patronage of H.E. The Minister of Commerce, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in cooperation with Saudi Standards, Metrology and Quality Organization (SASO), that took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 18-19 October 2022, under the theme "Laboratory Proficiency for Food Security and Sustainability". The two-day Laboratory Proficiency Conference targeted 300 officials and specialists of laboratories in public and private sectors and was honored by ISO SG, IAF Chair, ILAC Vice Chair, (IAAC) Chair, SMIIC SG, ARSO SG, GAC DG, and high-level experts from ISO, GSO, GOIC, ASTM, SFDA, Siemens (Middle East), SAC, and GSO member States.

9.9. GSO issued 241 standards and technical regulations in the food sector during 2022 and 2023:

- 137 Gulf Standards;
- 53 Gulf technical regulations;
- 29 translations of standards and technical regulations;
- 22 technical amendments and typographical corrections.

9.10. Some posts and activities attended during the last period:

- WTO SPS Committee meetings and accompanying events, 22-25 March 2022 (virtually);
- Several workshops with Codex and the Regional Near East Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, CCNE – Codex;
- Several workshops for Arab countries in the field of encouraging participation in Codex activities throughout the year;
- Special Halal Conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (online) 14 February 2022;
- Organizing the Gulf Food Week and the meetings of the Food and Halal Standards Committees (Riyadh, March and November 2022);
- Nutrition And Food Safety Summit - Nutrition Days (Dubai, 23-26 May 2022), organized by the European Union;
- Annual meeting of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC 45) Rome - November 2022, and the meetings of some technical committees of the Codex Alimentarius Commission;
- Meetings of the Arab initiative for points of contact with the Codex Alimentarius Commission (several meetings);

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- Training programme on the activities of participation in Codex work (Tunisia, September 2022; Jordan, October 2022);
 - Participating in organizing the USDA Nutrition and Food Safety Summit Series 2: The Safety of Food Additives, in cooperation with USDA, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Michigan University, American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM), and US Embassy in Riyadh. Over 150 food regulators and government officials from all GCC countries, USDA Officials, speakers from FAO-JECFA, FDA, Michigan State University, food additives industry, and AmCham Dubai Food and Beverage Regulations Committee. This summit was under the patronage of H.E. Dr. Saud Al-Habsi, Oman's Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. Participants have reached mutual understanding on a number of food regulatory issues, and agreed to keep the dialogue open on other key issues to further facilitate trade and maintain food safety. Science-based regulations and referencing international regulations like Codex were the optimum achievements of this summit;
 - Participating in organizing "The 2nd Arab Codex Colloquium", Muscat, 10-11 June 2023, in cooperation with USDA, GFORSS, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Food Safety and Quality Center, Sultanate of Oman. This event was attended by the Chairperson of Codex and the representatives of the US Codex Office (USDA), WHO, and GSO. The Colloquium aimed to review the accomplishments of the Arab Code Initiative and the progress of the Working Groups created through the Arab Codex Initiative. The Colloquium had an open discussion with the Codex Chairperson on the engagement of the Arab Region in Codex Proceedings, Future Opportunities;
 - A bilateral Meeting was held between the GSO President Mr Saud Al-Khusaibi and Codex Chair, Dr. Steven Wearne to discuss the cooperation between the two organizations to enhance the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and offer regional technical and capacity building support to the food safety and fair trade, Muscat, 11 June 2023;
 - Forming the Gulf Codex Alimentarius Working Group (GSO/TC05-CODEX-WG1), affiliated to the Gulf Technical Committee for Food and Agricultural Standards (TC05); which held its first meeting during the 2nd Arab Codex Colloquium, 10-11 June 2023, Muscat, in the presence of Codex Chair, Dr. Steven Wearne;
 - Supporting organizing and participating in the "Oman 6th Food Safety and Quality Conference", Muscat, 12-14 June 2023, under the patronage and presence of H.E. the Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion; also, with the presence of H.E. the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, GSO President. AIDSMO DG, Codex Chairperson, and representatives of US Codex USDA, and UNIDO, with 45 papers, 60 experts, and 400 participants;
 - Organizing the unified Gulf Halal system workshop, 22 June 2023, Muscat. Many regional standardization organizations were invited, such as AIDSMO, GCC Accreditation Center (GAC), Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC), International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) - a subsidiary organ of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and other relevant parties;
 - GSO organized a workshop titled "Participation in Codex Meetings: Best Practices", for GCC Codex Contact Points, Qatar, Doha, 19-20 September 2023;
 - GSO participated in the WTO National Workshop on the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement, organized by WTO and the Ministry of Commerce in Bahrain, from 23-26 October 2023. GSO delivered a presentation on the Gulf Unified Notification System for TBT and SPS. The Workshop was presented by the WTO TBT and SPS experts, and with the participation of ISO and Codex, and the Commercial Attaché, Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the UN and other international organizations in Geneva. The interactive workshop aimed at enhancing Bahrain's overall understanding of the Agreements, with special emphasis on the transparency provisions and on the ongoing discussions in the SPS and TBT Committees. Among other things, the hands-on training exercises will be geared at searching for information using the [ePing SPS&TBT Platform](#) and using its other functions;
 - GSO participated physically in the 46th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC46) at FAO headquarters, Italy from 27 November to 2 December 2023. A bilateral meeting was held between the GSO delegation and the Codex Chairperson, and his three Deputies, during which the role and activities of GSO were presented, with emphasis on its efforts in the field of unification of Gulf standards and technical regulations related to food;
 - GSO received ISO Secretary General, Mr Sergio Mujica, at its headquarters in Riyadh, on 10 January 2024. A high-level bilateral meeting was held to discuss the future collaboration between ISO and GSO within the signed MoU. A seminar was organized on "The Role of

Standardization in Promoting Economic Development and Sustainability in the Gulf Common Market";

- GSO developed (recently) 16 Gulf technical regulations and their amendments, which were initially approved by the GSO Technical Council in its 57th meeting on 30-31 January 2024 in Doha, and will be submitted to the Ministerial Committee at its next meeting in May 2024;
- GSO participated in organizing the Bahrain Halal Expo 2024: Bridging the Gap between Halal Industry and Islamic Finance, held under the patronage of His Excellency Minister of Industry and Commerce of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 6-7 February 2024, Manama. A keynote speech was delivered by the GSO President. GSO was a part of the panel discussions highlighting its pioneering role with its members to develop Gulf standards, including standards for Halal products and services, in accordance with an annual work plan to meet the needs identified by the member States and relevant authorities, relevant technical committees representing all member States. GSO, through its participation in the Halal Industry and Services Forum, aims at raising awareness of the importance of this sector from an economic perspective and consumer safety, coordinating efforts relating to Halal standards, and striving to build a unified Gulf Halal scheme in coordination with the relevant authorities at the Gulf, Islamic, regional, and international levels;
- GSO will participate in the next regular meeting of the SPS Committee, to be held in hybrid format on 20-22 March 2024.

9.11. For more information on GSO Outreach Reviews, please click [here](#).
