



Consumers International

The global voice for consumers

CI welcomes new social responsibility standard

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Consumers International (CI) has welcomed the decision by the International Organization for Standardization to develop an international guideline for social responsibility (SR). Sadie Homer, CI Senior Standards Officer, said: 'Consumers want to operate in an environment where ethical treatment prevails.'

Consumers International, which represents 250 consumer organisations in 115 countries, has been involved in social responsibility initiatives for over 30 years. It had contributed to the advocacy for the new standard at ISO and consumer forums, including the international conference in the week preceding the ISO management meeting and as a member of the Strategic Advisory Group (AG) that advised ISO on SR.

Sadie Homer, CI Senior Standards Officer, used her presentation to the conference to outline CI's concerns. She said, 'Consumers want to operate in an environment where ethical treatment prevails. If links between consumption and production are not based on ethical values, then standards and certification are meaningless.'

Over 350 stakeholders from developing and developed countries attended the conference and gave their views on whether ISO should proceed with SR work and what form it should take. In addition, developing country representatives at a meeting earlier in the week also fully backed the initiative. The joint support for the process led to ISO deciding that a further feasibility study was unnecessary and that SR work should be undertaken immediately.

ISO acknowledges that developing an SR standard will bring new and more diverse stakeholders into the ISO system. They pledged that work would be carried out 'in an innovative manner' while remaining 'consistent with ISO's fundamental principles', including openness and transparency.

ISO will set up a new working group to develop the SR standard, that will answer directly to ISO's Technical Management Board (TMB). As a first step, it has formed a task force to propose the terms of reference and operating processes for the working group for consideration at the TMB meeting in September 2004.

National standards institutes have been asked to nominate candidates for a twinned leadership and secretariat to the SR working group, linking developed and developing countries. The experts to the working group will be appointed by the ISO members from all stakeholder categories. Special efforts will be made to ensure participation by experts from developing countries, non-government organisations and consumer groups. ISO will establish a new funding mechanism to enable greater participation by developing country experts.

Sadie Homer said CI welcomed the ISO moves. She said: 'CI would have preferred ISO to adopt a standard rather than a guideline. A standard would be more precise in its demands and would better build consumer confidence. Even so, we feel this decision is a positive step forward and welcome ISO's willingness to be inclusive and innovative in its efforts to involve stakeholders, including consumers.'

Villy Dhyr, CI's representative to the ISO AG, said: 'The next step is to support the implementation of the new guidelines at national and international levels. CI already has a place at the ISO table, co-ordinating and contributing directly on behalf of the global consumer movement. Consumer organisations should enhance their participation within national mirror committees and use opportunities to work with their national standards organisations at international forums. Together, we can keep up a momentum for strong and enforceable SR standards.'

Notes for editors

Consumers International is the international body for the global consumer movement with over 250 members in 115 countries and represents the world's six billion consumers in international forums.

To speak with Sadie Homer or other CI representatives, please contact Kaye Stearman.