

# GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED

MTN/NTM/W/15

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## Multilateral Trade Negotiations

### Group "Non-Tariff Measures"

#### PROPOSED ISO INFORMATION NETWORK

##### Note by the Secretariat

1. At its May meeting the Sub-Group requested the secretariat to "prepare a paper on the ISO/UNESCO work in connexion with the establishment of an information network" (MTN/NTM/3, paragraph 10). Discussion in the Sub-Group indicated that the paper should examine whether this work would duplicate arrangements foreseen in the proposed Code (annexed to MTN/NTM/W/5), mention being made specifically of the provisions that adherents should notify the GATT secretariat of the products to be covered by proposed mandatory standards and that the secretariat should circulate this information to other adherents and, in particular, to developing countries (Section 2, (e)(ii) and Section 16, (d)).
2. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) comprises the national standards bodies of over eighty countries. Arrangements for the exchange of information among these bodies already exist, but the ISO is at present examining the possibility of establishing an organic and systematic information network and a feasibility study has just been completed on this subject.
3. The study says that the primary purposes of the network should be:
  - (a) to aid the transfer of technology for development;
  - (b) to reduce technical barriers to trade; and
  - (c) to encourage co-ordination and implementation of standardization, by promoting the flow of information on standards and related matters.
4. It specifically suggests that the network should aim to promote the international flow of information concerning literature relating to standardization, standards (including mandatory standards), administrative arrangements and procedures relating to standards and, particularly, their implementation (e.g. quality assurance systems) and to develop the ability to provide comparisons of standards from different sources.
5. However, the study distinguishes between desirable long-term aims and the aims which may be realizable in the relatively near future. It concludes that knowledge of sources of information and about other matters together with the system for using such sources, and use of the members' own standards documentation is the most that can be expected of the average member during the next decade. It also points out

that in countries where there is separation of arrangements for voluntary standards, mandatory standards and quality assurance it is unlikely that the average member of the network would easily become a national centre of competence on mandatory requirements and that indeed it might be undesirable at present for this to be an objective of the network. It is also clear that ISO member bodies in such countries would not usually themselves be in a position to provide full information on mandatory standards which were in the drafting stage. The minimum requirement on members of the network, however, is that they should provide a full referral service to other relevant organizations in their respective countries.

6. The network would provide for the exchange of information among members (i.e. national standards bodies). Other parties wishing to obtain information through the network would approach their national standards body.

7. The feasibility study does not examine in detail questions relating to the financing of the network. It is envisaged that national standards bodies would draw up balance sheets of the time spent in answering enquiries from other members of the network. Individual national standards bodies would decide whether to charge their clients for services rendered - sometimes the service would be included in the client's subscription fee.

8. The ISO is also concerned that the information network should meet the special needs of developing countries and has suggested that the UNCTAD finance a study, to be undertaken by ISO, which would examine how this aim might be achieved.