



## World Export Development Forum (WEDF), 8 – 11 October 2008

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### SESSION SUMMARY: Thursday, 9 October 2008

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#### BREAKOUT SERIES 2

### **Environmental Standards for Global Markets: Implications for Developing Countries**

#### SPEAKERS:

Ulrich Hoffman, Chief, Trade and Sustainable Development Section,  
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

Kevin McKinley, Deputy Secretary-General, International Organization for  
Standardization (ISO)

Jochen Krebuehl, Programme Officer, Social and Ecological Standards,  
Division 45, Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH, Germany

MODERATOR: Jacqueline Coté, ICC Permanent Representative in  
Geneva, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Switzerland

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Voluntary product standards are a driver of sustainability, panellists agreed, but there was a general conclusion that much remains to be done both by donors and within developing countries themselves to ensure they can meet the challenge that these standards pose.

Developing-country producers face a bewildering and growing array of private ethically-based standards to which their exports are expected to conform and need help in ensuring they can play a role in the standard-setting as well as in meeting the standards already set.

“The paradox is that the producers that governments and donors most want to help are those who may be the least able to manage the changes required to meet the requirements of more conscientious consumers,” said UNCTAD’s Ulrich Hoffmann. Yet sustainable standards have to be addressed or they could become a serious market-entry hurdle.

Kevin McKinley argued that developing country representatives could be more active in his organization, the ISO, where their voice is equal with that of industrialized powers in expert committees.

Jochen Krebuehl of GTZ said globalization can be pursued in a sustainable and human way by the application of the standards whose proliferation it is sparking. Over the coming years, governments would probably play a larger role in standard-setting – a trend that was already emerging in European Union member countries in relations to biofuels.



However, some scepticism was voiced by session participants from developing countries. Who should be funding the vast educational effort on environmental management among producers seeking to export to the major markets of the North, an effort that requires huge investment? asked one.

What is the standard-setting participatory process? asked another, while a third argued that standard-setters were often both law-maker and policer, charged with verifying that standards are being met. A fourth suggested that the panellists were ignoring the realities of the world economic system in which smaller developing countries have to conform to what amounted to arm-twisting from developed powers.

Responding, Hoffmann said UNCTAD is recommending that developing country governments set up their own national programmes on setting good standards, especially in agriculture, covering 90% of the way towards meeting what is required by the sustainable standards coming from the international community, leaving producers to cover just the last 10%. At the moment, producers even in advanced developing countries are left entirely on their own.

Moderator Jacqueline Coté summed up the debate with the following points:

- 1) Panellists had delivered a vote of confidence in voluntary standards as a driver of sustainability.
- 2) The wide variance in sometimes conflicting standards that developing countries had to absorb demand harmonization.
- 3) Developing countries and their governments must ensure that they are involved in the shaping of standards, and set up their own national programmes.
- 4) Although organizations like UNCTAD have made a major contribution to the understanding of standards and their value to developing countries, a great deal of educational work remains to be done.
- 5) But there were questions about whether panellists' contributions, although based on practice in and with developing countries, reflect the realities of the modern world.