

WSSD 'Earth Summit' action plan and ISO standards

As a member of the Canadian delegation to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, I was privileged to have a front row seat and to see how over a decade since the last "Earth Summit" in Rio, Brazil, the debate had shifted from "what should we do?" and "why?" to "how do we do it?".

tion was: "Wonderful! Let's wrap this up and go back to the lazy holiday days of late August!" However, the remaining 25 % took all the rest of the time allotted to the programme and proved difficult to deliver given the differing views and fears over the implications.

By the end, the world had an action plan which to this participant:

- established energy, water and sanitation as the defining environmental and developmental issues of the next decades;
- identified biodiversity as an ongoing priority;



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A spectacular moment from the opening ceremony to the World Summit for Sustainable Development summit in Johannesburg, South Africa.



This shift put the emphasis on action, targets, compromise and the realization that no one party – government, civil society or business – can individually or in selective combinations achieve the performance expected over the coming decades. Whether we like it or not, we are bound to act together or face collective failure.

In the first days of our briefings at the summit, we were told that 75 % of the implementation plan text had already been agreed. My first reac-

- advocated "partnerships" as a growing reality and common pathway for all stakeholders;
- highlighted corporate accountability, corporate responsibility and governance issues as fundamental to ensure developmental goals, close the gap on equity issues and as a driver to increased sharing of technology and investments.

These were not the only outcomes recorded in what is a 70-page text,

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Photo: UN



The panel at the 'business session' press conference given at the WSSD (from left):

Mr. Bjorn Stigson, *World Business Council for Sustainable Development*;
Bryce Corbett;
Sir Mark Moody-Stuart, *Chairman, Business Action for Sustainable Development*;
Mr. Rueul Khosa, *CEO, ESKOM*;
Lord Richard Holme, *International Chamber of Commerce*.

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1) *Environmental Management – The ISO 14000 Family of International Standards 2002* (ISBN 92-67-10367-9), 14 pages, A4 format, is available from ISO's national member institutes (see list on ISO's Web site: www.iso.org) and ISO Central Secretariat (sales@iso.org). Small quantities are free; postage and handling will be charged for larger orders.

but they convey the flavour underlying both the time-bound targets and other commitments on which the international community agreed.

What about ISO?

What about ISO and the role of standards? Where do these fit? Were they considered or raised at the summit?

Firstly, I should say that the ISO brochure *Environmental Management – The ISO 14000 Family of International Standards 2002*¹⁾, which was specially produced for the WSSD, proved attractive and was a vehicle which provided the message in a clear and understandable manner to many delegates. We were certainly noticed.

On the broader questions, my personal conclusion is that standards and ISO are not contentious issues: there seems to be a broad recognition that these are required if we are to ensure the sharing of best practices, aid in capacity building and achieve continual improvement on a global scale. No doubt, the focus on the need to negotiate on targets and how to deliver on the promises of Rio tended to focus the mind and helped in recognition of the utility of the ISO 14000 family of

standards and guides. However, we should not forget the links between the ISO 14000 family and ISO's complete portfolio of standards for the role they play in improving the quality and ease of life for so many people.

Sir Mark Moody-Stuart, who was instrumental in organizing a very successful business presence at the summit through the Business Action for Sustainable Development (BASD) network, answered the question on "where do standards fit?". He supported the development of international, best practice standards to help judge the performance of international companies. With the advent of sector-specific ISO 14000 standards and the possibility of future ISO standards for corporate social responsibility (CSR) – which, presumably, would eventually go the sector-specific route as well – this statement should be of high interest to ISO.

Structure

I believe that ISO could have an important role in providing a little structure to some of the "type II partnerships" that many hope will emerge. These will include partnerships between industries, and between industries and governments, as well as with non-governmental organizations. In fact, it is being recognized that the definition of these partnerships is a multi-faceted one, as well as encompassing both bilateral and multi-

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lateral examples. This is why it is incumbent on us all not to rush into areas where standards may not be the answer, but to develop and articulate a clear role for ISO in the area of sustainability, which means different things to different people. The term and concept includes criteria

used to define corporate social responsibility. It is, however, encompassing to reflect the measureable deliverables which a company must provide if it is to be sustainable – or remain in business in the long term.

If this is not done, others will stake out this ground and marginalize the contribution that ISO standards have already made to component parts of corporate social responsibility.

Photo: UN



The President of South Africa, Mr. Thabo Mbeki (left), with United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, during the latter's visit to attend the WSSD summit.

In conclusion, we should challenge ourselves to identify where and how we can contribute to meet the emerging requirements of our constituents and stakeholders by developing new manuals, guides and standards that can be useful as business and its partners grapple with the performance targets embedded in the Johannesburg Action Plan. ■