International Relevance of IEC Standards
Address to ABINEE

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Sao Paulo, Brazil
28 April 2005

Ladies and gentlemen…

…if you believe, as I believe, in Latin America, then you believe in the same future as I do. Allow me to begin with a few figures and then we'll put them in context.

In Latin America in 1997 the volume of merchandise exported rose by 12 % compared to the previous year and the volume imported rose by 22 %. In the year 2000 those figures were 8 % and 13 %. In 2003 exports rose by 3.8 % over 2002 figures, while imports rose by only 0.7 %. So an increase and then a decrease, but overall things stayed in positive territory in those years.Those figures are about volume.

What about value? In 1997 the value of merchandise exported by Latin America rose 11 % while the value of imports rose by 19 %. In 2000 those figures had changed to 20 % and 17 %. But in 2003 exports rose by only 8.7 % while imports rose by 3.4 %.

We all have good years and bad years. It seems that recently, at least according to those WTO figures that I just mentioned, things have slowed down a little in Latin America. If we look elsewhere in the world, some areas show similar trends, while others show different ones. During much of the 1990s Asia was booming and, at present, China's economy is getting all the headlines.

Brazil

I think what's most important is to talk about potential, about opportunity, about determination and about commitment. Let's look specifically at Brazil for a moment. According to the International Trade Centre, the value of power generating equipment exported from Brazil grew from about 19 million US dollars in 1999 to about 45 million US dollars in 2002. It fell off a little in 2003, down to USD 30 million. Power generating equipment is part of the basics, part of the infrastructure. Having good infrastructure is a necessary, vital step in economic development, one that helps to lead on to the successive stages of industrialization.

What about middle-tech equipment? From 1999 to 2003 the value of telecommunications equipment exported by Brazil rose from about 400 million to 1.4 billion US dollars. As for high-tech

equipment, electrical equipment for medical diagnostics, for instance, it's still a fairly small part of the economy, and has grown from 7 to about 11 million US dollars between 1999 and 2003.

Here I'm focusing on electrotechnology, but this is only part of a much bigger picture. For instance, Brazil is a major player in the medium-sized aircraft industry with Embraer jets. The ability to do that requires an economy that is well into becoming fully industrialized.

The point that I wish to make is that the ability to develop an economy and produce goods that are sold on international markets requires standards. In terms of electrotechnology, IEC standards are the most widely used in the world. Standards help to open the door for companies to export and, at the same time, help governments to guarantee the quality of imports. But standards don't appear by magic. People set them. In the IEC, people from all over the world determine the content of our standards. People like every one of you here in the audience today.

Six reasons

There is no doubt that developing standards costs money. An electrical engineer who develops IEC standards usually does it on company time. Going to IEC technical committee meetings means time out of the office and it means hotel and transportation costs. But time after time when I speak to industry leaders, they tell me again and again how important it is to use IEC standards, and how important it is to be involved in helping to develop them. These industry leaders have about six similar reasons for doing so.

The first is to build acceptance in global markets: governments around the world require evidence of manufacturing to standards when specifying contracts. Equally, purchasers usually require products to be built to certain, standardized specifications. By using IEC standards, you meet those requirements. By being involved in IEC work, you help to set those requirements. The second reason is to influence the content of standards. They are the compromise result of competing interests. Your presence means your interests are represented. This also applies in reverse: by being present, you can counter unfavourable bias. The third reason is to develop anticipatory intelligence: you can acquire information that enables you to anticipate, before other stakeholders, circumstances that have not yet widely manifested themselves.

The fourth is to use customer networks: you can identify consumer needs and conceive new products through networking with user representatives on standards committees. This may enhance the market success of new products. The fifth is to save time and money: one of the goals of standardization is to make design and manufacturing simpler, cleaner, surer. By using standards, you don't need to reinvent the wheel every time. Instead, you can focus your efforts on adding something new to the wheel – something that will improve the quality of life and that will contribute

to technological progress. The sixth reason is to improve safety and quality: nobody today can pretend to know all there is about a certain technology. Within IEC working groups you will encounter ideas some of which will be new and valuable, others which may help you to avoid making costly mistakes.

Finally, an additional advantage applies to small-to-medium-sized enterprises is recognition: because IEC technical committees and subcommittees consist of people from both large and small companies, the small companies are therefore seen to be players of equal weight with the big ones. This enhances industry and peer recognition, and thus creates the potential for future opportunities.

Regional engagement

Latin America is a region of potential and of opportunity and the IEC's presence in this region is growing. The IEC has two regional centres, one in Singapore and one in the United States. I am happy to announce that we are now looking at opening a third regional centre, probably in Latin America. The IEC believes in the countries of this region, it believes in your potential and it intends to become more engaged with you. Several years ago we created the Affiliate Country Programme and 19 countries from Latin America participate. It's a good first step, a good way to begin to become involved in helping to set the international standards that affect your domestic economy.

I'm sure that each of you knows that economic growth in this region leads to greater engagement with the global market. But economic growth here also calls for greater engagement with the IEC. Electrical and electronic expertise in this region is as good as in any other region. The voices of experience in Latin America are worth hearing and should be heard. You have a role to play in setting the agenda for international standards for electricity and electronics. But for you to fulfil that role, you should consider how to take your seat at the table. For those countries that are already members of the IEC, I encourage you to broaden and deepen your involvement as your economies develop, as established industries branch out, and as new industries begin to flourish. For those that are in the Affiliate Country Programme, the IEC will help you to establish a national committee when you are ready. We have the experience and the infrastructure for this. What we need from you is determination and commitment.

Ladies and gentlemen… if you believe, as I believe, in Latin America, then that determination is already here, just as the potential and the opportunities are already here. With your commitment, let's work together, you and the IEC, to make the 21st century the century of Latin America.

Thank you.