

*International Accreditation Forum, Inc.*



# **IAF Procedures Document**

## **PROCEDURE FOR THE INVESTIGATION AND RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS**

**Issue 2, version 3**

**(IAF PR 1:2007)**

Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring them that accredited bodies are competent to carry out the work they undertake. Accreditation bodies which are members of the International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) are required to operate at the highest standard and to require the bodies they accredit to comply with appropriate international standards and IAF Guidance to the application of those standards.

Accreditations granted by accreditation body members of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA), based on regular surveillance to assure the equivalence of their accreditation programs, allows companies with an accredited conformity assessment certificate in one part of the world to have that certificate recognized everywhere else in the world.

Therefore certificates in the fields of management systems, products, services, personnel and other similar programs of conformity assessment issued by bodies accredited by members of the IAF MLA are relied upon in international trade.

This document describes the IAF procedure for investigating and resolving complaints.

## **IAF PROCEDURE FOR THE INVESTIGATION AND RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS**

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## **IAF PROCEDURE FOR THE INVESTIGATION AND RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS**

### **1. General**

1.1. This procedure describes the responsibilities and actions of IAF Committees, IAF Secretary, the regional accreditation groups, accreditation body members and association body members of IAF in relation to the investigation and resolution of complaints.

1.2. Complaints received may concern decisions and activities of IAF or IAF members, or certification/registration bodies (CRBs) and inspection bodies accredited by IAF members.

### **2. Referenced Documents**

The following referenced documents are relevant to the application of this procedure:

ISO/IEC Guide 2:1996 Standardization and related activities - General vocabulary

ISO/IEC Guide 62:1996 General requirements for bodies operating assessment and certification/registration of quality systems

ISO/IEC Guide 65:1996 General requirements for bodies operating product certification systems

ISO/IEC Guide 66:1999 General requirements for bodies operating assessment and certification/registration of environmental management systems (EMS)

ISO/IEC 17011:2004 Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies

ISO/IEC 17020:1998 General Criteria for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection.

ISO/IEC 17021:2006 Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems

ISO/IEC 17024:2003 Conformity assessment -- General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons

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ISO/IEC 17040:2005- Conformity assessment—General requirements for peer assessment of conformity assessment bodies and accreditation bodies.

ISO/TS 22003:2007 Food Safety Systems – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of food safety management systems

ISO/IEC 27006:2007 Information technology – Security techniques – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of information security management systems

IAF GD 1:2003 Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC Guide 61:1996 (Issue 3, version 3)

IAF GD 2:2005 Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC Guide 62:1996 (Issue 4)

IAF GD 5:2006 Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC Guide 65:1999 (Issue 2)

IAF GD 6:2006 Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC Guide 66:1996 (Issue 4)

IAF GD 24:2004 Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC Guide 17024:2003 (Issue 1)

IAF MLA 4:2005 Policies and Procedures (Issue 4)

IAF PL 1:2003 Code of Conduct for Accreditation Body Members of the IAF (Issue 1)

IAF/ILAC A1:2006 IAF/ILAC Multi-lateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements – Requirements for Evaluation of a Regional Group

IAF/ILAC A2:2006 IAF/ILAC Multi-lateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements – Requirements for Evaluation of a Single Accreditation Body

IAF/ILAC A3:2006 IAF/ILAC Multi-lateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements – Key Performance Indicators – A Tool for the Evaluation Process

IAF/ILAC A4:2004 Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC 17020:1998

### **3. Terminology**

3.1. The terms and definitions used in this procedure are based on ISO/IEC Guide 2 except as noted below..

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3.2. Description of terms. For the purpose of this procedure, the following terms have the meanings indicated –

- “accreditation body” includes bodies which offer accreditation services in accordance with ISO/IEC Guide 61 and accredit CRBs to issue certificates of conformity with a standard, such as for management systems, products or personnel or ISO/IEC TR 17010 and accredit inspection bodies.
- “association body” includes members of IAF consisting of organisations or associations representing the interests within an economy, region or internationally, of a like group of entities that engage in, are subject to, make use of, accept or rely on, programs accredited by accreditation body members of IAF, and which support the objectives of IAF.
- “MoU” means the Memorandum of Understanding signed by all members of IAF (refer to [www.iaf.nu](http://www.iaf.nu)).
- “MLA” means IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement(s) among Accreditation Body Members (refer to [www.iaf.nu](http://www.iaf.nu)).
- “regional accreditation groups” includes regional groupings of accreditation bodies granted Special Recognition status by IAF Members in order to promote the effective implementation of the IAF MLA (Multilateral Recognition Arrangements) within the recognised regions.

#### **4. IAF Responsibility for Complaints**

4.1. Complaints submitted to IAF shall be limited to concerns or issues regarding IAF MLA or MoU members and/or their accredited CRBs/inspection bodies with respect to the requirements of IAF procedural documents and ISO/IEC Guide 62, ISO/IEC Guide 65, ISO/IEC Guide 66, ISO/IEC 17011, ISO/IEC 17020, ISO/IEC 17021, ISO/IEC 17024, ISO/IEC 17040, ISO/TS 22003 and ISO/IEC 27006, taking into account the guidance given in relevant IAF Guidance documents.

4.2. If a complaint is made about the activities of a member of IAF, whether from a third party or another IAF member, the principal role of IAF in relation to the immediate issue is an indirect one of ensuring that the affected IAF member itself has first had the opportunity to resolve a particular matter, through its own complaints handling procedure, and through direct discussions between the IAF member and the complainant.

4.3. Complaints submitted regarding a specific certification/registration body or inspection body must be referred to the relevant accreditation body(ies) for resolution

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through the accreditation body's(ies') own complaints handling procedure and/or the CRBs/inspection body's complaints handling procedure, as appropriate.

4.4. It is the responsibility of the complainant to provide relevant documentation to IAF to demonstrate that the complaint has already been submitted for investigation by the IAF member's own complaint handling procedure.

4.5. If the IAF member has not been able to make satisfactory progress in the resolution of a complaint within a reasonable length of time (e.g. 6 months), the complainant has the right to refer the matter to IAF for resolution using the IAF Complaints Investigation process.

Note: It is expected that authenticated complaints not requiring an on-site investigation would normally be resolved within 6 months. The IAF member should keep the complainant informed of progress being made in dealing with the complaint. (see 5.2 and 5.3)

4.6. If the complaint made is specifically against the peer evaluation process, the complaint shall be handled in accordance with the specific procedures as specified in the IAF MLA Policies and Procedures document.

4.7. If the complaint is against other activities of IAF, the complaint shall be forwarded to the IAF Secretary for resolution by the IAF Executive Committee.

## **5. IAF Complaints Investigation Process**

5.1. All complaints shall be lodged in the first instance with the IAF Secretary. The IAF Secretary shall promptly acknowledge in writing the receipt and subject of the complaint or the rejection of the complaint (with written justification) to the complainant if it is not in accordance with, or has not been dealt with, the requirements of Clause 4.

5.2. Upon receipt of a complaint, the IAF Secretary shall ensure that the substance of the complaint is clearly understood and documented, and that all relevant claims or statements made by the complainant or other interested parties can be properly authenticated in writing. Such authentication is essential before the complaint can be considered as a formal complaint and any investigation initiated.

5.3. Authentication means that all information can be verified as accurate and correct through an independent source, other than the complainant. It is the responsibility of the complainant to submit information that can be authenticated.

5.4. When the complaint has been satisfactorily authenticated the IAF Secretary shall formally bring the issue of the complaint, and any relevant facts, to the notice of the IAF member, even where these have already been made known to the IAF member by the complainant, and ask the member to provide, within 30 days, a full account as to how the complaint has been dealt with and the outcome.

5.5. If it is found that it has not been possible to resolve the matter satisfactorily or a report is not received from the IAF member, the IAF Secretary will take the necessary action as set out in Clause 5.6 or 5.7, as appropriate.

5.6. If the complaint has been made against an accreditation body which is a member of an IAF Special Recognition Organisation – Regional Accreditation Group, the IAF Secretary will refer the complaint and all associated documentation to the relevant regional accreditation group for investigation.. The regional accreditation group will acknowledge receipt of the information relating to the complaint and confirm that it will appoint a “designated investigator(s)” to undertake an investigation of the matter in a timely manner. .

5.7. In the case of a complaint that has been made against an IAF member which is not a member of an IAF Special Recognition Organisation – Regional Accreditation Group, the IAF Secretary will refer the complaint and all associated documentation to the Chair of the IAF MLA Management Committee or the Vice Chair of IAF, as appropriate (for example if the complaint is against the organization which the Chair of the IAF MLA Management Committee is from). The Chair of the IAF MLA Management Committee



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(or the Vice Chair of IAF) will acknowledge receipt of the information relating to the complaint and will select a member(s) of the MLA Management Committee as a “designated investigator(s)” to undertake an investigation.

5.8. The Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) has the discretion to authenticate any and all information as he/she deems appropriate, at any time during the investigation process. If additional information is needed during this investigation, it is the responsibility of the designated investigator(s) to obtain such information.

5.9. Any individuals named as investigators that have a real or perceived conflict of interest or confidentiality issue with the information included within the complaint shall excuse themselves immediately from any discussions or potential receipt of information regarding the specific complaint.

5.10. All persons involved shall take necessary measures to preserve the confidentiality of information obtained during the investigation of the complaint. A complainant may request to remain anonymous to other parties involved in providing information for the investigation and the designated investigator shall take adequate steps to preserve confidentiality.

5.11. The designated investigator(s) shall proceed with a thorough investigation of the complaint and seek a resolution of the issue(s) involved. It is the responsibility of the designated investigator(s) to ensure that the investigation is performed in a timely manner.

Note: It is expected that authenticated complaints not requiring an on-site investigation would normally be resolved within 6 months. The designated investigator(s) should keep the Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF, as appropriate – see 5.7) or the IAF Secretary (see 5.6) informed of progress being made in dealing with the complaint.

5.12. When the issue has been investigated, the designated investigator(s) shall submit a detailed written report on the complaint, including a statement indicating whether the complaint has been found to have been substantiated or not, including recommendations on resolving the complaint, to the Chair of the MLA Management Committee and the IAF Secretary. The Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) shall decide if the report/recommendations are likely to be satisfactory in terms of resolving the matter. The Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) shall make or request any amendments to the report/recommendations considered necessary and when satisfied shall forward the final outcome to the IAF Secretary. The final outcome shall include a recommendation on action(s) to be taken, if any, in relation to the complaint. If grounds have been found for the IAF Executive Committee to

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consider taking remedial action, the report shall recommend the specific action to be taken.

5.13. The IAF Secretary shall notify the complainant of the final outcome of the complaint, consistent with valid confidentiality requirements.

5.14. The IAF Secretary shall maintain a detailed and complete record of the receipt, handling and outcome of every complaint. The Secretary shall submit a summary of all complaints handled since the previous meetings to each meeting of the IAF Executive Committee.

## **6. Timing of Complaints Process**

6.1. If the complainant is unable to submit all necessary information within 30 days of the submission of the original information to enable the IAF Secretary to authenticate the complaint, the IAF Secretary shall close the complaint and inform the complainant of the closure.

6.2. The IAF Secretary shall refer an authenticated complaint to the relevant IAF regional accreditation group or Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) within 5 working days of concluding that the information relating to the complaint can be authenticated.

6.3. The designated investigator(s) shall complete the investigation and provide a written report to the IAF Secretary and the Chair of the MLA Management Committee as soon as possible. If the investigation has not been finalized within 6 months of the investigator(s) being appointed a written progress report shall be prepared and forwarded to the IAF Secretary and the Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF, as appropriate).

6.4. The IAF Secretary shall forward the final outcome to the complainant within 5 days of receipt from the Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF).

## **7. Appeal by Complainant**

7.1. The complainant may submit an appeal to the IAF Secretary, or regional accreditation group Secretary where the complaint has been investigated by that body (see 5.6), within 30 days of receiving the final outcome on the complaint.

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7.2. Any appeal to a final outcome shall be heard by the IAF Executive Committee and shall be conducted to ensure that the investigation was performed in full conformance with this complaints procedure.

7.3. The Executive Committee may request the relevant regional accreditation group or the Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) to reopen or reconsider any aspect of the investigation, with a maximum period for resolution of 30 days.

7.4. The decision made by the Executive Committee shall be conveyed to the complainant by the IAF Secretary, shall be final and the complaint closed.

End of IAF Procedure for Investigation and Resolution of Complaints

**Further Information**

For further Information on this document or other IAF documents, contact any member of IAF or the IAF Secretary.

For contact details of members of IAF see - IAF Web Site - <<http://www.iaf.nu>>

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