

**COMMUNIQUE**

The IAF at its 11<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting held in Guangzhou, China on January 22-23, 1998 witnessed the signing of its Multilateral Recognition Agreement (MLA) by 13 of its accreditation body members. Chairman Harry Gundlach of the Netherlands said the signing culminates years of work by the IAF and will help reduce trade barriers. Those signing the MLA are members of IAF who have passed a rigorous evaluation by peers against internationally accepted requirements. Signing were JAS-ANZ (Australia and New Zealand), SCC (Canada), CNACR (China), DANAK (Denmark), DAR (Germany), SINCERT (Italy), JAB (Japan), RVA (Netherlands), ENAC (Spain), SWEDAC (Sweden), SAS (Switzerland), UKAS (United Kingdom), and ANSI-RAB (United States). Signatories agree to recognize each other's work and promote the acceptance of ISO 9000 certificates issued by one another's accredited certification/registration bodies, thus leading to acceptance on a wider scale.

At the meeting the IAF decided to become a legal entity incorporating in the United States and approved articles of incorporation and by-laws. Other actions were taken to set fees, establish an annual budget, and select an administrator.

Another major step taken by IAF was the adoption of an IAF policy concerning Alternative Methods for Maintaining ISO 9001/2/3 Registration/Certification (AM). This position was developed as a result of an extensive multi-year effort involving accreditation bodies, certification/registration bodies, and industry. Multiple pilot projects were undertaken covering sites in Europe, the Americas, and Asia. AM will be applicable to qualified supplier organizations worldwide and offer significant benefit in terms of customization of the surveillance processes. While suppliers using these methods may see economic benefits, the IAF also expects benefits in terms of improvements in the internal processes for internal audit, management review, and corrective/preventive action. The supporting position paper provides clear guidance in terms of conditions under which the new methods are applicable and defines rigorous conditions for the supplier organizations, the certification/registration bodies as well as accreditation bodies.

IAF's plenary meeting was attended by 68 delegates and observers from 27 countries and economies, representing 21 accreditation bodies and 8 associate members as well as five international organizations. IAF consists of 26 accreditation bodies and 10 associate members who have signed the IAF Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Signatories of the MOU commit themselves to:

- establish confidence in the members and bodies accredited by them;
- support development and use of ISO/IEC documents;
- establish the equivalence of the members' programs based on a multilateral agreement among them;
- promote regional multilateral agreements.

Since its first formative meeting in January 1993, the IAF has pursued its work program relying on the efforts of three informally constituted working groups each comprised of representatives

of the IAF members. One group has produced documents interpreting international (ISO/IEC) requirements based on experience with their application at the national level. The second group has produced the requirements and procedure for forming the MLA. The third group has dealt with a variety of topics, including the above described AM position papers, developing requirements for registration of an organization's adoption of the environmental management system standard, consideration of sector specific applications of system standards, and the development of a metric for evaluating program effectiveness. The progress and results of the working groups are reviewed at annual plenary meetings where decisions are made to accept completed work items and initiate new ones. The next meeting of the IAF will take place in October 1998 in Australia.