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**REPORT OF THE UN/EDIFACT WORKING GROUP (EWG)
TO THE UN/CEFACT PLENARY**

Submitted by the Chairman of the UN/EDIFACT Working Group (EWG)*

This document has been submitted to the Centre for discussion and noting.

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## Report of the UN/EDIFACT Working Group  (EWG)
## to the UN/CEFACT Plenary

### Introduction

1.      This report covers the activities of the EWG since the previous report submitted to the UN/CEFACT Plenary in March 1999.

2.      The EWG conducted two plenary meetings in the intervening period, the first being held in Atlanta, USA from 22-26 March 1999 and the second was held in Canberra, Australia from 20-24 September 1999.  The Management Team of EWG also held a meeting in Geneva on 26 November 1999.

3.      A number of major milestones occurred during the year, significant among them being the creation of new sub working groups for Environmental Management and Safety and also for Object-Oriented EDI.  Other most significant occurrences were the adoption of the work of the Simple EDI and Web-based EDI Ad Hoc Working Group (SIMAC) and the emergence of the ebXML Initiative, fostered by UN/CEFACT, via the Techniques and Methodologies Working Group.

### Atlanta (USA) Meeting – 22-26 March 1999

4.      A total of 180 UN/EDIFACT accredited experts attended the meeting at the Renaissance Atlanta Hotel which was organised by DISA (Data Interchange Standards Association).

5.      The primary purpose of the meeting was to work collectively and within sub groups to produce the input material for production of the D.99B directory, to progress the message programs of the various groups and to exchange views and experience of the business applications of the messages.  This work was performed at the meeting with most satisfactory results.  A total of 1648 data maintenance requests were processed at the meeting utilising the upgraded procedures which have enabled the processing cycle to be reduced from 12 to 5 months.  This was only possible with the high level of cooperation between the sectoral sub-working groups and the Technical Assessment sub-working group.  The directory output reflected the full implementation of version 4 of the UN/EDIFACT syntax.

*Environmental Management and Safety*

6.      As stated above it was agreed at this meeting to allow the convening of an Environmental Management and Safety sub-working group.  This was made possible by co-operation between the environmental protection authorities in the United States (USEPA) and in Taiwan Province of China

(EPAT). It was agreed that the first formal meetings would occur in Canberra, Australia in September 1999.

*SIMAC Activity*

7.      Following upon the decisions and recommendations made at the March 1999 Plenary of UN/CEFACT, the EWG agreed at the Atlanta meeting to accept and progress the output of the Simple EDI and Web-based EDI Ad Hoc Group (SIMAC). It was agreed in Atlanta that the SIMAC Simple EDI work would be included in the Work Programme of EWG. To put this decision into effect the Implementation Harmonisation sub working group (T8) was allocated the task. T8 has since taken up this task in co-ordination with the other sub-working groups.

Object Oriented EDI

8.      Consequent, and responsive, to the level of interest in Object Oriented EDI, the EWG established a sub group to work as a project team to explore the concept and to prove its operation and viability. This group is known as technical sub-working group T9. In view of the short time since its creation no output is yet available though there is agreement on the project pilot.

**Canberra (Australia) Meeting – 20/24 September 1999**

9.      The Canberra EWG meeting was attended by 196 experts from 27 countries/economies. The week-long meeting was supplemented by an electronic business open day seminar held at the same venue as the EWG meeting – Old Parliament House, Canberra – on 22 September. At the seminar the announcement was made of the agreement between UN/CEFACT and OASIS (Organisation for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards) to work together within the ebXML Initiative. This Initiative is designed to create a global, open technical framework that will allow XML to be used in a consistent manner for the exchange of electronic business data. The meeting and seminar were organised and hosted by Tradegate ECA which also maintains the UN/CEFACT – UN/EDIFACT Entry Point for Australia.

10.     The Business Process Analysis Working Group (BPAWG) of UN/CEFACT also met in Canberra in parallel with the EWG at the same venue. EWG welcomed the co-operative working arrangement.

*Major Developments*

11.     Major decisions/actions at the Canberra meeting included:-

(a) Adoption of Unified Modelling Language (UML) by the EWG;

(b) Examination and analysis of the implications of the Simpl-EDI message concepts by the Purchasing SWG (D2);

(c) Advice by Transport SWG (D4) that there are now 3000 organisations worldwide which have implemented the SMDG guideline for the Container Shipping Bayplan message (BAPLIE);

(d) Successful inaugural meeting of the Environmental Management and Safety SWG (D15) which attracted seven experts from a number of countries including the Philippines.  It was chaired by Dr. David Schwarz of USEPA and the vice-chair was Howard Chen of EPA Taiwan Province of China;

(e) Agreement to form an ongoing group for the purposes of maintaining the EWG Message Design Rules.  The group will be known as Message Design Rules sub-working group (T2);

(f) Agreement to conduct a strategic review of EWG encompassing a possible move to project orientation rather than process, conduct of meetings, EWG financial arrangements and membership issues.  A start on this review was undertaken by the Management Team at its meeting in November.  A discussion document has been prepared and is under consideration.

(g) The MADRAS (Data Element Renaming Project) work was completed by the Technical Assessment sub-working group and approved by the Steering Committee. Necessary data maintenance requests to reflect the outcomes of the project were made to be included in the D.00A directory. The matter of potential disconnects between the TDED and TDID was discussed and the matter referred to the CSG for consideration.

(h) A revision of R.1023 - to be known as R.1023 Rev.5 - was approved by the EWG for use in the production of D.00A.

**Directory Production**

12.     Since the previous  UN/CEFACT Plenary the EWG has processed – in collaboration with the UN/ECE Secretariat – two UN/EDIFACT directories i.e., D.99B and D.00A. As UN/CEFACT would be aware the EWG has been working hard at improving the quality, efficiency and timeliness of the directory production process.  This encompasses the preparation of the output of the Technical Assessment process through to audit and eventual publishing.

13.     The two directories had very different production cycles in the report period.

14.     D.99B directory was the first to use newly created automation processes and as often occurs the cycle suffered a number of delays and setbacks which were due to a series of problems – not all from the same source.  Sufficient to say that the personnel both in the UN/ECE Secretariat and in the EWG learned significantly from the circumstances created and the mistakes made.  Though the directory issued in September 1999 the production cycle was not as efficient as expected. The directory has 189 UNSM'S (standard messages) and 49 messages in development.

15.     The D.00A directory production following the Canberra EWG meeting was very much more successful and was completed with a minimum of delay.  The software and input data difficulties of

the D.99B production had been corrected and the production process much smoother. There is still room for improvement and the evolutionary progress to attaining the desired level will continue into subsequent directories.

16.     Two matters which are assisting this attainment of efficiency are the automation of the Data Maintenance Request procedures and the staffing levels at the UN/ECE Secretariat. This latter, and most pleasing, aspect is assisted by the fact that the staff are now trained and familiar with the revised automated process.

### Single International Technical Assessment (SIT)

17.     As reported to the March 1999 Plenary the first meeting of the SIT was held in January 1999. A second meeting was held in London (UK) in June 1999 and the third in Alexandria, Virginia (USA) in January 2000.

18.     The concept of these meetings – being to progress the agreement of Data Maintenance Requests (DMR's) in between EWG meetings has proven most successful from 2 points of view. Firstly and most importantly it speeds up the DMR process making the messages more useable and responsive to user needs and, secondly, it reduces the number of DMR's which need to be reviewed at an EWG plenary meeting with a consequent reduction in time consumed. UN/ECE Secretariat attendance at SIT meetings is however vital to achieve the desired success - see later.

### UN/ECE Secretariat Issues

*Staffing*
19.     It is pleasing to report that the staffing resources supporting EWG have now been provided to the approved levels with competent staff who are working cooperatively with the appropriate EWG responsible persons. It is hoped that these levels of staff and competence can be maintained into the future.

*Travel Funding*
20.     Whilst the staff levels are adequate it is disappointing that the funding for these staff in relation to international travel is inadequate. There are insufficient allocated funds to allow 2 Secretariat staff to attend the six-monthly EWG meetings and no funds whatever to support the Single International Technical Assessment and Management Team meeting outside of Geneva. This is not directly the fault of the UN/ECE Secretariat but is very frustrating to the EWG which is a volunteer group whose organisations spend considerable resources each year on the UN/EDIFACT process. The lack of presence at vital EWG related meetings will reduce the effectiveness of the EWG organisation and the promotion of the standard and also reduce the relevance of the Secretariat in the process .

*Agreement of Understanding*

21.     In the period since the last UN/CEFACT Plenary, the Management Team of EWG attempted to finalise its requirements of cooperation and activity with the Secretariat and vice versa. The proposed agreement had been the subject of discussion between the Chairman of EWG and the Deputy Director (Mr H. Hansell) for some months.

22.     When the EWG Management Team met in Geneva in November 1999 it was informed that the UN/ECE was not permitted to enter such an agreement and, disappointingly, no formal agreement of understanding (or expectation) exists between the two bodies.

23.     The requirements of the EWG – in relation to how best the UN/ECE Secretariat can support EWG in its activities – will, in view of the lack of a documented and agreed understanding, be incorporated in the work plan of EWG submitted for approval to the UN/CEFACT Plenary.

## ebXML Inititiative

24.     The EWG was a major participant in the inaugural meeting of the ebXML Initiative in San Jose, California from 17-19 November 1999 with around 20 members directly representing EWG and a further similar number of EWG members attending representing other organisations.  It was a strong contingent which represented UN/CEFACT and UN/EDIFACT very capably.

25.     There was general acceptance that the meeting was a milestone and a significant event in the life of the XML syntax as a business tool.  There is an air of enthusiasm amongst the project teams created which augurs well for the ebXML Initiative.  Most importantly, for the preservation of the work done over many years by the UN/EDIFACT process, it is clear that the semantics of UN/EDIFACT will be a basis for the semantic content of XML messages to be used in future.

26.     At the time of preparation of this report the members of EWG, committed to the work of the ebXML Initiative were preparing to attend the second meeting in Orlando USA from 31 January to 4 February 2000 to further progress the Initiative.

## EWG Website

27.     The Promotion Advisory Team of EWG has successfully launched the EWG Website at www.edifact-wg.org  . This website will enable access to documents, agenda and minutes of the various sub-working groups of EWG and also for information and registration concerning the Paris March 2000 EWG meeting.  The site is hosted by EDIFRANCE and the EWG is most grateful for their kind assistance.

## *Next Meetings*

28.     The schedule of meetings for EWG is as follows:-

- March 20-24 2000      -       Paris  France

- September 4-8 2000   -       Taiwan Province of China

- March 19-23 2001    -       New Orleans,  USA

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