UN/CEFACT

REPORT FROM THE STANDARDS LIAISON RAPPORTEUR

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Standards Liaison Report

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General

With the creation of UN/CEFACT it became clear that a single person could not act as the sole liaison to the ever increasing demand for following external standardization activities that may be of benefit to UN/CEFACT and its working groups. Over the last year more and more of that work is being performed by members of the various UN/CEFACT working groups, many actually being from those external standardization bodies that realize the benefit of being active participating members of those groups.

The role of the standards liaison rapporteur has started to shift, and will continue on a larger scale of the next 12-24 months, from being a sole active representative for UN/CEFACT to the coordination role of the various liaison activities with in UN/CEFACT's working groups.

However, the tasks of identifying who is an interface among the various activities is a difficult one requiring the cooperation of all UN/CEFACT working groups. The effort has started but because of the limited resources among all parties, it is difficult to gather that information. Hopefully for the next UN/CEFACT meeting a list of all liaison activities can be provided.

This report will outline key liaison activities UN/CEFACT and its working groups.

Memorandum of Understanding

ITU

During last year, the effort by various UN/CEFACT members to encourage the ITU to join the MoU have paid off. During the MoU/MG meeting ITU agreed to join the MoU. During the meeting a revised MoU was approved in order to be used for the signatures by the 4 Standardization Organizations as well as by the 2 current International User Groups (CALS International and NATO CALS). The current status is that ISO, ITU and UN/ECE have approved this revised MoU and are ready to sign it. CALS International should review it for approval during its next meeting on the 02 March 2000. In regard to IEC and NATO CALS they are in the final process of approval.

It should be noted that this is a great achievement since now all four international standards bodies in the area of Electronic Business have a joint agreement to work together in this field in a coordinated way, thereby eliminating duplication of work, as well as harmonizing those efforts.

Business Object Summit

Owing to scheduling and logistical conflicts the Business Object Summit that was scheduled for November last year, was moved to this year. The summit is now to be held on 16-17 May in Geneva.

To facilitate the organization of the summit the MoU/MG agreed to Terms of Reference and appointed a organizational team.

The purpose of the summit is to define a joint approach for the development of Common Business Objects. This will include a execution plan to be presented to the MoU/MG at its next meeting (18 May).

TC 154

During the last year it became apparent to many CSG members that TC 154 was encroaching on a number of UN/CEFACT deliverables without having sought conformation on whether UN/CEFACT or its working groups shared the same vision in regard to the UN/TDED (ISO 7372). During the MoU/MG meeting the group passed a resolution ensure that UN/CEFACT was given the chance to determine its own action on its own product before TC154 entered into a new development phase. The resolution passed is as follows:

Resolution 99/27: TC154 and ISO 7372.

The MoU/MG requests TC154 not to proceed with any revision of ISO 7372 (TDED) until UN/CEFACT has completed its official review of the usage of this standard.

The CSG fully supports the ISO/IEC/ECE MoU/MG resolution 99/27 and understand its rationale. It was agreed that UN/CEFACT should undertake a survey of its UNTDED user base which, apart from establishing applications and usage levels, will also seek views about the current maintenance programme and requirements for future developments. CSG will consult with TC 154 (through the Chair) as this exercise develops but, in the meantime, it is hoped that in line with the MoU resolution 99/27, TC154 will take no further action with regard to UNTDED - ISO 7372 until the completion of the review. Once the review has been completed, CSG shall put forward appropriate proposals to UN/CEFACT and to TC 154, which will also take into account the recommendations of the "Madras" project.

TC154

During the last CSG meeting (22-26 November,1999), the group became aware of the TC154 agenda, for the upcoming TC154 meeting (7&8 December, 1999). It seems that no one in the UN/CEFACT "ISO" team was consulted about the date. Had there been consultation, TC154 could have been held "back-to-back" with the CSG which took place two weeks earlier in Geneva. This would have guaranteed representation from Australia, Japan, North America and Europe to represent not only UN/CEFACT but also their respective national Standards Bodies. However, no CSG participant could justify travelling inter-continentally and returning to Geneva one week later. To avoid this happening again it is strongly requested that there is effective consultation with the CSG MoU team about the dates of future meetings.

In addition to the work item in regard to the UN/TDED, TC 154 is currently balloting a work item (TC154N315) to develop "EDIFACT Rules for the markup of UN/EDIFACT interchange structures with the eXtended Markup Language (XML) using Document Type Definitions (DTDs)". During the last CSG meeting this topic was discussed and there was shared agreement that this is not a appropriate work item for TC 154 for two reasons:

- UN/EDIFACT is a work item of UN/CEFACT. Any work to define how to convert UN/EDIFACT content in to XML should be determined by UN/CEFACT's EWG.

- The ebXML Initiative. In that regard, UN/CEFACT has declared a moratorium on any formal development of XML specifications until such time as the ebXML Initiative has released its technical specification for electronic business.

Further, CSG understands that it can not stop any party from developing a XML solution. However, it is inappropriate for any other party, other than a UN/CEFACT working group, to develop solutions based upon, or in regard to, the

UN/EDIFACT directories. The DIN work request to TC154 appears to challenge that principle.

On the topic of ebXML, it is suggested that UN/CEFACT should urge TC154 to participate formally in the ebXML initiative in order to ensure that all interested parties work together on a single global solution. This will enable XML to be utilized in a consistent and uniform manner for the exchange of electronic business data.

Another item noted during the CSG meeting was that the "Compendium of Trade Facilitation Recommendations" was placed on the TC 154 agenda. This is currently an active work item for UN/CEFACT's ITPWG. Therefore, whilst CSG members are pleased with TC154's interest they urge that, in considering this agenda item, TC154 do nothing to give the impression of a duplication of effort in the revision of this valuable UNCTAD/ECE joint document.

ebXML Initiative

During last year, one priority of the Standards Liaison Rapporteur was to pursue the UN/CEFACT wish, on a TMWG recommendation, to engage with the XML community in an effort to create a single global solution for XML utilization for Electronic Business. As reported to the Heads of Delegations, this has resulted in a joint project with OASIS called the ebXML initiative. For more detail see the report from the CSG chair as well as CRP.1

TMWG

During the last CSG meeting, CSG requested that TMWG review the BSR (and related efforts) to determine how it relates to the work of UN/CEFACT as a whole, especially taking into account the multi-lingual aspects, and also make proposals to the CSG as to its future strategy towards the BSR. In that regard TMWG has established a channel of communication in order to obtain all electronic copies of BSR related documentation that is available to TC154/WG1. TMWG would like to thank Alain Chapdaniel not only for providing the documents to the TMWG meeting, but also taking time to meet with the TMWG chair in Paris the week before the meeting in order to provide his view as editor for the BSR.

JSWG

The following text was provided by the JSWG chair who is not able to attend the UN/CEFACT session, but wishes to give an update on the groups activities.

JSWG held its 3rd meeting in Paris from the 23rd to the 25th of February. Following an ISO/TC 154 recommendation, the group agreed to consolidate the ISO 9735 Version 4 syntax service directories into a new Part 10. (Currently, the majority of the directories are contained in Part 1 of 9735, with some being held in other parts). It was also agreed that the normative definitions should also be consolidated and retained as an annex of Part 1.

Two earlier recommendations made by JSWG and approved by CSG will also be incorporated in the revisions of the 9735 parts to be balloted and re-published. The first concerns the introduction of a syntax version 'release number' technique (which will permit minor changes to the standard to be made if required in the future, without the need to change the higher level syntax version number). The second relates to the new Part 10, in which a 'one-off' provision of a 'snapshot' of the current service code directory will be included, plus advice as to how future revisions of the code directory can be obtained via the JSWG web-site, (linked to the UN/CEFACT web-site).

Finally, the group agreed that the current membership will be retained as a 'virtual' group, and that they will carry out any future maintenance of ISO 9735 electronically. This would not preclude any formal meetings (for example of sub-working groups of JSWG) being held if absolutely necessary, but this would be the exception rather than the rule.