

Report to the IEC Council

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IEC General Secretary

It has been good to see you all again, even if only on a screen. I am delighted that I have finally managed to meet some of you in person, here in Dubai, at our first-ever hybrid General Meeting. It is one of the many adjustments that we have had to make as the world around us continues to change and we head towards a “new normal”.

Make no mistake, the pandemic has accelerated the pace of digital transformation. I believe that it will have a lasting impact and that only those who adapt quickly and flexibly will succeed. At the IEC, work is under way to make our governance more effective and agile. We are also developing new ways to engage and interact with our Members and stakeholders. And we are investing in innovation to create sustainable revenue streams that are adapted to the needs of a digital world.

Over the next 15 minutes or so, I would like to reflect on our journey over the past year and why it stands us in good stead for the future. I will discuss our response to the pandemic and some of the other major challenges and opportunities that we are facing. These include:

- digital transformation
- Member services
- smart standards
- diversity and inclusion
- developing our global reach
- succession planning



At the start of the pandemic, the IEC launched a business continuity plan that allowed us to carry on providing our vital work in standardization and conformity assessment. We were prepared because much of our work was already happening online, including document management, distribution and voting. We were able to build on solid foundations. What I find interesting is that, although it was devised as a response to very demanding circumstances, in many ways the continuity plan has driven us forward. What we have experienced and learnt in 2020 and 2021 will affect how we work in the future. It has prepared us not only by digitalizing processes and procedures, but also by evolving mindsets and helping us to develop a stronger, more digital culture.



We can already see evidence of this in the work undertaken by the New Revenue Group to develop new income streams that are in line with the evolving needs of our Members. It is a huge challenge. I would like to thank Jo Cops and everyone else who is contributing to making it happen. I am convinced that we have achieved real progress towards ensuring our future relevance.

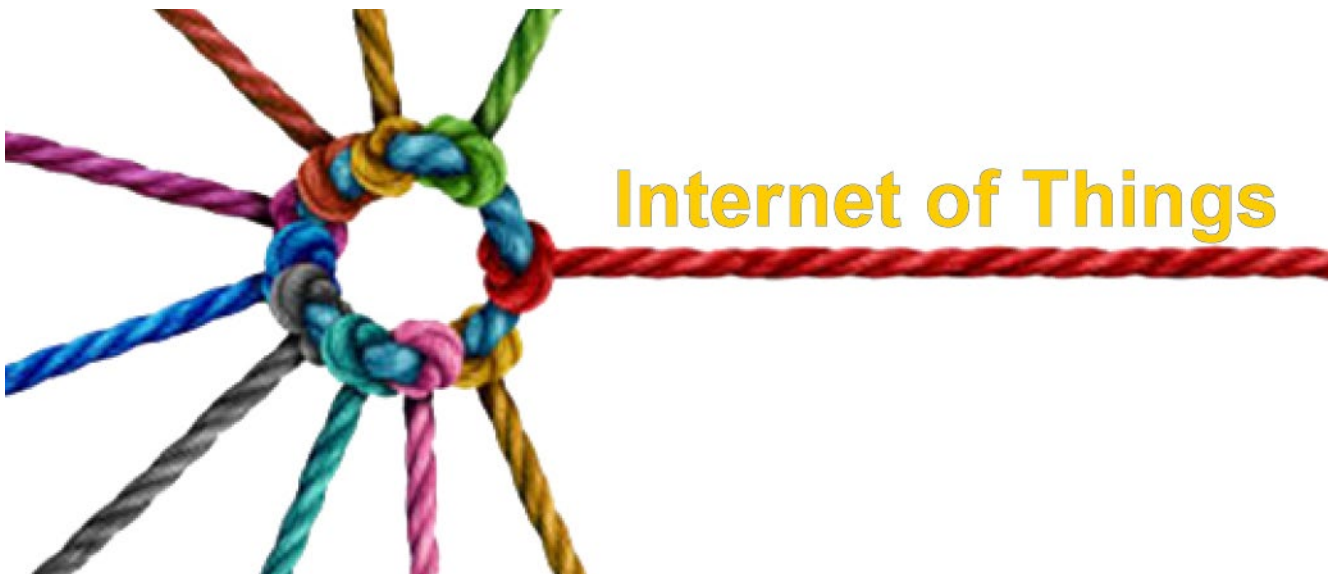
On the operational front, we have set up a new technical committee – TC 129 – to develop standards on robotics for electricity generation, transmission and distribution systems. In addition, the TC will provide standards for edge computing, as well as for the analysis of the data acquired by these robots.



A new standardization evaluation group – SEG 12 – is developing a roadmap for standardization in the area of bio-digital convergence.



Artificial intelligence has been another important focus of our work this year, with SEG 10 concluding its work on ethical aspects and eight new standards published by Subcommittee 42, in the joint IEC and ISO technical committee. Another 23 AI-related standards are under development. We are also producing an international workshop with the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs as we continue to explore opportunities for strengthening the dialogue between regulators and experts in standardization and conformity assessment. This is vital to make certain that we continue to address the needs and concerns of society and is to be followed by a high-level conference in Geneva next year.



We have achieved a lot over the past 12 months, but we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. Digital technologies are continuing to transform the worlds of work and leisure. We live in a society that is permanently connected, where at any moment we can send and receive text, audio and video messages and where encounters, including business meetings, can happen virtually. In manufacturing and the electrical grid, sensors and monitors connected to the Internet of Things gather, analyze and communicate data with other devices to improve output, quality, and consistency. Staying relevant means transforming digitally and that means developing smart standards and conformity assessment services. The future of the IEC is where the future needs of society and the economy will be.



We are dedicated to delivering value to our members and stakeholders. We listen to you. This year, our Academy and Capacity Building Unit has produced very high quality and well received webinars, delivered by leading experts in standardization and conformity assessment. Recognizing the limits and disadvantages of spreadsheets, we have developed a new dashboard that visualizes data about National Committee participation in IEC standardization and conformity assessment work. It will make information easier to find, facilitate reporting and eliminate errors. The attention to you is only going to grow if Council adopts the proposed new governance system as it has been designed to deliver closer interaction with and involvement of the Members, notably in terms of operational planning and resource engagement.



We are also pursuing a digital strategy for our standardization work. For the time being, we are still producing our standards as PDFs for people to download and use. But most of our standards are also available in a machine-readable XML format. It is clear that in the future the content will be not only machine-readable but also machine-executable, machine-interpretable and eventually machine-controllable. Smart standards will be fully customizable. They will make it possible for machines to cherry-pick not only whole IEC standards, but also paragraphs or even single requirements from different publications and to combine them in a way that addresses specific needs and challenges. This is also what we call a move towards Standards as a Service (SaaS).

The way standards are developed will change. We are currently implementing new tools and agile processes to deliver more data-centric standards. These include, for example, online standards development – notably through a project with ISO – as well as a stronger digital backbone in the IEC secretariat to automate resource management processes and working methods, both in standardization and in conformity assessment. They make it possible to work in a more efficient and collaborative way.

Here I would like to thank our SMB Chair, Ralph Sporer, for his priceless contribution and his deep understanding of the complexities of this project.

Under Ralph's leadership and technical guidance, we are developing an IEC smart standards concept, which will provide the foundations for developing standards in a much more flexible way and making them more relevant for the needs of our stakeholders in industry. This is a massive undertaking. The advent of smart standards will have a profound impact on the IEC as an organization. It will affect all aspects of our work, including legal, commercial and future business models.



Digital transformation is our key to remaining relevant, but we must be prepared to assume our responsibilities and remain focused on our role in the global economy and our contribution to society. That brings me to the important question of diversity and inclusion. In a world that is changing at an increasingly rapid pace, staying relevant is becoming a greater challenge than ever before. At the IEC, we have always recognized that diversity increases relevance, which I define as the point where our services intersect with the expectations of multi-stakeholderism. We owe our global relevance and success to the diversity of countries and stakeholders that participate in our standards and conformity assessment work. In addition, we have also forged partnerships with many other international and regional organizations to broaden the diversity and the reach of our work.

We are committed to attracting more women to standardization and conformity assessment work but there is clearly room for improvement. The representation of women in standards falls to under 10 per cent in some technical groups. We are developing guidelines and training material to improve the gender balance in technical committees and within the IEC Conformity Assessment Systems. We are also investing in tools and resources to allow technical committees to develop gender responsive standards.



This year we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Affiliate Country Programme and we are delighted that many of our affiliates joining us here in Dubai. As you know, the programme enables developing and newly industrializing countries to participate in IEC work and the IEC Conformity Assessment Systems without the financial burden of membership. Over the past two decades, it has helped numerous countries to increase the quality of their infrastructure. They have gained the necessary technical expertise to participate in international standardization work, as well as a deeper understanding of conformity assessment and the capacity to apply testing and certification.

Inclusivity is the cornerstone of the Affiliate Country Programme. The countries participating in the programme gain access to IEC International Standards and other publications. They learn how to set up a national electrotechnical committee and benefit from mentoring. They are able to contribute to IEC work and to participate in the annual IEC General Meeting and Affiliate Forum. Let me share a few figures with you. There are currently 84 affiliates. Since the inception of the programme, Affiliate countries have ordered more than 16 500 standards, free of charge, in view of national adoption. They have adopted more than 8 600 IEC International Standards as national standards. Seventeen affiliates are currently benefiting from mentoring partnerships with IEC Members. Sixty have a National Electrotechnical Committee. Thirty-five have Affiliate Conformity Assessment (ACA) Status. This is building for the future. Their insights, experience and knowledge will help to ensure that the standards of tomorrow stay relevant in all corners of the world.



succession planning

Our future also depends on our ability to nurture the next generation of engineers, scientists and technology experts who will continue to provide the world with solutions in the digital era. They have always been the backbone of the IEC and as we enter the fourth industrial revolution, we need to engage the digital natives whose unique expertise will carry the IEC forward.

The IEC Young Professionals Programme is dedicated to the world's upcoming electrotechnology experts and industry leaders. Since 2010, it has been encouraging young people to participate in IEC work at the start of their career. They are young managers, engineers and technologists, aged from their early 20s to mid-30s, and all of them are handpicked by IEC National Committees. The benefits of the programme run both ways. We gain insights from the YPs and profit from their understanding of the digital world. While they help us to shape the future of international standards and conformity assessment, the YPs and their employers benefit from important networking opportunities, as well as staying ahead of the technology curve in their fields and ensuring technology transfer.

I am delighted that we managed to produce a YP Workshop at this GM. This and the other YP activities provide a learning opportunity for more established managers and researchers that we at the IEC value highly. YP alumni are now the presidents and secretaries of National Committees as well as members of our different governing bodies. Many more are active in IEC technical committees and the conformity assessment systems.



2021 has been a year of consolidation and renewal, of making the IEC more efficient, sustainable and transparent. Our work on governance and diversity has brought us at CO closer to our Members, as well as making us more aware of what they want and value. I cannot overstate the importance of this. Delivering value to our Members and stakeholders is our key to future success.

I am proud of our accomplishments and would like to say a big thank you to IEC staff everywhere for their commitment and dedication. I am also aware that this is only the beginning of a process of change. It will be ongoing as we evolve with technology to keep pace with the needs and concerns of our stakeholders. In this context, the Strategic Plan Task Force SPTF under the leadership of our Treasurer Jo Cops is currently crafting – in close interaction with the IEC's National Committees and leading entities – a new strategy and operational plan for the time beyond 2021.

We will be helped by the unique contribution of our worldwide community of experts and their ability to develop consensus-based solutions that reflect state-of-the-art best practices. I am immensely grateful to the more than 20,000 engineers, scientists and technology experts – standards professionals and conformity assessment professionals – around the world who contribute to IEC work ensure that standards provide guidance on implementing best practices in safety, efficiency and trustworthiness. Our digital transformation is about streamlining and simplifying their tools and processes while enabling us to develop new products and services that leverage their priceless work more efficiently.

Thank you for your attention!