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COMMENTS FROM THE SECRETARIAT ON
UN/CEFACT'S PROPOSED NEW STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
AND E-BUSINESS VISION

Submitted by the secretariat

The UN secretariat has a positive duty to defend and promote the values of the organisation, especially the responsibility to deliver public goods accessible to all in a transparent manner and the need for balance and respect for diversity in its work. In this spirit, the secretariat respectfully calls to the attention of delegates to the UN/CEFACT Plenary to ensure balance between the many divergent pressures that currently confront them. The purpose of this note is to assist Heads of Delegation at the 2004 UN/CEFACT Plenary meeting to consider the issues rais ed by the proposed new strategic directions for UN/CEFACT. It highlights the secretariat's concerns regarding the current lack of balance in UN/CEFACT's work between electronic business and trade facilitation, as well as the overall direction of the work in electronic business and makes the following recommendations:

- Implement the May 2003 decision on a UN/CEFACT ebXML Recommendation for approval by the Plenary;

- The secretariat, at this stage, questions the advisability for UN/CEFACT to develop the Business Collaboration Framework (BCF) and would suggest that, prior to any decision on this matter, an independent study be initiated taking into account the uncertainties and complexity associated with this project;

- Establish a high level Trade Facilitation Group within UN/CEFACT, reporting directly to the Plenary.

Summary

Since its establishment in 1997, UN/CEFACT has led a dynamic programme of work. While recognising that trade facilitation should be a cornerstone of the work of the Centre, the secretariat is of the opinion that insufficient focus and effort are being directed towards addressing pressing areas of trade facilitation and procedures such as trade facilitation policy and implementation. This is particularly important at a time when the role of and need for policy guidance in these areas has increased dramatically. Specific examples include the need to implement existing trade facilitation recommendations and standards in transition and developing economies; the need for a clear multilateral approach to international trade security and facilitation and the need to articulate clearly how trade facilitation might be incorporated into a rules based system such as the WTO. It is also very important to develop the special character of UN/CEFACT as a partnership of public and private interests, while ensuring that no single group of commercial interests could exert undue influence.

The secretariat is working closely with the CSG to prepare a revised version of the "constitution" of UN/CEFACT (R.650). In that context, the secretariat requests delegates to consider some changes in the existing institutional structure to include a high level Trade Facilitation Group within UN/CEFACT, reporting directly to the Plenary. This Trade Facilitation Group would be responsible for trade facilitation policy, procedures and implementation, and should establish the necessary Working Group structure to accommodate this. The Trade Facilitation Group should be a high-level working group with representatives from governments and leading trade organisations.

The secretariat is concerned about the actual direction of the electronic business work of UN/CEFACT, as articulated in the UN/CEFACT Steering Group's (CSG) new draft e-business vision contained in document CSG/2003/xxx of 5 August 2003, and the process through which this direction is being decided.

The secretariat also draws the attention of the Plenary to its future work in this area and the need to build on existing strengths by implementing the following decisions which have already been taken by previous plenaries:

- March 2000 decision on the protection of UN/CEFACT data definitions including UN/EDIFACT and UNTDED (ISO 7372);
- March 2001 decision on a phased implementation on modelling methodology based on UMM;
- May 2003 decision on a UN/CEFACT ebXML Recommendation for approval by the Plenary.

With respect to e-business developments and directions, the secretariat strongly suggests that the goals, objectives and practicability of the Business Collaboration Framework (BCF) should be clarified as detailed in Annex A in order to allow the Plenary delegations to take informed decisions about the future direction in this area. Moreover, the relative advantages of BCF and ebXML should be explained. Further, given the cost and considerable complexity of the BCF initiative, the secretariat is not sure whether UN/CEFACT is the right body to undertake this work and would suggest that the Plenary carefully consider the project before any inclusion in the UN/CEFACT's

Programme of Work. Further, the secretariat would like to see the relationship with OASIS re-examined with the ultimate aim of re-establishing a harmonious situation and an appropriate distribution of work between OASIS and UN/CEFACT.

To conclude, the secretariat proposes that the UN/CEFACT Plenary consider how it can ensure a more balanced structure and programme of work, giving attention to both trade facilitation policy dialogue and technical work on standards development while at the same time addressing both global and regional needs in a more open and accessible structure. The Plenary may also wish to consider how it could implement projects to assist less-advantaged transition and developing countries to benefit from UN/CEFACT's activities in conformity with the UN Millennium Development Goals.

1. Introduction

This paper first looks at the historical development of UNECE's trade facilitation and e-business activities and considers the existing environment for work in these areas. It reviews proposed new strategic directions prepared by the CSG for UN/CEFACT's future focus, work programme and structure, including the new draft UN/CEFACT e-business vision.[1] It ends with the secretariat's conclusions on these maters and recommendations for UN/CEFACT's future activities.

2. Trade Facilitation

2.1 The Evolution of Trade Facilitation and e-Business Activities within UNECE

UNECE has been developing trade facilitation tools since the 1960's. This work was originally carried out by the Working Party on the Facilitation of International Trade Procedures, Working Party 4 (WP.4). WP.4 comprised two main groups: the Meeting of Experts on Data Elements and Automatic Data Interchange (GE.1) (i.e., electronic business standards) and GE.2, the Meeting of Experts on Procedures and Documentation (trade facilitation).

Working Party 4 developed a number of recommendations for best practices in trade procedures and for facilitating information management, which benefited governments, traders and providers of trade-related services. These recommendations include the widely used UN Layout Key, a guideline for designing documents that allows information to be recorded only once for an entire set of trade documents. Other recommendations include the UN Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) which now includes over 42,000 trade locations in the world; the Country Code, adopted as an ISO standard; Recommendation 4 on national trade facilitation organizations; and Recommendation 18 on "Facilitation Measures Related to International Trade Procedures" which provides a comprehensive overview of best practices for documentary aspects of the production, purchase and sale of goods, and for customs, transport, insurance and payment procedures.

WP.4 was also very active in the development and maintenance of standards for electronic data interchange (EDI), which form the basis of today's global standard for EDI, the UN Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT).

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[1] CEFACT/CSG/2003/xxx, 5 August 2003.

In 1997, UNECE restructured Working Party 4 and formed the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). A new structure was approved again in 2002 to streamline the work of UN/CEFACT's permanent Working Groups, comprising five Working Groups that meet twice a year under the UN/CEFACT Forum.

2.2   The New Environment for Trade Facilitation

The conceptual thinking on trade facilitation has changed radically in recent years. Once considered a back-room technical issue, trade facilitation has now emerged as a critical element of trade policy and business efficiency. This is due to several factors:

- The growing importance of trade facilitation measures as a key component of trade policy, especially with the reduction of tariffs and the increasing importance of non-tariff barriers and the discussion of trade facilitation within the WTO context.

- Current concerns regarding trade security have prompted governments and business to view trade facilitation as a tool, which, if properly applied, can greatly enhance both the efficiency and the security of the international trading system. .

- The emergence of global supply chains and just-in-time inventory techniques have significantly increased the demand for predictable international trade procedures and processes, ensuring that trade-related documentation arrives ahead of the goods and services involved in the international supply chain.

- Developments in e-business have resulted in increased expectations for faster delivery times in international trade, including the related trade documentation.

- The need to improve the integration of less-advantaged countries into world trades has made the implementation of existing recommendations, tools and techniques even more important, especially in transition and developing countries.

- Intensification and expansion of regional and sub-regional cooperation broadens the scope and enhances the benefits of integrated customs, trade and transport facilitation solutions.

The above developments have highlighted the need for a vigorous and focused involvement by trade facilitation experts in responding to these demands and in providing relevant solutions. They have also combined to enhance the interest of many countries and business organisations in trade facilitation and especially in more efficient trade procedures.

2.3 The Work of the secretariat and UN/CEFACT in Trade Facilitation Policy and Implementation

The secretariat is working to respond to this demand and to facilitate the active debate of policy issues and national implementations. Specifically, UNECE organized two International Forums on Trade Facilitation in May 2002 and May 2003 under the auspices of the UNECE Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development. These Forums also contributed to the global debate on trade facilitation in preparation for the Fifth WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancún, Mexico, in September 2003. In addition, the UNECE secretariat held two conferences on trade and security issues in February and November 2003, and has been an active participant in the WCO Task Force on security and trade facilitation. A new International Forum on Trade Facilitation is envisaged for 2005. One of the most important features of these events has been the involvement of high-level policy-makers (ministers, heads of customs, heads of departments, ambassadors and senior executives) from the key countries in the trade facilitation policy debate. The Forums have also highlighted the multiple facets of trade facilitation.

The secretariat is also involved in several capacity building projects to enhance the implementation of trade facilitation in transition and developing countries. These include:

- "Support of Trade Facilitation Measures and UN/EDIFACT implementation in Selected Eastern European Countries" together with the Czech Republic
- The UN Development Account project "E-Med" – Capacity Building in Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business in the Mediterranean.

Notwithstanding the good work undertaken by UN/CEFACT since its foundation, and apart from the work undertaken by the International Trade Procedures Working Group (ITPWG-TBG15), the secretariat is concerned that the primary focus of UN/CEFACT on e-business standards development has been at the expense of any substantial work in areas such as trade facilitation policy and implementation. Although UN/CEFACT's mandate shows that equal emphasis should be placed on trade facilitation as in the development of electronic business standards, since 1997 most of its efforts have been focussed on further development of UN/EDIFACT and new standards for e-business, such as ebXML and most recently the BCF. The UN/CEFACT Policy Group established in 2002 has so far concentrated primarily on internal UN/CEFACT policy issues and has not addressed the broader trade facilitation policy area.

2.4 Recommendations from the secretariat

To address this need and establish a proper balance between trade facilitation and e-business work, the secretariat suggests the establishment of a fully empowered Trade Facilitation Group within UN/CEFACT that would cover trade facilitation policy, implementation and procedures. Within this structure, the existing ITPWG-TBG15 should become a Working Group to cover trade facilitation procedures, and a new high-level Working Group would be established to address pressing trade facilitation policy issues. It is proposed that this new Trade Facilitation Group report directly to the UN/CEFACT Plenary. This suggestion is fully consistent with the paper submitted to the Plenary (Document TRADE/CEFACT/2004/34) by the International Trade Procedures Working Group –

TBG15, suggesting the establishment of a fully empowered Trade Facilitation Group within UN/CEFACT.

The secretariat also recommends that UN/CEFACT consider shifting some of its emphasis from the development of technical instruments to the implementation of existing tools, particularly in transition economies and developing countries. UN/CEFACT and the secretariat should consider together the most suitable strategies for implementation projects.

3. Electronic Business

3.1 UN/CEFACT's work and strategic direction in Electronic Business

Underlying UN/CEFACT's work is the understanding that the scope and growth of world trade can be intensified by combining the benefits of information and communication technologies (ICT) and a reduction of transaction costs through the simplification, harmonization and standardization of procedures. It is this convergence of business process facilitation and ICT opportunities – called the "business relevance" of technology – that characterizes UN/CEFACT's major contribution to "the development and implementation of a proper framework of rules, norms and standards for international trade … necessary to help the international community respond effectively to the challenges posed by globalisation."[2]

There is clearly a strong link between trade facilitation and e-business and the application of e-business standards has brought about fundamental improvements to many parts of the international trade transaction chain throughout the world. This link is now more important than ever in the context of the increased focus on trade security and facilitation and the greater emphasis on the provision of advance cargo information and risk assessment, all of which rely on the speedy and efficient flow of information.

Over the past two decades, UNECE's development of electronic business standards has focussed on two areas: UN/EDIFACT and ebXML. UN/EDIFACT is the main international standard for electronic data interchange. It was developed by WP.4 and approved as an ISO standard in 1987. Over the years, experts in Working Groups meeting outside the formal UN/CEFACT Plenary (through the Joint Rapporteur and EDIFACT Working Group teams) have carried out major efforts to develop this standard.

In the past four years, the number of Data Maintenance Requests (DMRs) to be implemented for UN/EDIFACT has decreased considerably, from several thousand to several hundred per year. This indicates that the Directories are now in a mature phase and few new messages are being developed.

The secretariat has therefore allocated freed resources to other tasks, mainly the development and maintenance of UN/LOCODE. UN/LOCODE (United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations) is used throughout international trade to designate locations whenever there is a need for a coded representation for the names of ports, airports, railway terminals, inland clearance depots, inland freight terminals and other transport related locations, such as places of receipt and delivery,

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[2] Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change, Report of the Secretary General (A/57/387), page 10, September 2002.

which are used for goods movements associated with trade (for example locations where Customs clearance of goods can take place), or otherwise proposed by Governments. UNECE maintains this code set and database on an ongoing basis. UN/LOCODE integrates other important location lists such as IATA Airport codes, the Lloyds Register for ports and codes of the Universal Postal Union.

In total, the number of UN/LOCODE Data Maintenance Requests received at the secretariat has increased significantly since 2001, practically doubling between 2002 and 2003 (from 4,810 to 9,580 requests per year) with an increase in the diversity of the sources of requests (the public, international organizations and the private sector). In addition, new database formats and website presentation were developed, making it much easier to update the list and simplifying the code list maintenance process for the user community.

In recent years, the experts working under the auspices of UN/CEFACT have focussed primarily on the development of electronic business extensible mark-up language (eb-XML). The work on ebXML was undertaken jointly by UN/CEFACT and the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS) to standardize XML business specifications and to develop a technical framework that would enable XML to be utilized in a consistent manner for the exchange of all electronic business data. UN/CEFACT and OASIS established ebXML Working Groups to develop a technical framework that would enable ebXML to be used for exchanging all electronic business data in a consistent manner. Industry groups working on XML specifications also participated in the 18-month project.

In 2002, UN/CEFACT released the ebXML Core Components technical specifications for public review under its open development process, and in 2003 the ebXML architecture specifications were submitted to the UN/CEFACT Plenary for endorsement. The development work was undertaken by a large number of experts, mainly from the private sector, in working groups not serviced by the secretariat.

The Report of the Ninth Session[3] in 2003 states "the CSG Chairman noted that preparations of a recommendation on the use of ebXML should be initiated, possibly based on the model of Recommendation 25 on the use of UN/EDIFACT or following a fast track process with ISO. … The Plenary requested the CSG to start preparing a UN/CEFACT Recommendation on ebXML for approval by the Plenary." Further, during that session, the Chairman of the UN/CEFACT Technologies and Methodologies Group (TMG) briefly explained the status of the working groups and that "the UMM user guide had been coordinated in a larger framework - Business Collaboration Framework - to be known as BCF." The Deputy Director of the UNECE Trade and Timber Division supported the suggestion to move towards web services. "However, this was a difficult area and a paper was requested to brief the Plenary delegations on the issue for the next Plenary session. … In order to keep pace with the current UN/CEFACT vision of a general business collaboration framework, the Plenary directed the CSG and the appropriate empowered groups, such as the Techniques and Methodologies Group, to move closer to web services."[4]

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[3] Report of the Ninth Session, TRADE/CEFACT/2003/21 paras. 55-56, May 2003.
[4] Report of the Ninth Session, TRADE/CEFACT/2003/21 paras.111-112 and 116, May 2003.

Moreover, in August 2003 the CSG announced the successful completion of the ebXML technical standards work with OASIS and indicated that future developments would be based on technology neutral and implementation neutral global e-framework tools. In the opinion of the secretariat and according to the rules of procedure of UN/CEFACT, this significant redirection of work falls within the responsibility of the Plenary, which should therefore discuss thoroughly this important issue.

In August 2003, the CSG developed the "UN/CEFACT's e-business vision" draft document,[5] in which the Techniques and Methodologies Group (TMG) reported the development of a Business Collaboration Framework (BCF) combining cross-sectoral analysis and business process and information modelling that will be syntax independent (i.e., will allow companies to maintain their data without concern for the eventual "syntax" [message formats] that will be used to communicate the data to business partners). By combining these elements, the TMG believes that UN/CEFACT will be able to utilize the same business process models and the same information definitions for any language or syntax of the future. At its February 2004 meeting, the CSG decided that the document should be circulated once more for comments, revised as commented, and then submitted to the Plenary.[6]

3.2   Considerations by the secretariat

The decision by the UN/CEFACT Steering Group (CSG) to conclude its cooperation with OASIS and to begin developing a "Business Collaboration Framework"[7] suggests that the CSG wishes to change the course of UN/CEFACT's e-business standards development. In the view of the secretariat, a change towards such a difficult (highly complex) development area needs to be well explained to the delegations, the new direction should be clearly identified and its objectives and deliverables explicitly defined and endorsed by the UN/CEFACT Plenary.

However, before discussing possible new developments, the UNECE secretariat would like to recall the Plenary decision of May 2003: "The Plenary requested the CSG to start preparing a UN/CEFACT Recommendation on ebXML for approval by the Plenary." It is unclear how the CSG's decision to "complete" the ebXML technical standards work programme with OASIS will permit the implementation of this Plenary decision. Therefore, the secretariat suggests that this decision be reconsidered by the Plenary. In addition, the secretariat suggests that contacts be renewed with OASIS in order to agree on how to implement this decision and to settle upon a division of work between the two organizations. In the secretariat's view, it is crucial that a common understanding be reached on how "core components" should be developed. Further, the secretariat believes that these discussions should be well coordinated within the framework of the MoU between ISO/IEC/ITU and UNECE.

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[5] CEFACT/CSG/2003/xxx, 5 August 2003.
[6] CSG Minutes, Decision 04-01-15.
[7] CEFACT/CSG/2000/xxx, August 2003

BCF and ebXML

The UNECE, through UN/CEFACT, has developed the only international standard for the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) which today is used by approximately one million users world wide. However, with the advent of Internet, users now also wish to use this new technology for the transfer of business data.

To that purpose, UN/CEFACT, in cooperation with OASIS initiated the Electronic business XML (ebXML) project. ebXML exploits these technological advances to create a comprehensive framework to execute business processes over the Internet using the XML (eXtensible Mark up Language) standard.

ebXML allows all parties to describe business processes, information, messages and services for the exchange of business data. Using this framework it also gives the possibility to establish electronic marketplaces (so called repositories). Thus, ebXML can complement the existing UN/EDIFACT by creating electronic business solutions based on a technology that is increasingly available to a large number of users - the Internet.

The Business Collaborative Framework (BCF) is not a technology for direct implementation by users for transfer of data. BCF is a methodology based on advanced computer modeling tools which enable users to model business process. BCF focuses on developing business processes and information models in a technology-neutral manner - no specific technology or syntax is developed. On the contrary, the implementation of these models in a given syntax (UN/EDIFACT, XML) and the required services are not defined but are left to the software providers.

Thus, the underlying concept of BCF is to try to provide universal standard models for business processes on which specific technologies can later be applied e.g. UN/EDIFACT or XML. This would enable systems designers to use the underlying models regardless of technology and the models could be reused and when new technologies develop. In the view of the secretariat it is not yet clear if this methodology is feasible and moreover, the development of the basic models could take 5-10 years to accomplish.

With regard to the proposed BCF initiative, based on the information available to the secretariat. It seems that this would require at least several years of further research and development to achieve the proof of concept and to implement any practical applications. In addition, the CSG has indicated that the cost for development could be over US $10,000,000 for a three-year period. With the very significant investment in both time and resources from government and industry required by the BCF proposal, the UNECE secretariat recommends, as with any such large investment, a comprehensive analysis of the feasibility of the project should be undertaken, along with a detailed business plan for its implementation (as described in Annex A). This analysis and plan should include the project's ultimate objectives, deliverables, cost and time schedules and could be developed through broad consultations of the representatives from both trade facilitation and e-business drawn in the UN/CEFACT Forum and the MoU on electronic business.

In addition, it would be necessary to better explain the exploratory character of the BCF and the ensuing research implications, so that an evaluation could be made as to whether this work should be carried out within the remit of the United Nations or left to the private sector.

3.3   Conclusions and Recommendations from the secretariat on UN/CEFACT's e-Business Activities

3.3.1   UN/CEFACT's Relationship with OASIS

UN/CEFACT has a very distinguished history in the development of electronic business standards. However, uncertainties regarding its relationship with OASIS have resulted in a situation where UN/CEFACT is no longer seen as the principal body for the development of such standards. It is crucial that this situation be resolved urgently to restore UN/CEFACT's image.

3.3.2   Implementation of the March 2000 Plenary Decision on the Protection of UN/CEFACT Data Definitions – UN/EDIFACT and UNTDED (ISO 7372)

To protect UN/CEFACT's efforts to standardize data definitions undertaken since the mid 1980's, the UNECE secretariat recommends supporting the public review of the revision of UNTDED (ISO 7372) and submitting the revision for approval to the Plenary. In addition, any further development in the field of business semantics, such as "core components" for the new generation of electronic business standards, should be based on the accumulated knowledge represented in the current UNECE data element dictionaries. In outlining future work in this area, it is essential to build on the competencies and strengths provided by the experts in UN/CEFACT's various Working Groups.

In this context the UN/CEFACT Forum plays a very important role providing synergy between the different working groups. The secretariat recognizes the strengths of the Forum and supports all efforts to create an effective working environment. To that end the secretariat welcomes any extra budgetary contribution towards running the Forum. It has also been made clear that the Forum is a part of the official UN system and as such must follow established rules for UN meetings e.g. regarding nominations of participants and the presence in the Forum of staff from the secretariat. Further, the secretariat suggests that the Forum meets once a year in Geneva which would give both the Forum and the participants a more direct linkage to the United Nations.

In the secretariat's view, UN/CEFACT's future work programme is likely to be most productive if it builds on its competence in semantics and includes a coordinated development of "core components." Details of this work programme could then be coordinated with OASIS and other standard-setting bodies through the MoU between ISO/IEC/ITU and UNECE. To that end, it is essential to establish close working relationships with the relevant bodies working in this field and evaluate any additional inputs that may be required from efforts such as the UBL development under OASIS

3.3.3   Implementation of the March 2001 Plenary Decision on Modelling

The link between trade facilitation and e-business is now more important than ever, especially with the increased emphasis on information flow in a secure trading environment. The UNECE secretariat sees modelling as the tool that can provide this linkage, and recommends the development and implementation of a phased approach that gradually enables UN/CEFACT business groups to learn and take increased advantage of the Unified Modelling Methodology (UMM).

Considering the practical implications for users of the advanced modeling tools, it is unclear if the modeling tools and methods which are a fundamental aspect of BCF as currently proposed can also be implemented by less sophisticated users at reasonable cost and with only minimum training. Should this not be the case, the practicality of implementing a strategy that relies upon tools that users (in particular from less advanced countries) cannot operate independently is questionable. The secretariat is strongly of the opinion that UN/CEFACT should refocus on the needs of developing and transition countries and develop electronic business standards and trade facilitation recommendations that can help diminish the divide between developed and less developed economies.

3.3.4 *Implementation of the May 2003 Plenary Decision on ebXML*

Before addressing new developments, the UNECE secretariat would like to recall the Plenary decision of May 2003: "The Plenary requested the CSG to start preparing a UN/CEFACT Recommendation on ebXML for approval by the Plenary."8 With the decision by the CSG on "the completion of the ebXML technical standards work programme with OASIS"9, it is unclear how this Plenary decision will be implemented. Thus, it seems necessary for the Plenary to raise this issue at its next session for consideration.

Regarding the BCF proposal, the secretariat remains sceptical that the proposed change of direction of the CSG moving away from ebXML development to the BCF will deliver the expected results in a realistic timeframe. In any case, a new direction should be explicitly defined so that UN/CEFACT Plenary delegations can take informed decisions about future work, and provide a clear mandate within the framework of the UN programme of work.

The secretariat strongly advocates further debate on these issues, and requests the UN/CEFACT Plenary to take full account of the views of all those who have contributed to this important work, which can play a crucial role in bridging the digital divide and supporting the integration of all countries and enterprises into the international economy.

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8 TRADE/CEFACT/2003/21 report of the ninth session, para.56
9 ECE/TRADE/03/P07, 21 August 2003

Annex A

➢ The secretariat firmly believes that the concept of a Business Collaboration Framework (BCF) should be clearly explained including its ultimate objectives, deliverables, cost and time schedules so as to allow UN/CEFACT Plenary delegations to take informed decisions about the future direction of UN/CEFACT's electronic standards development.

➢ Given that the BCF has never been implemented, the Plenary should also receive, for review:

* An analysis of the project's potential benefits and risks, including an alternate scenario in case the BCF project is not successful.
* An explanation of why the UN is the most appropriate place for implementation, as opposed to the private sector or another international organization.
* A report on the consensus among experts participating in the UN/CEFACT Forums regarding BCF development.
* A review of the points of view of other organizations active in electronic business standards development including a review of the standardization process to ensure its impartiality.

The secretariat also believes that if the BCF is to be implemented, it would be wise to take a cautious approach to its implementation, which would imply:

➢ Implementing a proof of concept, pilot project in a selected sector such as Customs or procurement rather than moving all existing work immediately into a "BCF stream."

➢ Continuing and improving the existing work on UN/EDIFACT, ebXML and other technologies while the proof of concept work is undertaken. This could include the implementation of UMM in the work, which would make every project more "BCF ready." However, since the BCF is supposed to be compatible with any "final output" syntax, the overall direction of other work should not affect the utilization of either BCF or existing work.

➢ Identifying the work of other key organizations in this area and indicating how the work will either complement or compete with the BCF.