

Explanatory Note: Global Compact-ISO Memorandum of Understanding

The Global Compact Office recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) related to the development ISO 26000 – an International Standard that will provide guidance on social responsibility (SR). I would like to share the GCO's expectations and hopes for this recently formalized relationship with ISO.

As many of you are aware, ISO will release SR guidance in 2008 that will encourage voluntary commitment to social responsibility and seek to provide common understanding and guidance on SR concepts, definitions and methods of evaluation. The final product is still under deliberation by various stakeholders, a process that is extremely valuable. As a participant in this process, it is our belief that the outcome as a minimum should be consistent with and complement the internationally agreed ten principles of the UN Global Compact. If accomplished, an ISO 26000 standard that reflects the ten principles – including the fundamental principles and rights at work – could have important practical use for advancing the Global Compact initiative globally.

We are delighted that ISO has confirmed that the SR guidance will be based on existing frameworks such as the UN Global Compact, an appropriate measure as ours is the most global and universal corporate citizenship initiative – with thousands of participants in 100 countries, local networks in 50-plus countries, and principles that enjoy political and social legitimacy around the world. In addition to agreeing that ISO 26000 needs to be consistent with the Global Compact's principles, the MOU also provides for a collaborative relationship during the development of the standard through commenting and engagement in working groups.

The ISO 26000 standard has the potential to build local capacity and foster local ownership of the corporate citizenship movement – particularly in developing countries – which is a critical step in better establishing the business-society agenda worldwide and ultimately achieving a level global playing field for all businesses. Therefore, the GCO is looking forward to further engaging in the ISO 26000 development process in a constructive and supportive manner.

We are committed to working in close consultation throughout the process with the UN agencies which form the Inter-agency team, as well as other relevant UN system organizations, and GC stakeholder groups – business, civil society, labour, academia and Local Networks. Additionally, the GCO is encouraging Local Networks to engage locally in ISO mirror committees where appropriate. An ISO 26000 standard that helps to advance the Global Compact's mission and principles is in our collective interest; this MOU is an important step in reaching that goal. I encourage you to contact Mr. Kola Badejo (badejo@un.org, +1 917-367-9112), manager of the ISO process for the Global Compact Office, with any questions or comments you may have related to the Global Compact's engagement with ISO.

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