



## Activity Report Philippe Metzger IEC General Secretary & CEO

This has been an extraordinary year. Less than a month after taking up my position, the World Health Organization declared a global emergency. From that moment, Covid-19 has hung like a sword of Damocles over every action and every decision that we have taken.

I am proud that the IEC could make an important contribution to the global fight against Covid-19. In the very early days of the pandemic, we identified IEC standards related to critical care ventilators and made them available, free of charge to support medical care providers and patients around the world. We undertook this action in close coordination with ISO.

For the organization as a whole, adapting to the demands of the pandemic has been the defining factor of 2020. The pandemic has accelerated the process of digitalization, transforming the way the world works and people interact. Organizations like ours that have relied on face-to-face meetings to do their business have been forced to make greater use of online tools and more digital processes to survive. On a personal level, the travel restrictions meant that I was not able to establish all the personal contacts to the extent that I had wanted and planned.

Fortunately, I was able to get to know the management team and most of the employees for several weeks before we went into lockdown. As far as the National Committees are concerned, however, there is still some catching up to do. While it is true that eliminating business trips has given me more time to settle into my role and manage, it is also true that the conversion of physical into virtual meetings has been demanding, time-consuming and not entirely satisfactory.

I am glad to say that the IEC was able to make a seamless transition to remote working, without hampering our core activities or services. Partly, this was because we have been operating electronically for many years and key components of our IT infrastructure were rebuilt fairly recently. Above all, though, we were able to implement a business continuity plan very quickly.

It has enabled us to mitigate some of the impact of the emergency and provide our members and stakeholders with the highest level of support possible under the circumstances. In Geneva and our other locations around the world our technical staff have offered guidance to our community of experts in the transition to working online. Thanks to their efforts and increased vigilance, we hope to avoid any significant delays in our standardization and conformity assessment work.

Indeed, I am grateful to all IEC staff for their dedication and hard work and for how they have coped during this difficult period. I know that I can rely on their professionalism and commitment for the challenges that still lie ahead of us. In order to stay relevant, in what will be a very difficult post pandemic economy, we will need to become more digital and more agile.

For this reason, I have implemented a new management structure at the IEC. I am a convinced silo-breaker. I expect cross-departmental cooperation and agility at all times, so that existing structures and processes can be adapted quickly, if and when necessary. With the help of my senior management team we can optimize internal resources and deal more efficiently with business transformation and change. Delegating more responsibility across the organization will enable us to leverage internal knowhow more

effectively, while allowing employees to develop and grow. This is essential if we are to address future challenges and seize opportunities in an increasingly digital world.

Digitalization has long been a strategic priority for us. The IEC has been working electronically since 1998 and was a pioneer among the standardization organizations. Early on, we offered our members and experts new applications via the Internet to simplify cooperation, consensus building and voting. We continue to do so, of course, and this trend has accelerated because of Covid-19. Especially in the area of IT, we have been working increasingly with ISO for several years now in order to be able to offer our members efficient and cost-effective, state-of-the-art digital solutions.

Digitalization is a central theme for our "engine room", which is how I like to think of the many technical standardization committees and conformity assessment systems. The experts who carry out this work contribute significantly to the secure digital transformation of energy, society, health, industry and transport, both in terms of hardware and software. Looking to the future, the work we are doing now on 'online authoring' and 'machine readable standards' will increase our efficiency and make us better prepared for developments in technology.

Working closely with ISO, we have set up three IEC pilot groups that are beginning to use the new FontoXML tool for collaborative online authoring of standards. In the short term, it will simplify and make more effective the time-consuming process of drafting IEC publications, including International Standards, Technical Specifications and Technical Reports. In the longer term, as the world becomes more digital and connected, it will enable us to create new and more relevant products and services.

Cooperation with other stakeholders, whether industry, consortia or other standards development organizations, is becoming increasingly important. In this context, we have extended standardization to systems and are allowing stakeholders to contribute their knowledge and expertise directly to develop jointly the best possible solutions. This approach concerns a growing number of systems, from the smart city to the smart grid, industry 4.0 and so forth. The fact is that none of the standardization organisations can develop all the standards needed on their own.

Less technical but nonetheless critical issues, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals and climate change, are increasingly on our radar. This is reflected both in our technical work and at policy and external communication level. Going forward, we must pay more attention to addressing and motivating additional stakeholders, while promoting awareness of the IEC and the use of IEC standards and conformity assessment.

In the context of external communications, we must place a greater emphasis on portraying the societal importance of the IEC more clearly to the outside world. This means establishing clear links between broad public issues and the work of the IEC – our true hallmark, thanks to the vast knowledge of our 20,000 or so experts – and involving members in our communication efforts.

We have taken concrete steps towards developing a longer-term vision for the IEC. We have collaborated with our members to identify and develop new sources of revenue. This is of fundamental importance, as we expect external factors to have an impact on our current business models. At my suggestion, the Council Board set up a task force in June to evaluate the Masterplan and its implementation. This process will allow us to take corrective action, when needed, as well as laying the foundations for the development of a new IEC strategy.

Another key potential change vector, which was already being considered before I joined the IEC, is the review of our governance. The global pandemic has provided a stark reminder that we cannot plan for everything and that continuity relies on adaptability and flexibility. To be ready for future challenges and opportunities, we must integrate more closely with our members and we must develop a more transparent governance structure. We began a governance review process earlier this year with this in mind.

We are enhancing coordination between the various IEC governing boards and have begun to provide more information about their activities and decisions. We are developing a governance system that reflects the varying needs of the different IEC stakeholders. Our aim is to deliver the revised Statutes and Rules of Procedure to Council for consideration and decision at the IEC General Meeting in 2021.

This project is of great importance and takes up a lot of my time. It is about ensuring that we have decision-making structures and processes that are fit for the future. The IEC is an association under Swiss law, and our members must feel that they are protected by the statutes and procedural regulations and are fully involved in the decision-making process. Here, the need to adapt is becoming apparent, in order to reflect developments in the composition and environment of the IEC and to remedy any shortcomings identified in our current "constitution".

The economic and financial crisis accompanying the pandemic has not failed to leave its mark, but the IEC is built on solid foundations. I consider the cooperation between the Treasurer, the National Committees and the Central Office in this area to be not just constructive, but exemplary. It reflects the "IEC everywhere" spirit of togetherness and a determination to stay the course that I have witnessed during this difficult and challenging period.

I am grateful for the warm welcome you have given me since my appointment. I am very honoured to serve this unique organization and proud to be leading a dedicated and talented team. Together, we will do our utmost to support you in your future endeavours.