



Address to the IEC Council

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There is a saying in Chinese that it is hard to walk on one foot and it is impossible to clap with one hand. The moral is that it is only by working together and cooperating that we can accomplish many tasks. This same holds true for tackling global challenges like Covid-19.

The ever-changing reality of the pandemic has brought to the forefront the importance of international cooperation that allows us to play to our strengths and to leverage synergies. As the global trade enabler, international cooperation is an integral part of the DNA of the IEC. It is now more important than ever as globalism has become a reality. It is only by working together that we can tackle the current emergency and the other major challenges that we face. Earlier this year, IEC and ISO coordinated efforts to identify standards that support the global fight against Covid-19 and made them available, free of charge. We have never done anything like this before.

The world is undergoing drastic changes. Millions of people are suffering as the virus has triggered not only a health emergency, but also an economic one. In a matter of months, the pandemic has changed how we live and how we work. Occupational social distancing and remote working have accelerated the process of digitalization and underscored the crucial importance for businesses of being agile and resilient.

The IEC was prepared and has shown extraordinary strength by adapting and adjusting to the Covid-19 global crisis. We had the processes and systems in place to be able to implement a business continuity plan that has minimized the impact of the pandemic on the commission's core standardization and conformity assessment activities. I am a firm believer that there are opportunities in every challenge. The urgent need to adapt has provided us with a proving ground for new technologies, as well as a training ground for new business models. These are opportunities that the IEC has grabbed with both hands. The Central Office and National Committees have worked together to identify opportunities for new value-added products and services. This work will benefit the entire IEC community.

Being prepared means continuing to evolve digitally. There is a great deal that the IEC still needs to accomplish in order to remain relevant and viable 10 years from now. We have already begun to upgrade the core machinery for producing standards and we are developing the foundations to enable machine-readable standards. This will also influence the standards development process and the ability of the IEC to respond to market needs in time.

An excellent position paper from the IEC Market Strategy Board explores future challenges and opportunities in a world that is hyper-connected and critically dependent on technology. It calls for increased understanding about the drivers of change and the development of an environment that fosters innovation. The MSB report highlights the role of demographics, climate change and natural resources.

There is therefore a clear imperative for the IEC to align its vision to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. IEC Standards and conformity assessment contribute, directly or indirectly, to one or more indicators for all 17 of the SDGs. That is why the Council Board has decided to set up a task force to begin the process of engaging the IEC community about the vital contribution of standards and conformity assessment to the ambitious goals of the United Nations. The IEC is stepping up to the plate

and recognizing the crucial role that its expertise can play in protecting the environment and building a better future for the whole of humanity.

There is also a compelling business case for embracing the SDGs, which can act as drivers for innovation, for opening up new and emerging markets, and for creating new opportunities for investment. Moreover, consumers, employees and investors expect industry to play a part in this global effort. They are calling on governments and industry to adopt policies that will ensure a green and inclusive recovery from Covid-19.

IEC Standards and conformity assessment underpin such policies, helping the world to address the major challenges identified in the UN sustainable development goals. IEC work is making cities and critical infrastructure safer and more resilient. We are supporting the transition to a less carbon-intensive, more sustainable energy system. We are ensuring that products and services are safe, reliable and efficient: reducing risks, streamlining costs and enhancing market access.

At the same time, our ground-breaking work on low voltage direct current (LVDC) is addressing the need to bring affordable and clean electricity to the nearly one billion people who currently go without. Failure to act now will affect business performance and stability by increasing competition for scarce natural resources and hindering growth. It would also leave us out of step with policymakers and regulators on the national, regional and international levels.

The fifth sustainable development goal is to achieve gender equality. If we want to build a more sustainable world, we need more women in science and engineering and we need more women in leadership positions. It is my experience that teams that are diverse reflect society better and generate a broader range of insights and innovations.

But gender equality is only part of the diversity equation. The IEC is also committed to achieving greater stakeholder and geographic diversity. Nor should we forget generational diversity. Engineers and other technology experts have always been the backbone of the IEC and as we enter the fourth industrial revolution, we need to engage the next generation of experts – the digital natives who will carry the IEC forward. Similarly, we must broaden our stakeholder base to gain new perspectives and relevance from the likes of social scientists, regulators and ethicists, to ensure that our standardization and conformity assessment work remains relevant. From the beginning, diversity has been part of our essence. We have made progress on the road to becoming more diverse to reflect a changing world, but we still have some way to travel.

It is worth remembering that international standards support the ICT technologies that have been at the core of many responses to the crisis. Much of the standardization work on technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things is carried out by IEC and ISO experts together, in the joint technical committee that we all know as JTC1. They ensure that these technologies are safe, secure, interoperable and reliable for all users. One more important area of cooperation is cyber security, where IEC collaborates with a variety of partners to promote international best practices. IEC work increases the level of cyber security for health, transport and other essential services, as well as the reliability, continuity and safety of critical infrastructures, such as the electrical grid.

Let us not forget electricity is our core domain. It is the electricity that connects all the components, products, systems that our modern society depends on. Facilitating broad access to electricity and enabling a more sustainable world is our mission. Energy transition is the key. The transition should take the decarbonization of energy production as the aim and the electrification of energy consumption as the path. Digitalization should provide the drive and standardization the foundation to build a clean, safe and efficient modern energy system that can help us to achieve the carbon neutrality target of the Paris Agreement on combatting climate change. IEC work covers all facets of energy generation, transmission, distribution and use. IEC standards and conformity assessment play an important role in promoting electrification, improving energy efficiency and providing clean and sustainable energy to all countries.

In the future, more and more products and technologies will rely on electricity and electronics. Ahead of us, there are still many challenges in the electrical domain such as the use of renewables and energy efficiency.

At the IEC, we are privileged to be able to leverage the unique knowhow, insight and knowledge of thousands of experts representing almost every country and industry in the world. Their expertise in standardization and conformity assessment enable us to adopt new and more agile ways of working. But we must also reach out to organizations that we have never worked with before to ensure that we look at things from every possible angle and that we identify the most efficient, most innovative, and safest solutions.

At this point, I would like to say a very big thank you to my predecessor and good friend, Jim Shannon, for his support and advice during this difficult period. I would also like to thank Jim for his tireless work to identify synergies and opportunities for collaborating with ISO and ITU. Cooperation is a powerful tool in our toolbox that will help us to overcome this emergency and rebuild a safer and more efficient world. The pandemic is presenting us with an opportunity to share our different experiences and approaches for the benefit of society.

Against this backdrop, we are undertaking a high-level review of the current IEC Masterplan, looking at our successes and taking stock of lessons learned. This process will allow us to take corrective action, if and when needed, as well as laying the foundations for the development of a new IEC strategy. Digitalization will be at the heart of our future strategy, just as it will be at the heart of the world's recovery and of tomorrow's economy. This is vital work, but this kind of continuity and future development would not be possible without a stable budget. I would therefore like to thank the IEC Treasurer, Jo Cops, for his exemplary stewardship of IEC finances in these difficult times.

To be ready for future challenges and opportunities, Central Office must integrate more closely with members and must develop a more transparent governance structure. The IEC is investing significant time and effort into developing an IEC governance system that will reflect the changing expectations of all our stakeholders. The IEC Governance Review Task Force has been working intensely and consulting the membership at every step. We are enhancing coordination between the various governing boards and have begun to provide more information about their activities and decisions. IEC National Committees need access to timely information about strategic decisions and they need it to be delivered in the simplest and most efficient way. This project will make the IEC more agile and more responsive to the needs and concerns of the wider IEC community. The open session on governance review on 18 November will be your opportunity to contribute to this very important project. I urge you to take part.

The IEC has shown strength and leadership throughout 2020, not only in its reaction to the global pandemic, but also with its response to the other strategic challenges that we are facing. For this I thank you all. It is an honour for me to be addressing you today as your President. I hope that the next time we meet, it will be in person rather than online.