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The International Organizations for Standardization and Industrialization renew agreement to help developing countries participate in international trade.

International Organization for Standardization, (ISO) Secretary-General Alan Bryden and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) Director-General, Carlos Magariños, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Vienna on Tuesday, 2 December 2003. The agreement updates a working arrangement between the two organizations that has been ongoing at least since the signing of the first MOU in 1979.

ISO Secretary-General Bryden participated in the 10th Session of the UNIDO General Conference, 1 - 5 December 2003, as a panelist on the Round Table *Making Trade Work for the Poor - Stimulating the Real Economy's Response*. It was the first time an ISO Secretary-General has attended a UNIDO General Conference.

"Today, standards and conformity assessment are sometimes mistakenly perceived as creating technical barriers to trade and as being a tool to reconstitute protectionism when tariff barriers are not possible any more," said Mr. Bryden. "A common challenge for UNIDO and ISO is to have standards perceived as the vehicle for socio-economic progress that they are. Standards are really a reservoir of knowledge that includes good practices and technical knowledge. International Standards are precisely the vehicle to assist social and economic and environmental progress."

Standards are a core element in economic development. Today, there are nearly 14 000 ISO standards addressing all economic sectors, covering products, processes, the environment, energy and consumer protection. And the products we see on our supermarket shelves don't get there without meeting one or another of these standards.

"The UNIDO-ISO partnership is a must in our programme to make trade work for the poor" said UNIDO Director-General Magariños. "To assist the developing countries participate in international trade, we have to build capacities along the whole product to market chain. Every link in that chain involves one standard or another. The renewed agreement will provide a framework for us to combine elements of UNIDO's Trade Capacity Building Programme and ISO's Five Year Plan for Developing Countries."

UNIDO has been pleading for interagency collaboration to assist the developing countries, particularly the least developed, participate in international trade. This is a complex and a multidimensional challenge that requires an international multi-agency response involving not only the UN agencies but also other technical partners.