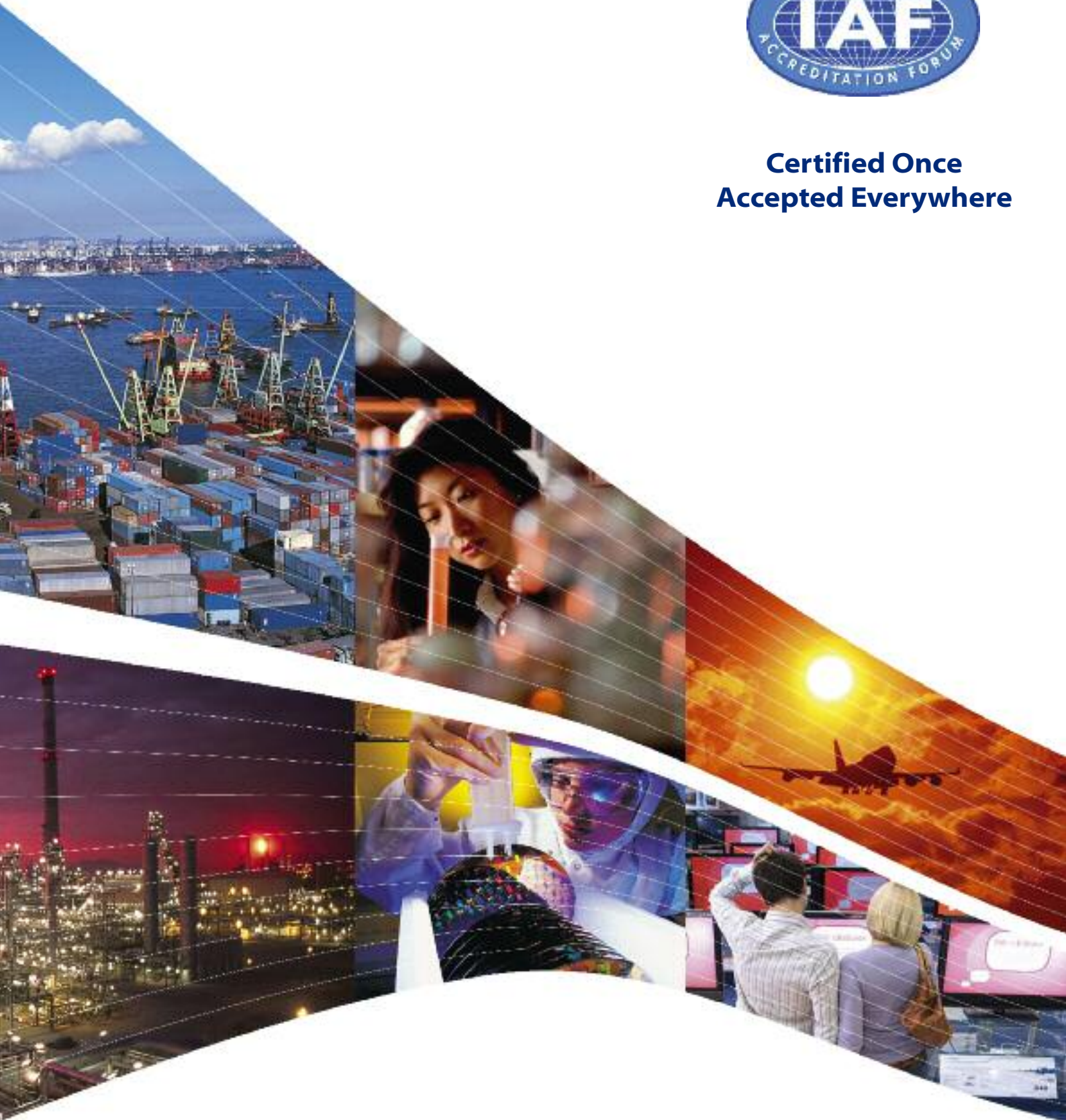




**Certified Once
Accepted Everywhere**



Introduction

The International Accreditation Forum (IAF) is a global association of Accreditation Bodies, Certification Body Associations and other organisations involved in conformity assessment activities in a variety of fields including management systems, products, services and personnel.



History

The IAF was formed from the first meeting of "Organisations that Accredite Quality System Registrars and Certification programs", which was held on 28 January 1993 in Houston, USA. The meeting was attended by representatives from the USA, Mexico, the Netherlands, the UK, Australia/New Zealand, Canada and Japan.

A communiqué was released after that meeting to announce that the IAF had been formed by the represented organisations. The purpose of the IAF was to operate a program for the accreditation of bodies dealing with conformity assessment, in order to ensure that certification of products, processes or services in one region or country should be accepted in other regions or countries. Also, through the program the IAF aimed to ensure that equivalent conformity assessment procedures used by organisations should be developed.

Member organisations engaged in regular discussions to achieve the above goals, seek agreement on the desirability of mutual recognition of each other's accreditation systems and to cooperate with one another in exchanging information and procedures on their accreditation programs.

Later, these meetings would then be identified as being those of the IAF. They were intended to contribute to mutual understanding and to build confidence in the operation of such accreditation programs in the interest of international trade.

The Role & Objectives of IAF

The primary objective of the IAF is to develop a single, worldwide program of conformity assessment, which reduces risk for business and end users by ensuring that accredited certificates and certifications may be relied upon.

Accreditation assures businesses and end users that the Conformity Assessment Body providing certification to a standard has the required competence and impartiality to do so as evidenced by fulfillment of international standards and requirements.

The second purpose of the IAF is to establish Multilateral Recognition Arrangements (MLA) between its accreditation body members. The object of these arrangements, as the name suggests, is to ensure mutual recognition of accredited certification between signatories to the MLA, and subsequently acceptance of accredited certification in many markets based on one accreditation.

The benefits of an MLA to business is that, if standards, specifications and conformity assessment methods are the same, one certificate or certification can be recognized around the world, thus lowering the cost of accredited certification and reducing risk that products or services could be rejected by international trading partners.

The MLA contributes to the freedom of world trade by eliminating technical barriers. IAF works to find the most effective way of achieving a single system to achieve the objective: **Certified once – accepted everywhere.**

The IAF Charter, agreed by members in November 2000, formalises these objectives:

- The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) is an international association of organisations that have agreed to work together on a worldwide basis to achieve common trade facilitation objectives. We are a major world forum for developing the principles and practices for the conduct of conformity assessment that will deliver the confidence needed for market acceptance. We act through the accreditation of those bodies that certify management systems, products, personnel and/or inspection.
- We promote the worldwide acceptance, of certificates of conformity issued by inspection and certification bodies accredited by an Accreditation Body Member of IAF, and seek to add value for all stakeholders through what we do, and through our programs.
- We bring together, on a worldwide basis, partner accreditation bodies and representatives of stakeholder groups that seek to facilitate global trade through the acceptance of accredited certificates of conformity.

- We develop and/or recognize appropriate processes and practices for the conduct of conformity assessment worldwide, and ensure their universal application by IAF Accreditation Body Members and their accredited certification and inspection bodies.
- We consult widely with stakeholders in developing our programs, and we work to deliver the best possible standard of conformity assessment in order to provide our stakeholders with a value added outcome.
- We influence world trade through linking, and working, with other key international organisations and industry groups.



The Importance of Conformity Assessment in a Global Marketplace

Increasing trade freedom and the development of new manufacturing and distribution technologies has facilitated a rapid growth of world trade. Subsequently, this has resulted in the emergence of hundreds of third-party national and multinational conformity assessment bodies.

These organisations examine a huge range of products, materials, installations, plants, processes, work procedures and services, in the private as well as the public sector. They also report on a wide range of parameters including quality, fitness for use and continuing safety in operation.

The overall aim is to reduce the risk to the buyer, owner, user or consumer of the item.



IAF Membership

Membership of the IAF is separated into a number of categories:

Accreditation body membership:

Open to organisations that conduct and administer programs by which they accredit bodies for certification of quality systems, products, services, personnel, environmental management systems, as well as other programs of conformity assessment. Accreditation body members must declare their intention to join the IAF MLA.

Association membership:

Open to organisations or associations that represent a similar group of entities, either internationally or within an economy or region.

Partner membership:

Open to entities representing the interests within an economy, region or internationally, of parts of governments, regulators or of organisations which are not accreditation bodies, but which have an interest in conformity assessment, and which support the objectives of IAF. Partner Members may be invited to participate in the technical work of IAF.

Special Recognition status:

The IAF has the discretion to give special recognition status to organisations that share a common objective with the Corporation. These organisations may be represented and participate at IAF Member meetings, but are not eligible to vote. Special Recognition status may also be granted to Regional groupings where the implementation of the IAF MLA is promoted.

Observer membership:

In cases where the IAF Board of Directors believes it is in the best interests of IAF Members to develop closer relationships with a particular entity, the Board may grant Observer status to such an entity for a period not exceeding one year, but subject to annual renewal.

An Observer Member may be invited to attend any meeting of IAF and/or participate in its technical work, as determined by the Board from time to time. However, Observer Members are not eligible to vote on any matter.

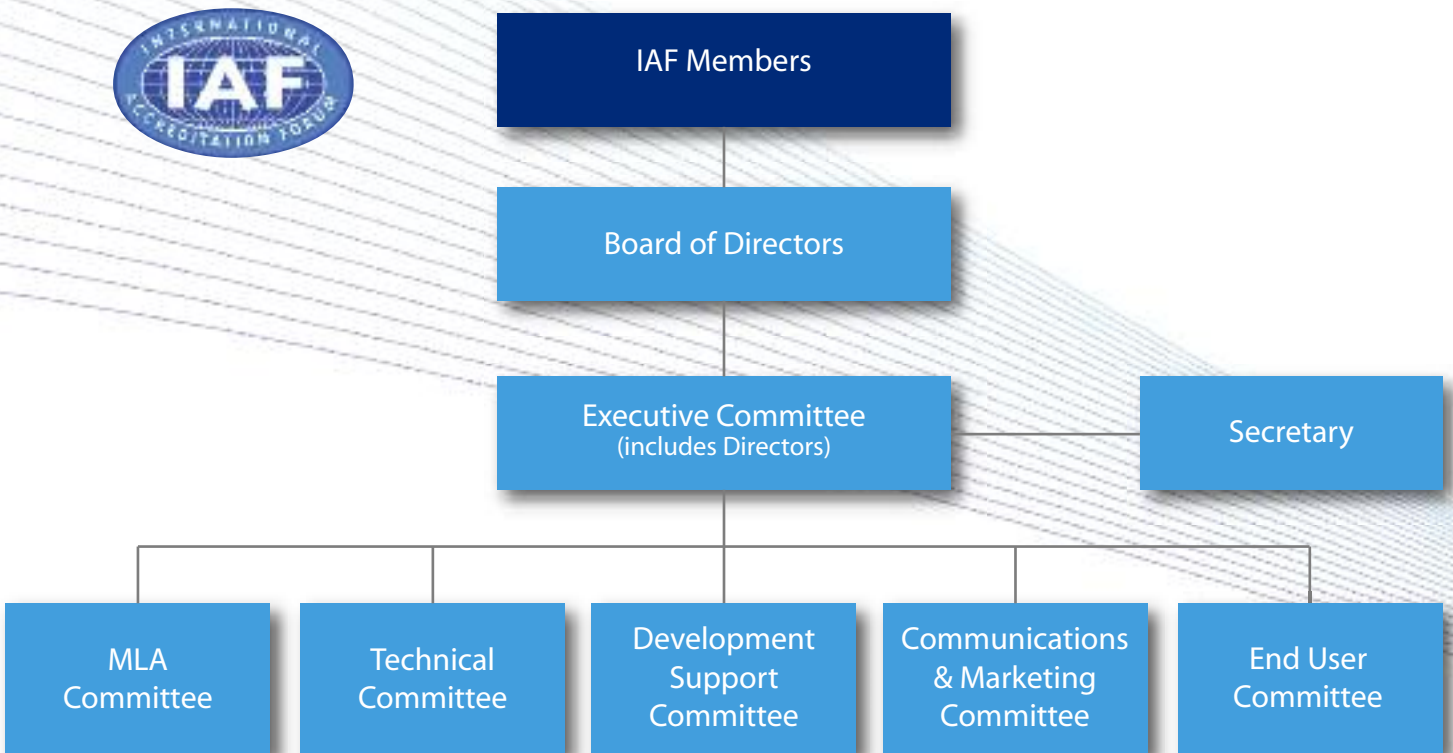


IAF Programs

The IAF has a wide range of programs which are designed to achieve goals which contribute to its two main objectives. The programs fulfill the following functions:

- Develop guidance, rules and procedures for the operation of accreditation, certification and mutual recognition programs
- Ensure that all accreditation body members operate to the highest standards of competence and probity
- Harmonise accreditation procedures and their implementation based on international standards and guides
- Develop guidance, rules and procedures for the operation of specific sector conformity assessment schemes to meet the needs of specific industries
- Develop guidance, rules and procedures for the operation of compliance programs to satisfy regulatory or government requirements
- Exchange information between accreditation bodies
- Cooperate in the training of assessors and other personnel
- Contribute to the work of ISO and other relevant international bodies
- Liaise with the regional groups of accreditation bodies
- Liaise with other relevant bodies such as ILAC, ISO and industry groups
- Assist emerging accreditation bodies in low and medium income economies

Organisational Structure of IAF



The terms of reference, tasks and duties of the Members, the Board of Directors and the Secretary are defined by the Bylaws and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The highest level of authority in IAF is the Members in a General Meeting. General Meetings make decisions and lay down policy in the name of the members.

General meetings are held annually, with hosting shared between accreditation body members. In recent times, the meetings have been held in Kyoto (Japan), Berlin (Germany), Bratislava (Slovakia), Cape Town (South Africa) and Auckland (New Zealand).

The Board is responsible for legal actions to be carried out on behalf of the members,

for developing broad policy directions for IAF and for ensuring that the day-to-day work of IAF is carried out in accordance with policies approved by members.

The Executive Committee is responsible to the Board of Directors for the day-to-day work of IAF on the basis of decisions made by the Members and directions by the Board of Directors.

IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA)

Accreditations granted by IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) accreditation body members are recognised worldwide based on their equivalent accreditation programs, therefore reducing costs and adding value to industry and consumers.

Certificates in the fields of management systems, products, services, personnel and other similar programs of conformity assessment issued by bodies accredited by IAF MLA members are therefore relied upon in international trade.

Without international standards, technical barriers to trade would result in increased costs for importers and consumers, reduced competition and different standards of a product or service.



MLA Signatories

Accreditation body members of IAF are admitted to the MLA only after stringent evaluation of their operations by a peer evaluation team. It is the responsibility of this team to assess that the applicant member complies fully with both the international standards and IAF guidelines.

Once an accreditation body is a member of the MLA it is obligated to recognise the competence and impartiality of accreditations of Conformity Assessment Bodies by all other members of the MLA.

IAF has granted Special Recognition to the MLA programs of three Regional Accreditation Groups, the European co-operation for Accreditation (EA), the Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (PAC) and the InterAmerican Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC), on the basis of the acceptance of the mutual recognition arrangements established within these organisations.

Membership of the IAF MLA is recognised as being satisfied by membership of either the EA MLA, the PAC MLA or the IAAC MLA for recognized programs. IAF members who are also signatories of these regional MLAs are automatically accepted into the IAF MLA for recognized programs.

The IAF MLA for Quality Management Systems (QMS) has been operational since 22 January 1998 when 14 IAF Members signed the Arrangement in Guangzhou, China.

The IAF MLAs for Environmental Management Systems (EMS) and Product Certification became operational at the IAF Annual Meetings held in Cape Town, South Africa in October 2004.

IAF encourages its members to join the MLA, as soon as they have passed a rigorous evaluation process, to ensure that their accreditation programs are of world standard.

The benefit of joining the IAF MLA is that conformity assessment bodies accredited by the members of the MLA will be equally reliable in world wide IAF Programs.

Developing Economies

The IAF provides technical assistance to emerging accreditation bodies in low and medium income economies through its Development Support Program.

It also provides financial assistance to help emerging accreditation bodies, particularly by giving them the means to enable their staff to attend training programs. The program also ensures representation by accreditation bodies of low and medium income economies on the IAF Board.

IAF also encourages membership from accreditation bodies in low and medium income economies in order that they may benefit from the opportunity to participate and interact in IAF meetings and from the technical assistance available to Members.

The IAF Development Support program includes workshops, seminars and specific training programs for the staff members of emerging accreditation bodies. In addition, it provides expert advice and encourages staff from emerging bodies to observe experienced staff from other accreditation bodies conducting assessments in a peer learning environment.

IAF and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) co-operate in operating technical assistance programs for emerging bodies.





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