



## **Governing Body**

310th Session, Geneva, March 2011

GB.310/17/7

# **FOR DEBATE AND GUIDANCE**

SEVENTEENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

## **Report of the Director-General**

### **Seventh Supplementary Report: Further developments in relation to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO)**

#### **Overview**

**Issue covered**

The paper covers recent developments in relation to a new field of activity proposed within the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) concerning human resource management systems.

**Policy implications**

The proposed field of ISO activity potentially concerns a number of issues relevant to the ILO's mandate, international labour standards and areas of ILO action.

**Financial implications**

None proposed.

**Action required**

Paragraph 5.

**References to other Governing Body documents and ILO instruments**

GB.309/18/4, GB.309/18/4(Add.).



1. At its 309th Session, the Governing Body reviewed the request of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) for comments on its proposal to establish a new technical committee to facilitate the development of a management system of standards for the human resource management field “associated with all sectors and industries where human labor is applied”.<sup>1</sup> The Governing Body requested the Office to inform the ISO that the ILO was not in agreement with the proposed activity which would interfere with the work of the ILO and that the ISO should abstain from any further action in the field of human resources management. The Office informed the ISO accordingly by letter of 13 December 2010. In the summary of the Governing Body’s discussion, it was noted that the ISO was becoming, without authority, an alternative body for dealing with issues involving human rights and labour rights rather than dealing, as was its mandate, with certain technical areas of work. The ISO was requested to circulate the ILO’s comments directly to its members in order to provide them with information of relevance to a decision on the proposal.
2. On 2 February 2011, the ISO informed the ILO that the proposal to establish a new field of activity in human resources management had received the requisite approval from its members. At its meeting on 23–24 February 2011, the ISO’s Technical Management Board (TMB) reviewed the results and comments received from the voting members, and the ILO letter of 13 December. The proposal had received 14 votes in favour, six votes against, with five abstentions, and eight member bodies had expressed a willingness to participate actively in the new field of activity. The Central Secretariat explained that it had not sent the voting members the ILO letter since it is the ISO’s practice to ensure that the members base their votes and comments purely on the views of their stakeholders, and not on the view of parties outside their own stakeholder base.
3. On the basis of the voting results, the TMB decided, by a resolution of 24 February 2011, to establish a new technical committee on human resources management and that its US member, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), which had initiated the proposal, should serve as the Committee’s secretariat. Upon review of the ILO’s comments, the TMB requested the ISO Central Secretariat and ANSI “to engage in dialogue with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on how to establish ongoing cooperation between the ILO and the new technical committee”.
4. The field of activity to be addressed by the new Committee concerns a number of issues relevant to the ILO’s mandate, international labour standards and areas of ILO activity, including technical assistance and advisory services. The ISO proposal stated that the work, which was to complement international labour standards in specified areas, would avoid subjects dealing with workers’ and human rights. However, it remains unclear how complementarity can be achieved without addressing fundamental principles and rights at work and other enabling or priority areas. It is also uncertain how to avoid any private standards that may be developed by the ISO serving as a substitute for international labour standards adopted by the ILO through its representative tripartite processes. It is expected that the ISO will approach the Director-General with a view to holding a dialogue on this matter.

<sup>1</sup> ISO TS/P 217, section 7. The proposal is contained in document GB.309/18/4(Add.).

- 5. In the light of its discussion on this issue at its 309th Session and the subsequent decision of the ISO to establish a technical committee on human resources management, the Governing Body is invited to provide guidance for the ILO's response to any ISO request for cooperation on this matter.***

Geneva, 8 March 2011

*Submitted for debate and guidance*