



SECOND ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Technical assistance in the framework of
the Seafarers' Identity Documents
Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185)**

1. At its 288th Session in November 2003, the Governing Body discussed a paper¹ prepared by the Office on the follow-up to the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185), and to the related resolutions adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 91st Session (June 2003). In the paper, the Office referred to urgent action that was needed on two aspects which might influence the decision of governments relating to the early ratification of the Convention. One of these was the development of a global interoperable standard for the "biometric template based on a fingerprint printed as numbers in a bar code" that is required by the Convention. The other was technical cooperation with respect to the implementation of the Convention, including assistance with respect to the biometric standard.
2. The 92nd Session of the International Labour Conference (June 2004), also took note of the resolution concerning technical cooperation relating to seafarers' identity documents (SIDs), adopted by the 91st Session of the Conference at the same time as the Convention. In keeping with this resolution, based on the November 2003 paper referred to above, the Governing Body requested the Director-General to give due priority, in the use of resources allocated to the Organization's technical cooperation programme, to assisting countries with respect to the technology, expertise and process required; and endorsed the follow-up action taken by the Office. The Governing Body, at its 289th Session (March 2004), endorsed the need to provide technical assistance to developing countries in particular to enable them to ratify and implement the Convention and the biometric standard adopted. The ILO, as a consequence, started looking into ways of facilitating an effective implementation of the Convention which would incorporate cost savings, particularly for developing countries, but also for other countries that might wish to join this endeavour.
3. An obvious area for cost savings relates to the choice of equipment to be used for taking the fingerprint and generating the biometric template and bar code or verifying that the bar code corresponds to the fingerprint of the person presenting the identity document. If each ratifying country carried out all the necessary measures to make sure that the equipment correctly followed the standard, there would be a considerable duplication of resources and

¹ GB.288/3/2.

a certain wastage if wrong choices were made. The Office therefore recently organized an online conference of potential vendors of appropriate equipment and producers of the necessary algorithms and sensors. There was significant interest. Ten companies responded to the Office's request for ten pairs of algorithms and hardware which the Office has arranged to be tested for conformity with the standard. Biometric products that are determined to successfully meet the requirements of the test would go on a list which the ILO would make available to all countries intending to issue SIDs in accordance with Convention No. 185.

4. As noted by the International Labour Conference and the Governing Body, the assistance that may be needed by some countries ratifying the Convention would relate to the comprehensive security system required by the Convention, of which the biometric template is simply a part. It would cover not only the production of a modern identity document embodying security features, but also the maintenance of national databases for the document and minimum procedures that would have to be implemented by ratifying countries regarding the production and issuance of the document, including quality control of the system. The Office is at present finalizing plans for assistance to countries in general at the international or regional levels. The ILO is currently developing a model document to be used by its member States for SID issuance as well as for procurement of systems such as enrolment stations, card stock, printer supplies, laminate material, and the equipment required to support seafarer biometric verification such as bar code readers and appropriate software. These plans, provided they receive proper funding, would enable individual countries to benefit, at a much reduced cost, from readily available but specifically developed products, rather than them supporting the costs of individually developing systems. The cost of this kind of assistance will be in the region of US\$1 million.
5. The Office is at present seeking financial assistance for this technical cooperation from a number of potential sources in member States, international and regional financial organizations and other organizations. While a number of these sources have stated that they are considering the request, no response has to date been received. On the other hand, a significant number of countries have expressed interest in receiving the necessary assistance to implement the Convention.
6. On 9 August 2004, a second member State, Jordan, submitted to the ILO Director-General ratification documents relating to Convention No. 185. France was the first country to ratify the Convention. As a consequence, this Convention will enter into force on 9 February 2005. The Government of Nigeria has also ratified it. A number of other countries have indicated that they have taken steps towards ratification.
7. In a world where the continued tightening of security measures in transport, in particular in its structurally international forms, is an inescapable fact, the consequent necessity to dispose, as soon as possible, of a reliable and interoperable system of identification for seafarers, as provided for in the Convention, is a matter of urgency. The global implementation of the Convention depends on wide ratification, which will only be possible if developing countries are able to bear the costs of such an operation.

8. *In the light of the above, the Committee on Sectoral and Technical Meetings and Related Issues may wish to recommend that the Governing Body:*

- (a) confirm the priority that should be given to the planning and financing of the kind of assistance referred to above; and*
- (b) remind member States and other potential donors of the urgent necessity to consider the appeal of the Office to provide assistance in order to enable developing and transition economy countries to ratify and effectively implement Convention No. 185.*

Geneva, 7 September 2004.

Point for decision: Paragraph 8.