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An Exclusive Interview with H.E Sergio Mujica ISO Secretary General January 2024

1. What is the role of ISO in today's world?

We live in a fast-changing, interconnected world that currently faces a number of huge challenges, including the destructive effects of climate change and the risks and opportunities posed by the rapid rise of Al. Responding to these challenges requires urgent and meaningful collaboration and an international approach.

ISO, through its members, brings together experts from around the world to share knowledge and develop voluntary, market-relevant International Standards that drive innovation and provide solutions to global challenges.

2. The name of the International Organization for Standardization is known across the world. How does ISO continue to strengthen its global reach?world?

Collaboration is at the heart of what we do at ISO; we have always taken an inclusive approach to developing and drafting standards. We engage with a diverse range of international stakeholders, including consumers, businesses, regulators and policymakers, of different backgrounds, nationalities and genders, to develop standards that are consensus-based and global in their reach. This approach transcends national borders while providing economic, environmental and social benefits.

In drawing on the expertise of our 169 national standards bodies, across every sector imaginable – from Al to healthcare management, from sustainable tourism to smart farming – we ensure that everyone has a voice and no-one is left behind.







3. What is the importance of standards for global trade and economic prosperity?

One of the main benefits of International Standards is that they facilitate the flow of international trade, ensuring products are readily accepted in global markets. International Standards are recognized as an important policy tool by the World Trade Organization (WTO), whose Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) encourages its member countries to use International Standards, such as those developed by ISO, as a basis for their national standards and regulations.

The advantages of using International Standards as the foundation of trade policy are countless. First and foremost, they provide clarity by defining and quantifying terms or concepts in the marketplace. Furthermore, they offer the flexibility to accommodate diverse national contexts and adapt to the unique cultural and economic needs of individual countries. And, by establishing the regulatory framework for fair competition, International Standards level the playing field for businesses and economies worldwide.

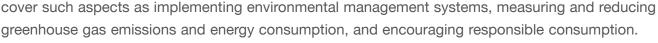
4. What are the economic, social and environmental benefits of ISO standards?

By supporting our members to maximize the benefits of international standardization and ensure the uptake of ISO standards, ISO is helping to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our standards provide effective tools to help organizations and companies looking to contribute to the SDGs rise to this challenge.

ISO standards play an essential role in making these development goals a reality, as they support the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

Firstly, they promote economic sustainability by facilitating international trade, improving countries' national quality infrastructure and supporting sustainable business practices, including everything from smart farming methods to anti-bribery management systems.

Secondly, our standards promote social sustainability by helping countries and communities to improve the health and well-being of their citizens. They cover all aspects of social welfare, from healthcare systems and related products to social inclusion and accessibility. Finally, ISO standards promote environmental sustainability by helping businesses and countries manage their environmental impact. They







5. How many standards has ISO published since its establishment? Which sectors are the most prominent?

Since ISO's inception in 1947 it has published 47,000 standards. There are currently over 27,000 active documents in our portfolio, of which over 24,000 are full International Standards. The most prominent sectors in terms of number of documents are information technology, mechanical engineering and transport.



6. Does ISO verify the application of standards?

At ISO, we develop International Standards, but we are not involved in their implementation; this is performed by external parties such as certification bodies, testing laboratories and accreditation bodies. This separation is necessary to ensure standards are developed in an impartial manner. Thus, a company's management system cannot be certified by ISO.

However, we do care about the application of our standards, which is key to making sure that they remain market driven. There are different mechanisms in ISO for doing this, such as the different partnerships and MOUs we have with a number of organizations involved in conformity assessment, our stakeholder engagement with members and their markets, and the research we carry out on the impact of standards on economies.

In addition, ISO's Committee on Conformity Assessment (CASCO) develops standards for conformity assessment that are used and recognized internationally. It promotes recognition and broad acceptance of international, regional and national conformity assessment systems, and appropriate use of International Standards and other documents for conformity assessment.





7. In addition to International Standards, what other deliverables does ISO publish? Do any of these documents include mandatory regulations?

Although ISO is primarily known for our International Standards, we do publish a number of other deliverables, including Technical Specifications (TS), Technical Reports (TR) and Publicly Available Specifications (PAS).

International Workshop Agreements (IWA) are prepared through a workshop mechanism outside of ISO committee structures to respond to urgent market requirements. They follow a procedure that ensures the broadest range of relevant interested parties worldwide have the opportunity to participate. Such notable publications as our Net Zero Guidelines and the forthcoming work on sustainable critical mineral supply chains have been developed as IWAs.

Finally, we also publish Guides, which help readers understand more about the main areas where standards add value.

ISO standards are voluntary and do not take precedence over regulation. However, International Standards play a significant role in shaping and influencing public policy across various domains. They provide the guidelines and best practices that help harmonize methods, ensure consistency and promote cooperation between stakeholders and across borders. International Standards are referenced in regulations.

ISO's "Standards and public policy" toolkit is intended to provide policymakers with practical guidance on how to incorporate ISO standards in their decision-making processes. It offers a framework of how International Standards can support policymakers and regulators in preparing, adopting and applying policy and, in particular, technical regulations.



8. How do you evaluate the relationship between ISO and GSO?

In 2020 the ISO Council approved the ISO Regional Engagement Policy (REP), which recognizes the value that regional standards organizations (RSOs) bring to the ISO system and acts as a basis for engaging with these organizations.

RSOs are closer than ISO/CS to ISO members in their region geographically, culturally and linguistically; therefore, forging and maintaining effective, strategic and beneficial partnerships with regional and sub-regional standards organizations will lead to greater engagement by ISO members.

ISO and GSO have enjoyed a long and fruitful partnership marked by active engagement and sharing of resources. In recent years we have been honoured to welcome GSO as our guests at ISO/CS in Geneva and have seen GSO participate in a number of ISO events, including the Annual Meeting. Early this year I chose GSO for my first official trip of 2024, reflecting the importance of this relationship to me personally and to ISO as a whole.

We look forward to strengthening our collaboration with GSO over the coming years as we focus on the SDGs, digital transformation and climate action, among other vital topics.





9. The cooperation between ISO and GSO is characterized by growth in many areas. What are the most prominent areas of cooperation between the two organizations? are the most prominent?

The cooperation between our two organizations is enshrined in an MoU, which enables the sharing of metadata and access to ISO standards for GSO, among other things. This cooperation can be summarized by three main elements:

Firstly, we jointly develop capacity-building training plans, with ISO providing international trainers to carry out various training activities and co-funding with GSO the participation of the nominated candidates or trainees from the Arab region. Secondly, the MoU enables GSO through its ISO members to contribute to the translation of ISO standards through the ATMG (Arab Translation Management Group). GSO also develops previews and adoption sheets to facilitate adoption of ISO standards by its members. Finally, ISO encourages the participation of experts from its members in GCC countries in its standards development process.

ISO also acknowledges GSO's harmonization of their strategy with ISO's strategy 2030, which aims to make lives easier, safer and better.







10. What is the importance of increasing both the use of International Standards in the GCC region and the involvement of GSO member countries in the standards development process?

For all common market arrangements, removing any barriers that hinder the free movement of goods, services and people is paramount. In line with WTO recommendations, the GCC should embrace the use of International Standards to eliminate unnecessary technical barriers to trade.

Scaling up the use of International Standards is central to achieving the objectives of the GCC common market, as this will help promote fair trade and industrialization and increase the competitiveness of goods produced by member countries. It can also help with the development of public policy and regulation in the GCC region.

Standardization is a crucial element of national and regional quality infrastructure, alongside metrology and accreditation. Strengthening this quality infrastructure through increased involvement in standards development will have benefits for international trade and ultimately economic development.

ISO calls on all GSO member states to actively participate in our standards development process in order to have a voice in the world of standardization. We would strongly encourage national standards bodies to become full members in order to enjoy the full benefits of the ISO system, such as developing standards and policy, selling ISO deliverables and participating in ISO governance.

Of the GSO members, SASO is currently on the ISO council and also participates in the DEVCO CAG. My hope is that more GSO members are inspired to become involved in ISO at governance level.

By working closely with GSO to promote the use of standards and enabling our members in the GCC region to engage with the ISO system, we can help to accelerate the economic, social and environmental benefits in these countries. Furthermore, we can meet our goals of ISO standards used everywhere, meeting global needs and all voices heard.

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