

High-level webinar: IOs and their Members facing the Global Crisis Together

Statement by Dr Martin Milton, Director of the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM - *Bureau International des Poids et Mesures*)

The BIPM is the intergovernmental organization through which Member States act together on matters related to measurement science and measurement standards. It was founded in Paris in 1875 by the signature of the Metre Convention. We currently have 62 Member States and 40 Associate States and Economies.

The organisation was originally founded to develop and distribute the original measurement standards for the metre and the kilogram. Since that time, our work has expanded greatly to coordinate the equivalence of measurements made using the SI units (International System of Units/Système International d'Unités) for all applications.

We work through the National Metrology Institutes (the NMIs) established in the Member States. Each country has its own NMI, and some countries have more than one, hence there is a global network of more than 250 national institutes in more than 100 countries that are involved in ensuring that measurements are fit for purpose and can be the basis for industry and trade, for science and policy making. Their work is made transparent through the Mutual Recognition Arrangements organised by our supervisory body (the CIPM – International Committee for Weights and Measures). This is based on rigorous peer-review of published technical evidence.

One of the areas where we have been most active in recent years has been in providing the basis for comparable measurements for use in chemistry and biology. These support many important global issues including the assurance of food safety, the monitoring of the global climate and supporting testing in the healthcare sector.

Since February this year, there has been an enormous extra demand for these measurements to establish globally comparable measurements of the SARS-COV-2 virus. National Institutes from more than a dozen Member States around the world have launched a new study with the goal of supporting globally-standardized testing. The ability to measure nucleic acids reproducibly is crucial for COVID-19 molecular testing which detects the genetic material (RNA) of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2).

This work will allow high-accuracy quantification of the biological reference standards that can support diagnostic manufacturers and ensure the quality of routine testing as it takes place in hospitals and laboratories around the world. International standardization of these tests will enable meaningful exchange of information between countries and government agencies and ensures its suitability for their decision-making.

Another way we bring together international organisations in the healthcare sector is through the Joint Committee for Traceability in Laboratory Medicine (the JCTLM). This is an international collaboration overseen by the BIPM, the ILAC (International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation), the IFCC (International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine) and the ICSH (International Council for Standardization in Haematology). One of their principle activities is to maintain a database of reference services and materials that manufacturers in the in-vitro diagnostics industry can use to meet regulatory requirements for testing in laboratory medicine.

Triggered by the global pandemic, this collaboration has acted to share information on new developments aiming to improve the "reliability of measurements in COVID-19 diagnostics". It has organised Webinars led by world experts in the field, sharing their experience on activities that ensure the reliability of measurements.

The third activity that I want to highlight today is to set up a repository on our webpages of information from 30 Member and Associate States about specific technical projects, sources of financial assistance and a summary of their activities to address the COVID-19 pandemic. These are examples of how the work of the NMIs is supporting the fight against the pandemic – for example, by applying expertise in measurement science to assist with the development of personal protection equipment, medical devices, certified reference materials or where they have joined efforts in the search for a vaccine. This is an excellent example of how we as an IO play a role in sharing information amongst Member States.

I have focussed in this short summary on our work to coordinate the work of NMIs in Member States and Associates. The main mechanism by which they have impact on industry, trade and science is through what we call the national quality infrastructure. We have been very pleased to be able to give international visibility to the work of quality infrastructure through INetQI which is the International Network on Quality Infrastructure. It seeks to bring together all specialized organizations that operate at an international level and that are active in promoting and implementing Quality Infrastructure activities as a tool for sustainable economic development; this includes the work of organisations in: metrology, accreditation, standardization and conformity assessment.

Of course, this pandemic came at a time when IOs, like all organisations, were planning a digital transformation in their services and activities. We are no exception. We have brought forward plans to allow automated machine-readable access to the information on our databases and of course to allow remote access to all our meetings. An unexpected benefit of this has been that whilst meetings held in-person are inevitably limited to a maximum number of participants; we have been able to hold on-line meetings that include many more participants from our stakeholder organisations.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the work of the OECD; particularly for the Compendium of International Organisations' Practices for Effective International Rulemaking currently being developed collectively. It will use examples from the BIPM and INetQI and from many other IOs to highlight how we work better together and how we can learn from each other about best practices as we go forward. We are also pleased to share with SIECA the role of the focal point of the Working Group on Coordination of the IO Partnership that works to better tailor the specific needs of IOs and address more in-depth coordination issues.

I would like to give our full support for the Joint Statement from the Secretariats of the International Organisations of the "IO Partnership" that will be endorsed this afternoon and which reaffirms a collective commitment to ensuring the inclusiveness, quality and impact of international rules and standards.