

REQUEST FOR OBSERVER STATUS BY THE INTERNATIONAL LABORATORY  
ACCREDITATION COOPERATION (ILAC)

The following communication has been received from the Chairman of the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) requesting observer status in the WTO Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade.

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1. ILAC is an international cooperation between national laboratory accreditation bodies with membership being open to both governmental and private sector organizations, although the nature of the work is such that the majority of the members are government bodies or agencies. Currently, there are forty-three Full Members (operational bodies) and six Associate Members (newly created accreditation bodies). Almost all ILAC members are from WTO Member countries.
  2. The first ILAC conference was held in 1977 in response to the discussions taking place within GATT in the formulation of the original Standards Code. During the early conferences the principal objectives of ILAC were formulated and these included ILAC's role in trade facilitation through elimination of testing as a trade barrier.
  3. The ILAC approach is to provide networks (eventually a single network) of mutual recognition agreements between ILAC members in which credibility of test data generated in accredited laboratories could be assured, irrespective of their location. Of course, the credibility of the accreditation process is a pre-requisite for the attainment of this objective and this would be achieved by the rigorous application of common, internationally agreed, standards and practices.
  4. There are a number of subsidiary objectives which are really means to this end and these focus on developing the essential documentation and training for its implementation. There is also some attention paid to domestic issues such as improving testing and measurement capability to meet national needs.
  5. Clearly, ILAC is vitally concerned with the deliberations within the WTO TBT Committee, particularly with respect to the issue of acceptance, or otherwise, of test reports and test data.
  6. WTO has had a standing invitation to attend ILAC conferences and to participate in its committee activities. Over the years, a number of senior GATT and, more recently, WTO staff have accepted these invitations. Under the new ILAC rules, currently being finalized, bodies such as WTO will be offered certain rights of participation in ILAC so that we can be more aware of developments within the WTO, and other organizations in which we may be able to make a useful contribution to their work.

7. ILAC also submits that it is an organization possessing certain technical expertise which the TBT Committee may find useful. For instance, ILAC was pleased to make a presentation of its work and role to a briefing session of the Committee in October 1997 and we would expect that ILAC would be able to provide similar inputs in the future. Participation as an observer in the continuing deliberations of the Committee would certainly enhance our understanding of your work and make us better prepared to make substantial contributions when requested.

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