

**FOR INFORMATION**

SEVENTEENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Report of the Director-General**Third Supplementary Report: Follow-up
to the Seafarers' Identity Documents
Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185)**

1. Since the International Labour Conference adopted the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185) in June 2003, there have been 14 ratifications and one declaration of provisional application by ILO Members. Issuance of Seafarers' Identity Documents (SIDs) has been limited and border security and seafarers' rights have suffered from the fact that the regime under the previous Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention, 1958 (No. 108) does not offer the same level of reliability as the documents issued under Convention No. 185, which has led to additional checking requirements for seafarers presenting these documents.
2. In order to encourage a more widespread ratification of Convention No. 185, and provision of the requisite facilities to seafarers, the Office has approached individual governments to highlight the benefits of SIDs issued under Convention No. 185, particularly as compared with those issued under Convention No. 108, and to address any issues that could hinder widespread ratification. Detailed technical guidance¹ has been provided to assist with the deployment of SID issuance systems complying with the requirements of Convention No. 185, and assistance has been sought from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) to ensure that the technical implementation of Convention No. 185 is secure, simple and internationally interoperable. Substantial progress has been made.
3. Initial concerns were raised about the difficulty of implementing biometrics, especially in an interoperable manner when seafarers would be enrolled in different countries using different technologies. The ILO organized biometric interoperability tests in 2004,² 2005,³ 2006,⁴ and 2008⁵ and that so far 12 biometric products from manufacturers in

¹ GB.294/16/3.

² GB.292/16/2.

³ GB.292/16/2(Add.).

⁴ GB.297/19/6.

⁵ GB.304/14/9.

eight different countries have been found to comply with the relevant requirements of Convention No. 185 and the related standard (ILO SID-0002), adopted by the Governing Body in 2004. The interoperability tests have been independently reviewed by an experts' group provided by the Joint Technical Committee (JTC-1) of the ISO and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), and there is now no doubt that a wide variety of biometric systems are available to be used with SIDs and all of them are proven to be interoperable.

4. Some border agencies had reservations about Convention No. 185 because of the technology used in the SID (the two-dimensional bar code) and its compatibility with existing border control infrastructure and with the new infrastructure being created to support chip-enabled "e-passports". There was also confusion about the status of the SID as a travel document. The Office has now developed a brochure entitled *International Labour Organization Seafarers' Identity Document: A tool for improved border security*. This explains how two-dimensional bar codes can be read by existing full-page passport readers and how the SID under Convention No. 185 can be fully integrated into existing border control document checking processes. Discussions between the Office and the ICAO secretariat are also taking place to make clear the nature of the SID as a stand-alone identity document and not a passport, and thus avoid previous perceptions of incompatibility with the ICAO standards for machine-readable travel documents.
5. On 25 July 2009, the ISO and the IEC approved *ISO/IEC 24713-3 Information technology – Biometric profiles for interoperability and data interchange – Part 3: Biometrics based verification and identification of seafarers*. This international standard has been in preparation since 2004 in response to an ILO request for technical assistance from the ISO. The vote to approve this document was unanimous, reflecting the strong support for a biometric-enabled SID among national bodies participating in JTC-1. International standards experts now believe that there are technically feasible means of deploying an international system of biometric-enabled SIDs which can be both convenient and secure.
6. The ISO/IEC 24713-3 standard is completely technically compatible with ILO Convention No. 185 but addresses, through the use of multiple other technical standards, some of the complex details that will arise once SIDs are issued by a large number of different competent authorities and are verified by port and border control authorities around the world. This includes additional details in the standardization of the bar-code content, the biometric data, the national databases and the infrastructure needed for communication between different issuing authorities and those who may wish to verify the authenticity of a SID. One of the most significant enhancements suggested by this standard is the use of an optional digital signature block at the end of the data in the two-dimensional barcode to allow automated verification of a document's authenticity. Another is the creation of a focal point to coordinate secure communications between each verification point (usually a border control station at an air or sea port) and the national electronic databases of all the SID-issuing authorities. This would allow automated electronic verification of SIDs and greatly reduce the burden of maintaining the 24/7 national focal points required by Convention No. 185.
7. The Office plans to organize a meeting of governments from member States that have ratified Convention No. 185 or which are seriously considering ratification, along with representatives from the International Shipping Federation and the International Transport Workers' Federation. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss the details of the new ISO/IEC 24713-3 standard and consider whether its technical recommendations should be followed. Specifically, the question of how to organize the focal point coordination centre and whether or not its benefits outweigh its costs will be discussed. On the basis of the outcome of this meeting, a series of proposals will be prepared for the Governing Body that will address the ways in which the ILO should respond to the ISO/IEC 24713-3

document and the infrastructure which it recommends for facilitating the implementation of Convention No. 185.

8. Given the significant event of a unanimous vote by the ISO/IEC JTC-1 national bodies in support of a standard to facilitate Convention No. 185 and the cooperation of the International Maritime Organization and the ICAO, it seems that momentum is building beyond traditional ILO participants for a secure, biometric means of identifying seafarers. Convention No. 185 provides this, whereas Convention No. 108 did not. This is why all Members are being encouraged to move forward with their ratification of Convention No. 185 and issuance of biometric-enabled SIDs as specified in the Convention.

Geneva, 12 October 2009.

Submitted for information.