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Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)

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**SECRETARIAT REVIEW OF UN/EDIFACT
2 April 2004**

Note by the secretariat

As part of its ongoing efforts to improve its work, the secretariat periodically evaluates projects that it participates in. In this context, during 2003, the secretariat undertook a brief review of the maintenance of UN/EDIFACT and is presenting the results **for information**.

Introduction

1. The Working Party on Facilitation of International Trade Procedures (WP.4), agreed in the 1980's to the revision of its programme of work "Exchange of trade data by means other than paper documents; trade data interchange protocols" by the addition of the programme element "Development of UN/EDIFACT Standardized Messages (UNSM)" to complete and maintain the United Nations Trade Data Interchange Directory (UNTDID).

2. A first set of interchange rules was developed and published in 1981 in the form of "Guidelines for Trade Data Interchange" (GTDI) which offered potential users a basis for developing their systems. Later on, in the light of experience gained by the many users of GTDI and various projects under way at the time, the Guidelines were enhanced with a view to permitting their wider acceptance.

3. The next stage in the work towards a common universal set of interchange rules for trade data was a reconciliation, carried out by a joint European/North American ad hoc Group, known as UN-JEDI, commissioned by WP.4, to bring together the enhanced GTDI and a set of standards for Electronic Business Data Interchange developed in the United States. The recommendations of the UN-JEDI Group were agreed by the Working Party at its September 1986 session. They led to the development of the United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT) syntax rules, which are incorporated in Part 4 of the present Trade Data Interchange Directory (UNTDID).

5. The electronic transfer of data in a structured format received growing attention and, in 1987, the UN/EDIFACT standard (United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport) was approved.

Definition of UN/EDIFACT

6. At its meeting 1990-03, Working Party 4 agreed on the following definition of UN/EDIFACT: the United Nations rules for Electronic Data Interchange For Administration, Commerce and Transport comprise a set of internationally agreed standards, directories and guidelines for the electronic interchange of structured data, and, in particular, that related to trade in goods and services between independent, computerized information systems.

7. The UNECE Recommendation aims at coordinated actions by governments for the introduction of UN/EDIFACT as a single international standard for the electronic interchange of data (EDI) between public administrations and private companies of all economic sectors worldwide.

8. Since then, updated UN/EDIFACT directories have been issued twice a year containing messages from a wide range of economic sectors. They provide a framework for recommended actions to secure that EDI technologies and organizational processes evolve together for worldwide use in administration, commerce, transport, and to avoid the multiplication of circumscribed "islands" of EDI applications, different from each other, which may amount to as many non-tariff barriers.

9. The current report is based on the information contained in the latest update of UN/EDIFACT (version D03.B) issued 20 January 2004, which is available for download from the UNECE Web Server.

The table below shows the number of requests received every 6 months for updating the UN/EDIFACT since 2001:

DMRs	D.01A	D.01B	D.01C	D.02A	D.02B	D.03A	D.03B	Total
Approved	1.718	156	240	409	161	354	18	3.056
Postponed					3	5	2	10
Withdrawn								0
Rejected					13			13
								0
Total	1.718	156	240	409	177	359	20	3.079

UN/EDIFACT database

10. The UN/EDIFACT database contains 207 messages, with a total of 30.191 components.

Analysis of Internet hits

11. The secretariat carried out an analysis of hits on the UNECE website in March 2004. UN/EDIFACT alone received approximately 51.000 hits, which corresponds to 9% of the total hits to the most visited pages of the UNECE Website (560.000). It is important to note that the number of visitors to UN/EDIFACT pages is approximately 10% of the total visitors to all UNECE pages.

12. An average of 4.500 downloads were made each month in 2003. To give an example, 4,500 is about 12.7 % of the total number of downloads for the entire UNECE website during December 2003, which was 354.000. However, these values are higher in the months immediately following the publication of UN/EDIFACT directories.

Organizations using UN/EDIFACT

13. Some of the most important users of UN/EDIFACT include the following user groups:

- Governmental organizations
- Finance, Banking and Insurance
- Transport
- Healthcare
- Industry
- Travel, Tourism and Leisure
- Architecture, Engineering and Construction

Evaluation

14. Based on the above review and the secretariat's experiences during the last year, two activities should be undertaken to improve the operational aspects of UN/EDIFACT:

14.1 The transmission of the DMRs revised at the Forum meeting (ATG) should be provided to the Secretariat with the content and format agreed and according to the schedule defined.

14.2 The remote audit procedure (Directory Audit Team) dates should be clearly defined in advance (the beginning and end) in a similar way as it was when the procedure was done in person in Geneva.