



IAF MLA Document

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GUIDANCE FOR RESPONDING TO INQUIRIES ON IAF MLA SIGNATORY EQUIVALENCE AND ON THE ACCEPTANCE OF CERTIFICATION DOCUMENTS

Issue 2

(IAF ML 3:2012)

The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) details criteria for the accreditation of bodies that provide conformity assessment services, and such accreditation facilitates trade and reduces demands for multiple conformity assessment activities.

Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring that accredited Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) are competent to carry out the work they undertake within their scope of accreditation. Accreditation Bodies (ABs) that are members of IAF and the CABs they accredit are required to comply with appropriate international standards and the applicable IAF application documents for the consistent application of those standards.

ABs that are signatories to the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) are evaluated regularly by an appointed team of peers to provide confidence in the operation of their accreditation programs. The structure and scope of the IAF MLA is detailed in IAF PR 4 - Structure of IAF MLA and Endorsed Normative Documents.

The IAF MLA is structured in five levels: Level 1 specifies mandatory criteria that apply to all ABs, ISO/IEC 17011. The combination of a Level 2 activity(ies) and the corresponding Level 3 normative document(s) is called the main scope of the MLA, and the combination of Level 4 (if applicable) and Level 5 relevant normative documents is called a sub-scope of the MLA.

- Main scope of the MLA includes activities e.g. product certification and associated mandatory documents e.g. ISO/IEC Guide 65. The attestations made by CABs at the main scope level are considered to be equally reliable.
- Sub scope of the MLA includes conformity assessment requirements e.g. ISO 9001 and scheme specific requirements, where applicable, e.g. ISO TS 22003. The attestations made by CABs at the sub scope level are considered to be equivalent.

The IAF MLA delivers the confidence needed for market acceptance of conformity assessment outcomes. An attestation issued, within the scope of the IAF MLA, by a body that is accredited by an IAF MLA signatory AB can be recognized worldwide, thereby facilitating international trade.

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SIGNATORY EQUIVALENCE AND ON ACCEPTANCE OF
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CONTENTS

1.	Scope	5
2.	References	5
3.	Guidance	5

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**GUIDANCE FOR RESPONDING TO INQUIRIES ON IAF MLA SIGNATORY
EQUIVALENCE AND ON ACCEPTANCE OF CERTIFICATION DOCUMENTS****1. SCOPE**

1.1 This document provides guidance that should be used by IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) signatories and other IAF members, as appropriate, to respond to inquiries regarding the equivalence of accreditations of IAF MLA signatories and on acceptance of certification documents.

Note: Certification document is a generic term used in this publication that describes the formal document, such as a letter or a certificate issued by an accredited certification body. The certification document is where the accredited certification body attests that the product including processes or services, system or person, fulfills the requirements contained in the identified standard or normative document.

2. REFERENCES

- 2.1 IAF PL6 – IAF Memorandum of Understanding
- 2.2 IAF ML4 – Policies and Procedures for a Multilateral Recognition Arrangement on the Level of Single Accreditation Bodies and on the Level of Regional Groups
- 2.3 IAF/ILAC A2 IAF/ILAC – Multi-Lateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements (Arrangements) – Requirements and Procedures for Evaluation of a Single Accreditation Body
- 2.4 IAF PR4 – Structure of the IAF MLA and List of IAF Endorsed Normative Documents

Note: Available on the IAF Website at www.iaf.nu under Publications

3. GUIDANCE

3.1 IAF/ILAC A2 section 2, clause 2.2.1.6, requires accreditation bodies to have a program to promote the Arrangement with major stakeholders. The IAF MLA as specified in IAF ML 4 requires signatories to:

- recognize the operation of the other participating bodies as providing equivalent outcomes within the same scope of the MLA; and
- recommend and promote the acceptance of the certification document that bears a participating accreditation body's symbol (preferably in association with the IAF MLA Mark), and is within the scope of the MLA, as being on an equal basis with those of its own accredited bodies.

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IAF MLA signatories and other IAF Members should take into account this IAF guidance when responding to inquiries on the equivalence of accreditations of IAF MLA signatories and on acceptance of certification documents.

3.2 The approach and content of IAF MLA signatories and other IAF Member's responses may vary depending on the nature of the inquiry and the level of knowledge of the inquirer. In many cases, IAF MLA signatories and other IAF Members receive inquiries by phone and the inquirer is often satisfied with a response by phone. In other cases, an inquirer may request a written response with an explanation of IAF MLA signatory equivalence.

3.3. As appropriate, the response may need to contain one or more of the following elements:

3.3.1. Brief description of IAF and the purpose of the IAF MLA.

Example: The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) is an international association of accreditation bodies and other interested stakeholders that aims to facilitate international trade by working to remove barriers that may result from marketplace demands for specific certifications. To accomplish this objective, the IAF has established a Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA). IAF accreditation body members are allowed to sign the IAF MLA only following the successful completion of a peer evaluation process. The purpose of the IAF MLA is to ensure that the certification documents issued by Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) accredited by IAF MLA signatories are the result of competently conducted conformity assessment activities. Each IAF MLA signatory recognizes the operation of the other signatories as providing equivalent outcomes within the same scope of the MLA. Each IAF MLA signatory also recommends and promotes the acceptance of certification documents that bear an IAF signatory accreditation symbol (preferably in association with the IAF MLA Mark) and are being issued within the scope of the MLA.

3.3.2. Brief description of the peer evaluation process that is used to provide confidence in the competence of accreditation activities of other IAF MLA signatories.

Example: Accreditation body members of IAF are admitted to the IAF MLA only after a rigorous and stringent evaluation of their operations by a peer evaluation team. The peer evaluation team is charged with ensuring that the applicant member complies fully with both the international standards and relevant IAF application documents. These peer evaluations and the formal monitoring and re-evaluations of each member are designed to ensure that all the members of the IAF MLA operate their accreditation systems in a competent and equivalent manner.

3.3.3. A statement regarding the accreditation activities or scope covered by the IAF MLA.

3.3.3.1 Example for cases where the IAF MLA covers only the levels 1, 2 and 3 (refer to the MLA structure in PR4):

Note: As the main scope does not include the conformity assessment scheme requirements, Levels 4 & 5 e.g. ISO TS 22003 and ISO 22000, equivalence of certification documents cannot be claimed. In this situation, certification documents can be claimed to be equally reliable as the CAB has been deemed to comply with Level 3, e.g. ISO/IEC 17021 requirements. However, if required, accreditation body attestations can be claimed as being equivalent.

We, as well as "NAME of AB", are both signatories to IAF MLA for the accreditation of TYPE OF CAB. As IAF MLA signatories, both accreditation bodies and TYPE OF CAB they accredit are required to operate in a competent manner and in accordance with appropriate international standards and associated IAF application documents. TYPE OF CAB accredited by both organizations must be competent to conduct conformity assessments to the appropriate normative document, in accordance with applicable international standards. As a consequence of the above, we recognise the accreditation granted by 'NAME OF AB' as being equivalent to our own and that certificates that bear the 'NAME OF

AB' accreditation symbol are equally reliable to certificates issued by CAB's accredited by ourselves.

Note: The "TYPE OF CAB" should relate to the actual enquiry. In the case of main scope, an example would be "certification bodies providing product certification services. An example for sub-scope would be certification bodies certifying management systems to ISO 9001.

3.3.3.2 Example for cases where the IAF MLA covers the 4th and 5th levels:

We, as well as "NAME OF AB", are both signatories to the IAF MLA for the accreditation of TYPE OF CAB. As IAF MLA signatories, both accreditation bodies and TYPE OF CAB they accredit are required to operate in a competent manner and in accordance with appropriate international standards and associated IAF application documents. As a consequence, we recognize that certification documents that bear "NAME OF AB" accreditation symbol (preferably in association with the IAF MLA Mark), issued by a TYPE OF CAB accredited by "NAME OF AB", are equivalent as certification documents issued by a TYPE OF CAB accredited by ourselves.

3.3.4. A statement as to whether the activity identified in the inquiry is included within the scope of the IAF MLA.

Example: The CAB that has issued the subject certification document is accredited by "NAME OF AB", which is a signatory to the IAF MLA. The certification document has been issued within "NAME OF AB" scope of the IAF MLA.

or

Example: The ISO 9001:2008 certification document bears the "NAME OF AB" accreditation symbol and the IAF MLA Mark which indicates that

the certification document has been issued by a CAB that is accredited by an IAF MLA signatory with the appropriate scope to the IAF MLA.

or

Example: The subject certification document has been issued by NAME OF CAB which is accredited by an IAF MLA signatory and issued within NAME OF AB scope of the IAF MLA.

3.3.5. A reference to the IAF website for additional information on the IAF MLA.

Example: Additional information on IAF, the IAF MLA, as well as a list of IAF MLA Signatories is available at: <http://www.iaf.nu>

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Further Information

For further Information on this document or other IAF documents, contact any member of IAF or the IAF Secretariat.

For contact details of members of IAF see - IAF Web Site - <<http://www.iaf.nu>>

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