



DITC/MISC/2013/1
(13/19ams)

**Briefing Session on the Conference Launching the United Nations Forum on Sustainability
Standards for United Nations and World Trade Organization Delegates**

**18 February 2013, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Room XXVII, Palais des Nations**

Voluntary sustainability standards, also known as private standards, deal with occupational safety, environmental, economic, social or animal welfare issues. They have become a critical issue in international trade and the promotion of sustainable development strategies. Against this background, five United Nations bodies, comprising the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Trade Centre, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and UNCTAD, have come together to prepare the launching of the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards, based on existing mandates. The Forum will be a platform providing information, analysis and capacity-building assistance on these standards, with a particular focus on their potential value as tools for developing countries to achieve specific sustainable development goals. It will also address potential trade or development obstacles that these standards may create, with a particular emphasis on their impact on small-scale producers and least developed countries.

All United Nations and World Trade Organization delegates of member countries are invited to attend a briefing session, scheduled for 18 February 2013, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. in conference room XXVII of the Palais des Nations. The briefing is organized by the heads of the five United Nations agencies partnering in the Forum. The meeting aims at briefing delegates on the launching conference of the Forum, which is scheduled to be held in Geneva on 21–22 March 2013. Delegates will be informed of the objectives, possible structure, suitable commodity focus and some priority activities of the future Forum, as well as the main clusters of stakeholders to be represented therein.* In particular, the briefing will be an opportunity for delegates to provide guidance on the key substantive issues, commodity groups and main target stakeholders for future Forum activities. In this regard, it would be appreciated if feedback and guidance from national, public and private stakeholders in your countries could be sought to share at the briefing session.

The Forum will be demand-driven, in response to the information needs and concerns of its participants, in particular representatives of the public and private sectors in developing countries. As can be seen from the attached concept note and flyer, the Forum will not limit its discussion and activities to compliance issues regarding existing sustainability standards, but will contextualize

* A first briefing on the objectives, the demand-driven nature and the planned preparatory activities for the Forum was held on 5 June 2012. For further information, see: <http://unfss.org/news/unfss-briefing/>.



such standards against a threefold perspective: (a) couching voluntary sustainability standards into the context in exporting developing countries, with a particular focus on poverty alleviation in the least developed countries and strengthening the capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises; (b) examining sustainability standards within the overall context of the life cycle of a product and related services and (c) placing such standards in a context of avoidance, minimization and management of real risks.

The Forum will be open to all United Nations Member States and relevant stakeholders from the private sector and civil society. In addition, the Forum seeks to facilitate the participation of key public and private decision-makers from developing countries, with a particular focus on least developed countries.

The attached concept note provides an overview of the main clusters of proposed activities and the suggested governance structure for the Forum.

For further information, please contact Mr. Ulrich Hoffmann at the UNCTAD secretariat (E-mail: ulrich.hoffmann@unctad.org, tel: +41 (0) 22 917 5780).

Masoumeh Sahami
Chief, Intergovernmental Support Service

12 February 2013