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UNIDO AND CONSUMER INTERESTS^{1/}

by

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PREAMBLE

The International Organization of Consumer Unions (IOCU), which links bodies representing the consumer interest in some fifty countries at all stages of economic development, with a Regional Office in Penang, an affiliated Consumer Council in the Caribbean and a number of members in the developing countries, believes that it can fruitfully co-operate in UNIDO's new plan of action.

One of the main considerations in economic growth is, practically without exception, the necessity of raising quality levels of industrial and consumer products. Since many of the developing countries have their roots in an agricultural economy, the emphasis in the early years is usually upon the preparation of agricultural products for world markets and the manufacture of other consumer goods. Project objectives are often based upon the syllogism of increasing consumer desire to buy indigenous goods, raising quality levels for exports and the simultaneous earning and conservation of foreign currencies.

With this in mind the fostering of an active national standards body, the development of a products certification scheme and promulgation of standardization generally is often seen by the planners of bi- and multi-lateral scheme alike as a key to rational industrial growth.

The problems in institutional development of this kind invariably centre upon:

- a) Awareness among manufacturers of the economic and sales effects of standardization and quality control.
- b) The technical problems of preparing standards.
- c) The understanding and support of Governments.
- d) Adequate curricula activities in universities and teaching establishments.
- e) The growth of consumer awareness in order to bring pressure on manufacturers from a different direction to adopt standards and quality control systems.

It can be fairly said that (a) to (d) form in greater detail a brief now widely accepted by administrators and specialists executing assistance projects. We suggest that (e) is a field which has not been given adequate consideration either by Governments or funding bodies. Yet it is clearly a corollary of the development of quality control and the significant implications of this for developing countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We submit that the participation of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization is essential in the growth of consumer protection in developing countries as a further projection of its existing activity in rationalizing the industrial economy.

We recommend assistance as follows:

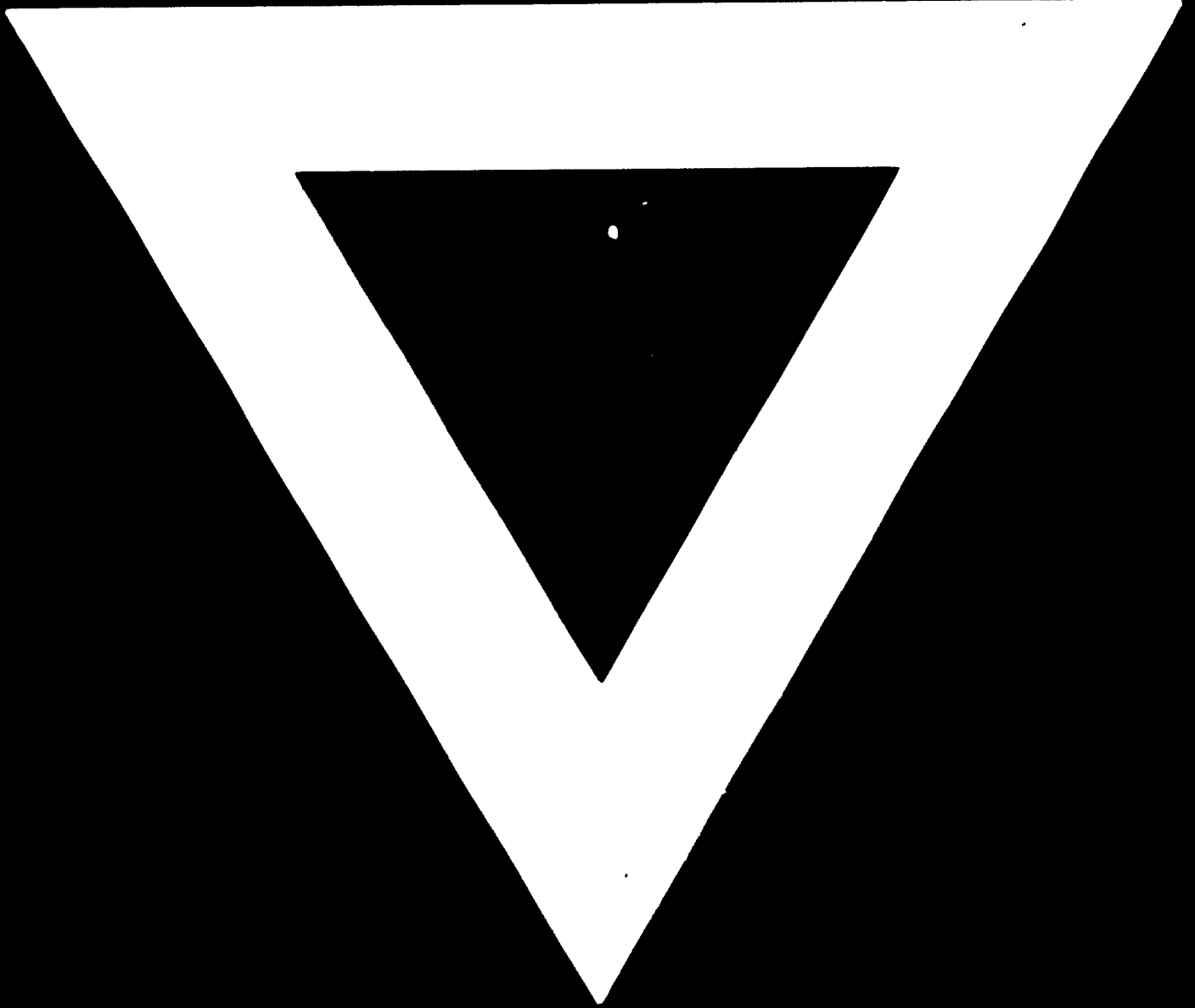
The setting-up on a regular rotational basis of UNIDO/IOCU regional workshops and seminars designed to educate consumer and Government representatives and bring together Governments, manufacturers, standards and consumer interests.

Expert assistance for independent consumer organizations - particularly on the technical aspects - in individual countries. These may be independent advisers or attached to relevant projects. They may also be full experts under UNIDO contracts or associate experts.

CONCLUSIONS

These proposals are made as a new dimension of technical assistance. It is a dimension which has not hitherto been recognized and seems to IOCU to be a development in schemes for economic growth which is highly significant. It is realized that UN agencies operate on the basis of Government requests and co-commitments but this proposal may well be relevant to emerging UN thinking that it will be possible to include agency assistance to non-governmental projects which have the sanction of Governments.

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