Dear Colleagues

XML and Global Business Exchanges – an invitation

We are writing to you on behalf of UN/CEFACT, the United Nations body whose mandate covers worldwide policy and technical development in the area of trade facilitation and electronic business. To facilitate global business exchanges and to make them a reality for all users, we strongly support the development and implementation of open, interoperable, international standards and specifications. More information on UN/CEFACT can be found on our Web site www.unece.org /cefact.

As part of our mandate, we have monitored closely the development of XML (Extensible Mark up Language) and recognize fully its potential to play a major role in facilitating all Web based business transactions. We especially recognize the opportunities that XML offers to small and medium sized companies, to developing countries, and to economies in transition. It enables them to enter easily into the world of electronic business and, as a consequence, could bring very significant additional growth to world trade.

There are however, many, often competing, efforts underway worldwide to develop XML specifications for global business exchanges. We are concerned that, without some urgent initiative to bring these efforts together, this will lead to considerable confusion and duplication among users and, that as a result, the opportunities that XML offers to the market will not be maximized.

Therefore, in a joint venture with OASIS – the Organisation for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards - we are launching a global initiative to develop an open technical framework to enable XML to be utilized in a consistent and uniform manner for the exchange of all electronic business data.

As you may know, OASIS is a not- for-profit organisation dedicated to contributing to technical interoperability and the market awareness of structured information standards. Its members include companies, organisations, and individuals many of whom have also been closely involved with the development of XML. More information on OASIS can be found at their Web site www.oasis-open.org

The Initiative will be project based, last for about 15 to 18 months and the results will be in the public domain. To ensure fast progress, UN/CEFACT and OASIS are establishing, under this Initiative, an Electronic Business XML Working Group (ebXML/WG) that will be led by Klaus-Dieter Naujok representing UN/CEFACT (Chair) and Dr. Robert Sutor representing OASIS (Vice Chair). The press release to this effect is attached which is being circulated to the media.

We invite you to join and participate in this new initiative, which will be organized into a Working Group with project teams each with their own project leader, focussing on

specific items jointly identified at the first meeting. The Terms of Reference for the Initiative are also attached.

We very much hope that you will be able to accept this invitation and participate in this unique effort. To do so and to receive an invitation to the first meeting, which will be held during the week beginning November 15 1999 in the San Francisco area, please email Hans Hansell of UN/CEFACT, <Hans.Hansell@unece.org>, copying it to Laura Walker of OASIS <execdir@oasis-open.org>, by September 30.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,

Carol Cosgrove-Sacks
Director, Trade Division, UN/ECE

Ray Walker
Chairman, UN/CEFACT Steering Group.