

**UNECE****United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

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Turning the page for paper in international trade

The United Nations through its Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) at its last meeting in Kuala Lumpur launched a major new initiative that provides electronic alternatives to key paper documents in the international supply chain. The UN body thereby adopted the United Nations electronic trade documents project (UNeDocs) as the basis for a new, global standard for digital trade documents. UNeDocs had previously been developed as a joint project between the United Nations Economic Commission of Europe and SITPRO, the United Kingdom trade facilitation agency, with financial support from the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

“For thousands of years, traders have relied on physical documents to exchange information in international trade” says Christian Frühwald, Chair of UN/CEFACT. “It’s now time to turn the page for paper and take an historic step forward. In international trade we issue and process more than 5 billion documents every year. For both trade and Governments, the annual cost of manually processing these documents is over 250 billion USD. In today’s global trade, information is vital for security and efficiency. We therefore need a digital equivalent of paper documents to process the information fast and efficiently”.

The new UNeDocs standard will simplify international trade and increase security in the international supply chain through the exchange of less but better data that integrate with the latest Internet-based technologies. UNeDocs trade documents implement international standards and best business practice. Traders and administrations can use the documents in both paper and electronic format depending on their needs, capabilities and the regulatory framework.

This new project opens a migration path from the current, paper-based information exchange to paperless trade. UNeDocs documents also provide a fallback option to paper. This digital paper concept allows a trader to convert at any time the electronic document into a valid paper document, if such is required.

UN/CEFACT has set up the UNeDocs TBG2 Working Group to develop the paper and electronic specifications for the core documents used in international trade. The Group will also develop customized document specifications to support national, regional and international projects for Single Window implementation and paperless trade.

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On 20 and 21 June 2005 in Geneva, the UNECE is holding an International Forum on "Paperless Trade in International Supply Chains: Enhancing Efficiency and Security" (www.unece.org/forums/forum05). The event will be attended by high-level decision makers from Governments and the private sector. They will discuss strategies and initiatives for security and efficiency, based on automated and advance information. Speakers will make presentations on best practice and benefits from introducing paperless trade and on how to follow a roadmap that addresses the issues that have so far prevented the wide use of electronic documents in international trade.

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http://www.unece.org/cefact/forum_grps/tbg/tbg2_edocs/tbg2_edocs.htm