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**BRM Concludes With Myriad Undiscussed Problems for OOXML**

Washington, DC, March 3, 2008. At the conclusion of the Ballot Resolution Meeting (BRM) concerning Microsoft's Office Open XML's (OOXML), Marino Marcich, Managing Director of the ODF Alliance, issued the following statement:

"The ODF Alliance commends the spirit of cooperation that prevailed among the participants from the national delegations. Despite the hard work by the many national standards bodies and ISO/IEC, the results fell far short of fixing the most important errors and omissions in OOXML. More than 80 percent of the comments from national bodies were not discussed. It has again been demonstrated that the standardization of OOXML in a fast-track process was entirely inappropriate."

With the major unresolved problems highlighted below, the BRM reinforced the outcome of the initial ballot, in which OOXML failed to achieve sufficient votes from national standards bodies during the ballot period that ended on September 2, 2007.

- **Many critical problems identified by national bodies were not discussed or resolved during the BRM.** The revised DIS 29500 that will emerge from the BRM failed to address numerous fundamental concerns by national bodies when they rejected OOXML during the first round of balloting on September 2, 2007.
- **Intellectual property rights issues were left completely out of the BRM process.** Resolution of well-founded intellectual property rights concerns are critical to the IT industry and governments and are legitimate issues for national bodies to consider as a group. Microsoft has a patent promise, the Open Specification Promise (OSP) and a Covenant Not to Sue relating to OOXML, but developers and competitors who want to implement OOXML with confidence that they are not infringing on any intellectual property rights should be mindful that the coverage has [serious gaps](#). There are also [serious issues with respect to the accessibility](#) of Office Open XML as a format.
- **Ecma and Microsoft bear responsibility for the fact that only a small fraction of the problems identified by national bodies were actually discussed during the BRM.** Of the 3,522 comments submitted by national bodies, reduced to approximately 1,100 on the BRM agenda, only approximately 200 were actually discussed and resolutions agreed. This is not the fault of national standards bodies, who cannot

reasonably be expected to analyze a 6,000 page specification, 3,522 comments, and 2,300 pages of proposed resolutions from Ecma. Ecma and Microsoft chose "fast track" when the usual and more appropriate ISO approval process was available to them for a specification of this enormity. National bodies attempted to raise these concerns at the BRM and were told they were out of order and regardless there is no other option. In fact, there is no proscribed limit to how long a BRM can take place, and other ISO/IEC standards have taken considerably longer than five days to conduct a BRM.

- **Maintenance of OOXML is not sufficiently resolved to be approved as an ISO standard.** The maintenance regime for OOXML (should it become an ISO Standard) is of critical importance, but it has yet to be determined. Ecma put forward a maintenance proposal (see <http://www.jtc1sc34.org/repository/0885.pdf>) but the issue was put on hold until the next meeting of JTC 1 SC 34 in April, 2008, after the close of the OOXML ballot reconsideration period.
- **A path is available for national bodies to ensure that Microsoft and Ecma make good on their recent promises.** Microsoft has made promises at the BRM and most recently with what was described as a "major announcement" regarding interoperability principles. Only by voting "disapprove" will national bodies ensure that Microsoft will not simply pocket the ISO seal of approval and fail to deliver on these promises, among them implementing DIS 29500 in its own products. A vote to "disapprove" need not be the NBs final say on OOXML because Ecma and Microsoft will still have available the usual ISO approval procedure instead of the "fast-track" which is appropriately reserved for ripe standards – widespread implementation and use (e.g., PDF). The "fast track" option is not appropriate for a specification that was proposed for standardization before it was shipped in a single software product.

"The inability to address all the concerns underscores that OOXML should be rejected by national standards bodies," concluded Marcich. "Ecma and Microsoft should seek technical harmonization with the OpenDocument Format, already an ISO standard. Alternatively, they can pursue the usual ISO approval procedure instead of the 'fast-track' which is appropriately reserved for mature standards of reasonable scope and size."

*The OpenDocument Format Alliance is an organization of governments, academic institutions, non-government organizations and industry dedicated to educating policy makers, IT administrators and the public on the benefits and opportunities of ODF.*

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