Guidelines for Joining the ARAC Multi-Lateral Arrangement ARAC MLA

CLASSIFICATION

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AVAILABILITY

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Content

1. Preamble

The Arab Accreditation Cooperation (ARAC), is an organization created to establish cooperation among accreditation bodies in the Arab region which operate programs for accreditation of conformity assessment bodies.

2. Purpose of this Document

This document provides guidelines to the ARAC accreditation body members on joining the ARAC Multi-Lateral Arrangement MLA including guidance, input, timeframe, and expected results for each step.

3. Terms and Definitions

In addition to the terms and definitions found in the document "ARAC MD 002/17 *Policies and Procedures for multi-lateral recognition arrangement"*, the following definitions apply for the purpose of this document:

- **Accreditation Body (AB)**: An organization that operates an accreditation system for one or more types of conformity assessment bodies in the ARAC region.
- **Accreditation program**: Accreditation of bodies according to a standard or normative document included in the ARAC MLA, used for the accreditation of conformity assessment bodies.
- **ARAC MLA**: The Multi-Lateral Arrangement (MLA), as a consequence of the "recognition" process, will be accepted as a subset of the ILAC or IAF Arrangements.
- **Peer Evaluation**: A structured process of evaluation of an Accreditation Body.
- **Signatory**: A Member of ARAC who has signed the ARAC multi-lateral recognition Arrangement for one or more scopes.

4. Benefits of the ARAC MLA and Eligibility Criteria

ARAC MLA forms a regional network of Conformity Assessment Bodies accredited by ABs that have been peer-evaluated and recognized as being competent. This network facilitates the acceptance of test, calibration, certification and inspection reports in the region, thus contributing to the facilitation of trade and the free-trade goal of "Accredited once, accepted everywhere".

In order for the AB to be eligible for achieving the signatory status of ARAC, it must fulfill the following:
- ARAC associate membership (See ARAC Document ARAC Membership Application Procedure ARAC PR013);
- Agreement to abide by the terms and conditions of ARAC MLA;

- Demonstration, through evaluations and through witnessing of its assessment process, that it satisfies the following requirements:
  - o Conformance with pertinent ISO/IEC standards and guides and related IAF and ILAC mandatory and guidance documents;
  - o Conformance with the relevant accreditation criteria accepted under IAF MLA and ILAC MRA,
  - o Conformance of all accredited CABs with the relevant ISO/IEC standards and Guides and the Arab region recognized conformity assessment schemes;
  - o For initial application completion of at least one accreditation cycle in each of the accreditation programs for which it applies that is valid at the time of the application in each of the scopes of the Arrangement for which it applies;
  - o Availability of sufficient evidence to demonstrate that applicant AB's management review and internal audit processes have been implemented, are effective, and will be maintained.

5. Guidelines to ARAC Members for Joining the ARAC MLA

The following sections are providing guidelines for the ABs that are planning to apply for joining the ARAC MLA and become a signatory thereof. It is worth mentioning that the sections 5.1 – 5.4 are preparatory steps that can be undertaken by the AB prior to official application.

5.1 Understanding of the Requirements

Prior to applying for becoming an ARAC MLA signatory, the candidate AB needs to fully understand the requirements described in the following documents:

a) *ISO/IEC 17011 Standard* "Conformity assessment — Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies". The requirements of this standard and their interpretation are best understood through participation in a training course provided by an experienced AB, which is a signatory to ARAC MLA. ARAC secretariat can be consulted for recommended training courses and other relevant capacity building programs.

b) *ARAC MD 002* Policies and Procedures for Multi-Lateral Recognition Arrangement

c) *IAF/ILAC-A3* IAF/ILAC Multi-Lateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements (Arrangements): Template report for the peer evaluation of an Accreditation Body based on ISO/IEC 17011

d) *IAF/ILAC A2*: IAF-ILAC Multi-Lateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements (Arrangements): Requirements and Procedures for Evaluation of a Single Accreditation Body

Except for the ISO/IEC 17011 standard, all the above documents can be downloaded from the relevant issuing body website. The AB shall purchase a licensed copy of the ISO/IEC 17011 standard from the ISO Store.

The candidate AB shall have demonstrated experience in operating and accreditation body and have access to technical expertise in each of the scopes of the ARAC MLA for which it applies. Other conditions are specified in 2.5 of ARAC MD 002 and 2.2.1 of IAF/ILAC A2.

5.2 Self-Evaluation

a) Documentation review

ARAC form FM 003 Peer Evaluation Checklist assists the applicant AB in reviewing its existing documents and therefore identifying the missing documents that need to be prepared prior to the official application.

At the application stage, this checklist form must be completed and submitted with the application for recognition in Word format to ARAC secretariat.

For reevaluations the checklist must be sent to the peer evaluation team and ARAC MLA secretariat with the documents for the evaluation. For each requirement the AB must indicate the documents that apply in the column "Documents of AB".

b) Performance assessment

Prior to the application and evaluation, the AB must complete the relevant sections of the evaluation report template included in the document *IAF/ILAC-A3* as Part 2, section 3, 4 and 5 of this document, including:
- Fully addressing all ISO/IEC 17011 requirements and other IAF and ILAC mandatory documents; and
- Also addressing any other requirements as determined by ARAC.

At the application stage, this draft report will be submitted to the peer evaluation team as part of the application documents.

5.3 Preparation of the Documents

After conducting the self-evaluation, the results of document review and performance assessment will assist the AB in identifying the missing documents and records that need to be prepared and submitted along with their application.

FM 001 - Application from an AB to Join the ARAC MLA; item 21 lists down also all the documents that need to be submitted with the application.

5.4 Application

The associate member AB of ARAC, which intends to join the ARAC MLA, must submit its application to ARAC secretariat at the following email address secretariat@arabarac.org using the form FM 001 - Application from an AB to Join the ARAC MLA.

If the ARAC MLA does not cover the relevant activities of the AB, the AB should apply to IAF and/or ILAC directly.

The AB must submit all required documents listed in form FM 001along with its application form, at least 90 days in advance of a visit to allow the evaluation team for preparation of the visit and for requesting additional information.

The steps involved in submitting the application are described in the detailed flowchart included in ARAC MD 002.

The AB is required to have undertaken a self-evaluation based on IAF/ILAC A3; this self-evaluation has to be done using the form FM 003 – Peer Evaluation Checklist. For an initial evaluation and extensions, the checklist must be submitted with the application for recognition. For reevaluations the checklist must be sent to the evaluator team and MLA secretariat with the documents for the evaluation. For each requirement the AB must indicate the documents that apply in the column "Documents of AB".

The AB must report the results of its self-evaluation in the IAF/ ILAC A3 Evaluation Report Template.

5.5 Pre-evaluation Visit

a) The steps involved in a Pre-evaluation are described in the detailed flowchart included in ARAC MD 002.

a) The AB may object, based on conflict of interest and impartiality, the appointment of any member of the team.

b) According to the document review report and recommendation of the Team Leader. It will be decided whether to implement a Pre-evaluation visit or not.

c) The aim of a pre-evaluation is to ensure the AB is prepared for the full evaluation and to minimize the number of findings expected to be raised during the full evaluation.

d) The pre-evaluation visit is performed by an ARAC appointed Peer Evaluation Team Leader and Team Members.

e) At the conclusion of the pre-evaluation visit, the Team Leader consults with the Team members and submits a summary written report to the AB.

f) The AB takes corrective actions and responds to any issues raised in the report supporting with evidences.

g) The TL provides a recommendation to the MLA Secretary /MLA Group Chairperson, which then decides whether to proceed with the full evaluation.

5.6 Full Evaluation

a) The steps involved in a full evaluation are described in the detailed flowchart included in ARAC MD 002.

b) At the appointed time, the on-site full evaluation including witnessing takes place. At the end of the visit, the Team Leader in consultation with the team members prepares a summary report including any findings. The TL shall give the AB an opportunity to discuss the team's findings and to clarify any misunderstandings during the evaluation visit. The Team Leader provides the summary report with the

List of Findings - F005 to the AB at the end of the visit with c/c to the MLAG Chair and MLA Secretary.

c) The AB responds to the Team Leader by supplying a corrective actions plan and evidence of the corrective actions for all findings as defined in ARAC MD 002, Annex 3.

d) The Team Leader forwards the corrective actions from the AB, the Final Report and a recommendation to the MLAC Secretariat. The recommendation might include a follow-up visit, if necessary, to verify corrective actions. If a follow-up visit is recommended, at least one Team member that was involved in the full evaluation shall be part of the follow-up team.

e) The final evaluation report (see ARAC MD 002) including a recommendation concerning the recognition is submitted to the MLA Secretary and MLA Group Chairperson according to the deadlines in Annex 3 of ARAC MD 002.

f) Finally, the MLA Group takes a decision as to whether or not the AB meets the requirements to sign the Arrangement.

g) The decision may be subject to conditions requiring additional actions and also states when the next planned evaluation activities shall take place.

h) The MC Secretariat informs the AB in writing of the decision. The AB has the right to appeal against the decision *according to ARAC Procedure for Handling Appeals and Complaints- PR 005.*

5.7 Re-Evaluation

a) The steps involved in re-evaluation are described in Annex 5 of ARAC MD 002.

b) Once the AB is a member of the Arrangement, periodic monitoring will be conducted. Typically, a re-evaluation is carried out every 4 years but the Decision Making Group can determine shorter time intervals, if needed.

c) Partial to total re-evaluation may be conducted at an earlier date as directed by the MLA Group, should there be due cause such as notification of significant changes as defined in Annex 4 of ARAC MD002.

d) Re-evaluations may also be conducted earlier than the deadline if that is requested by the AB, for example, in order to carry it out together with an evaluation for extension of the scope of recognition

Maintenance, suspension, withdrawal and notification of changes shall be treated according to ARAC MD 002.

6. References

a) ARAC MD 001 ARAC Multi-Lateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA)
b) ARAC MD002/ Policies and Procedures for Multi-Lateral Recognition Arrangement
c) The route to signing the IAF or ILAC Arrangements.
d) IAF/ILAC A2: IAF/ILAC Multi-Lateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements (Arrangements): Requirements and Procedures for Evaluation of a Single Accreditation Body.

e) IAF/ILAC A3:03/ Multi-Lateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements (Arrangements): Template report for the peer evaluation of an Accreditation Body based on ISO/IEC 17011
f) The ILAC MRA.
g) IAF ML 4- IAF MLA Policies and Procedures for a MLA on the Level of Single Accreditation Bodies and on the Level of Regional Accreditation Groups.

7. Annex A

Summary of Key Steps to Signing the ARAC MLA with Timeframes

#	Input	Activity	Responsibility	Time Frame	Expected results
-6: **(A.1) Pre-application Preparatory Steps**						
A.1.1	• Training on ISO/IEC 17011 • Documents reference under 5.1 above • Comply with 2.5 of ARAC MD 002 and 2.2.1 of IAF/ILAC A2	Understanding the requirements	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB	At least 8 months prior to applying for ARAC MLA	Understanding of the ARAC MLA application requirements
A.1.2	• ARAC FM003 • IAF/ILAC A3	Self-evaluation (documentation and performance)	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB	At least 6 months prior to applying for ARAC MLA	Filled out self-evaluation checklist and report
A.1.3	• Item 21 of ARAC FM 001 • Outcome of self-evaluation	Preparation of Documents	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB	Within 3 months after finishing the self-evaluation	Documents required as per item 21 of FM 001
-6: **(A.2) Application to Joining the ARAC MLA**						
A.2.1	• ARAC FM001 • IAF/ILAC A3	Applying for peer evaluation to ARAC Secretariat	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB		• Filled out application • Self-assessment Report • Documents required under item 21 in FM 001
A.2.2	AB application and relevant documents	Reviewing and acknowledging receipt of the application and relevant documents	ARAC Secretariat		Acceptance of the application by the ARAC Secretariat
A.2.3	Email from ARAC Secretariat	Submitting the application with the AB documents to	ARAC Secretariat		Submitted AB application and

#	Input	Activity	Responsibility	Time Frame	Expected results
		the ARAC MLA Secretary			relevant documents
A.2.4	Email from ARAC Secretariat	Reviewing the application with the AB documents and recommending the acceptance of the application to the MLA Group	MLA Secretary	10 days from receiving them	Acceptance of the application recommendation of acceptance to the MLA Group
A.2.5	Ballot voting form	Voting on the acceptance of the application	MLA Group	within 30 days from the acceptance of application *and may be done by email ballot*	Ballot results
A.2.6	Ballot results	Informing the AB of accepting the application	MLA Secretary	After completion of the Ballot	Approval of the application
A.2.7	Form FM 019	Appointing the Peer Evaluation Team	ARAC MLA Group (in cooperation with IAF, ILAC and other Regional Cooperation, in case of Joint evaluation)	60 days from accepting the application	
A.2.8	Form FM 019	Informing AB on evaluation team's appointment	MLA Secretary/MLA Group	As soon as the team is appointed	Accepting or objecting to the team appointment by the AB
(A.3) Document Review					
A.3.1	AB submitted Documents	Review of the AB submitted Documents	Team Leader and team members	As soon as the TL has been accepted by the applicant.	Results of document review
A.3.2	• ARAC FM 003 • IAF/ILAC A3	Sending the results of review and requesting missing documents	Team Leader and team members	90 days after the appointment of the team and receipt of all documents, provided all documents required have been received in the agreed language.	Updated Self-evaluation checklist

#	Input	Activity	Responsibility	Time Frame	Expected results
A.3.3	Updated Self-evaluation checklist	Submitting any missing documents as requested by the evaluation team	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB	According to the agreed upon timeframe	Missing documents
(A.4) Pre-Evaluation Visit [if recommended by the ARAC MLA Group in agreement with the applicant]					
A.4.1	Updated documentation after including the missing documents	Receiving the missing documents and sending the visit program to the AB	Peer Evaluation Team	At least one month in advance of the visit	Proposed visit program
A.4.2	Communication email from the Peer Evaluation Team with proposed program	Agreeing on the date of the visit and program	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB	As soon as receiving the visit program	Approved visit program
A.4.3	Pre-evaluation Visit Program	Conducting the visit	Peer Evaluation Team	According to the visit program	Pre-evaluation findings
A.4.4	Pre-evaluation findings	Reporting the findings of the visit	Peer Evaluation Team	Within the agreed upon timeframe	Pre-evaluation report
A.4.5	Pre-evaluation report	Reviewing the report and the findings and providing comments, if any.	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB	As soon as receiving the report and the findings	Approved Pre-evaluation by the AB
A.4.6	List of Findings	Completing the corrective actions	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB	Within the agreed upon timeframe	Corrective actions evidences
A.4.7	Evidences of completed corrective actions	Deciding whether a full evaluation can take place	MLA Group	As soon as the evidences of the completed corrective actions: all the findings raised during the Pre evaluation visit shall be closed	Decision to proceed with a full evaluation
(A.5) Full-Evaluation					
A.5.1	ARAC FM 004	Agreeing on the date and program	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB		Approved Program
A.5.2	IAF/ILAC A3	Conducting the visit and reporting the summary of	Peer Evaluation Team	In the final meeting	A summary section of the report together

#	Input	Activity	Responsibility	Time Frame	Expected results
		the results and list of findings			with the list of finding as per the IAF/ILAC A3
A.5.3	Summary Report and List of Findings	Reviewing the findings, discussing with the team and providing comments, if any.	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB	In the final meeting	Approved Summary Report and List of Findings by the AB
A.5.4		Preparation of draft final report	Peer Evaluation Team	Within 60 days from the on-site evaluation	
A.5.5	IAF/ILAC A3	Submitting response to findings and an action plan	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB	3 months from receiving the summary report	Action plan of Corrective Actions
A.5.6	Action plan of Corrective Actions	Submitting Corrective Actions evidences	ARAC Associate Member Applicant AB	5 months from the full evaluation	Copies of documents and records that provide evidences
A.5.7	Copies of documents and records that provide evidences	Reacting to the AB corrective actions	Peer Evaluation Team	Within 30 days from receiving the response of the AB	Approval of evidences
A.5.8	Approved Corrective Actions IAF/ILAC A3	Submitting the final report to the AB and the MLAC secretary	Peer Evaluation Team	Within 30 days from approving the CAs and closing of all the findings	Final Report with recommendation regarding acceptance of joining the ARAC MLA
(A.6) Decision Making					
A.6.1	Final Evaluation Report IAF/ILAC A3 with all attachments Commenting template	Reviewing the final report and distribute the report to the MLA Group members for comments	MLA secretary and MLAG chairperson MLA Group members	30 days Commenting period	Acceptance of the AB as a signatory to the ARAC MLA
A 6.2	MLA Group members comments	Clarification of comments	The evaluation team leader should clarify, with his team, all the received comments	30 day to clarify all the received comments	Clarification of all the received comments
A 6.3	Completed commenting template with updated evaluation report, if applicable	Reviewing the cleared comments and, if applicable, the updated evaluation report	MLA Group members	30 day ballot	Decisions according to 2.3 of ARAC MD 002

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#	Input	Activity	Responsibility	Time Frame	Expected results
A.6.4	Ballot results	In case of positive decision, Informing the ARAC General Assembly of new signatories and their scopes	MLA Secretary	As soon as the ballot is completed	In case of positive decision, Signing the ARAC MLA Certificate
(A.7) Re-evaluation					
Periodic monitoring and re-evaluation of the signatories is conducted according to ARAC MD 002, Annex 5.					