



The UNCTAD/ESCAP Conference on Information Technologies and Electronic Trading in the Asia-Pacific Region

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Introduction

The UN Conference on Information Technology and Electronic Trading held In Bangkok, Thailand from 21 to 23th May 1997 was a great success on which The United Nations Trade Point Development Center with offices in Melbourne announced the transactional phase of the Global Trade Point Network. The conference was co-organized by the UN Trade Point Development Center of UNCTAD and the Economic Commission for Asia and Pacific ESCAP. The conference was partially funded by the Government of Japan under the ESCAP-Japan Technical Assistance Fund project entitled, "Strengthening of TISNET through the development of the Asia-Pacific Information Exchange (APIX)".

A. Attendance

The Conference was attended by over 500 representatives from 68 countries representing Trade Points, trade promotion organizations, chambers of commerce and industry, government offices, commercial banks, private sector companies associated with the development of Trade Point project and relating to information, hardware and software support, academic institutions and associations. They worked together during 3 days to define the collaborative model for the establishment of this transactional phase of the GTPNet and participated at the conference panels at the United Nations Conference Center in Bangkok. The following countries and areas in the region were represented: Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Macau, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Republic of Singapore, Russian Federation, Thailand, United States and Viet Nam. Other countries represented were Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Finland, France, Greece, Guyana, Israel, Lithuania, Mexico, Mongolia, Republic of South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Switzerland, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and Trinidad and Tobago.

The Conference attracted leading Electronic Trading projects such as (Trade Points, Secure Electronic Trading opportunity Secure ETO system), Asia Pacific Information Exchange APIX, G77 Chambers of Commerce Network, Kompas International Network, SunSites, APIX ESCAP project, Telstra SureLink, MCI Network, World Bank IPNet Investment Network, Malaysia Super Corridor, Internet 2 and 3 initiatives. All these projects made contributions on how interconnect the Trade Points and ETO users via the UNTPDC Secure Electronic Authenticated Link.

B. Objectives of the Meeting

As a follow up to the Trade Point project and the 1995 Conference, this 1997 Conference aimed at bringing secure electronic commerce to the small and medium size business all over the world. Also it aimed at providing opportunities to learn and exchange ideas/information on the new and existing methods of utilizing the latest tools available in information technologies for 1) use among government, private sector, 2) trade and investment related organizations; and demonstrating how information technologies can facilitate information exchange and dissemination for promotion of international trade and investment flows.

C. Agenda of the Meeting

The Agenda was adopted as follows:

Agenda Item 1: Opening session.

Agenda item 2: Support to information technology and electronic trading.

Agenda item 3: The role of governments in trade efficiency.

Agenda item 4: Round table on cooperation among institutions

Agenda item 5: Information networking and ESCAP initiatives

Agenda item 6: The Trade Point programme and global electronic trading

Agenda item 7: Global electronic trading and its technologies

Agenda item 8: Conclusions: Toward secure electronic trading and trade efficiency.

D. Opening Statement

Welcoming the participants, the Officer-in-charge a.i. of ESCAP highlighted the spectacular growth of the Asia and Pacific region which may be attributed to its adoption of new approaches, and its pragmatic attitude to new global arrangements. The region has responded positively to recent technological advances: some countries in the region are leaders and aggressive advocates in the emerging global digital economy by applying electronic commerce, adapting to international standards, streamlining structures, and adopting the most relevant technologies.

He further explained that the international organizations and agencies are active in the field of examining and understanding technologies and resources with an incalculable range of information, and the impact upon various development sectors. ESCAP's role, in partnership with international and specialized agencies, is to provide a sharper focus on the benefits of policy, and operational and structural change. It continues to play a major catalytic role in the sharing of experience among its members and associate members. Recent ESCAP initiatives in this direction include collaboration with other international bodies on the working standards of trade facilitation, the organization of seminars for economies in transition on the national implications of trade efficiency issues, and the preparation of comprehensive training material for trade practitioners at all levels, to reduce transactions costs through the use of technology. He also explained the work being undertaken to lay the foundations for national focal points of the Trade and Investment Information Network of ESCAP, TISNET, to interact on information aspects relating to database management, trade and investment flows, regulatory and incentive systems, trade promotion events, and information resources. The APIX initiative will provide greater accessibility to regional and global marketplaces. Linkages among investment promotion bodies for company, country, and sectorial intelligence are being improved through INSAP, the Investment Network Services of Asia and the Pacific. These programmes are designed to enable policy makers and trade practitioners to formulate strategies for their imminent approach into the knowledge-intensive world of global trade and investment.

He stressed that ESCAP will continue to respond to the growing interdependence in the international marketplace. In particular, the focus is toward assisting small and medium-sized enterprises in achieving increased access to the new opportunities created. The Conference may further serve the cause of economic cooperation by accepting the challenges of rapidly changing technologies. The first challenge is to decrease the marginalization of developing countries and their disadvantaged enterprise, to increase their competitive edge through the power of knowledge and

information; the second is to maintain this objective to make maximum use of resources. These challenges pose a range of options to reduce, and where possible eliminate, risks and errors. The United Nations, and in particular ESCAP and UNCTAD, attempt to translate these abstract risks into real concerns. Thus the Conference is one of the activities to step up cooperation for the transition from few to many players, and from local to international trade and investment markets.

The UNCTAD representative of the Division for Services Infrastructure for Development and Trade Efficiency stated that the impact of information technologies upon trade, particularly in this last decade, has been immeasurable. The Global Trade Point Network or GTPNet has increased in size and the volume of matching "hits" on electronic inquiries has made the Website on the Internet the most-visited of all UN-sponsored programmes. UNCTAD has moved rapidly into the information era with the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency in 1994, and which was followed by the first Conference on Effective Use of Information Technology for Trade and Investment by ESCAP and UNCTAD, and held in Bangkok in May 1995. Thus governments and the private sector explored technologies and adopted the position that considerable savings in transaction costs were achievable by the increased use of electronic commerce.

He further explained that this Second conference is significant, to sustain the initial efforts to provide information services for enterprises seeking entry into electronic international trade. There are now over 30 operational trade points, which are mostly located in the Asia-Pacific region. This pioneering group is now on the verge of its second phase, and that is to enable contacts to be translated into contracts using Secure Electronic Trading Opportunities (ETO). Thus its technical aspects focus on secure financial transfer of funds, point to point electronic trading, and Intranet connections. The concepts of validation, authentication, and processing of secure payments will move the GTPNet environment from a pre-transactional to transactional. This Conference will demonstrate the various companies and organizations which are supporting this concept, and will be used as a forum to move ahead with the application of these technologies and the organizational framework in which it will operate.

The Honorable Minister of Commerce of the Royal Government of Thailand delivered the keynote and inaugural address. He gave an overview of Thailand's liberalization process, and especially considered the Conference as timely in view of the desire of the international trading community, and particularly those in Thailand, to see that these technologies will work in their favor to expand trade. He appealed to the bureaucratic mind to be courageous to accept the challenges, for which without this acceptance, all research and development in communications and information technologies would be in vain.

He further stressed that stride and trends in global communications have reached Thailand and opportunities should be sought to make it an effective tool for its development goals. He expressed his wish that all participants, and the Thais in particular, should take advantage of the learning opportunity which the Conference and Exhibition offer in introducing various technologies for international trade purposes.

E. Summary of discussions and the UN Conference main announcements:

1. The Official Launch of the Secure Electronic Trading Opportunity ETO System - The First Step towards Global Secure Electronic Trading.

One of the main objectives of the conference was to define a secure framework to support the Secure ETO system. As the ETO system usage increases, so does the risk of unwanted intrusion. Since the ETO system was launched in 1993 by the UNTPDC, the system was founded on the guiding principle of open access, at that time no security was built into the system or GTPNet architecture itself and its networking protocols. As the Internet, if an organization connects to the GTPNet and ETO system without some form of protection, its internal network is open to attack from outside intruders. As with the Internet, there are good business reasons to connect internal networks together, but there are also security issues. With the introduction of the Secure ETO system Trade Points are interconnected via Secure Electronic Authenticated Links via national Hubs interconnected to the UNTPDC servers and Mirror Sites in over 60 countries. When completed the system will be a global network, parallel to the Internet, that will provide such as safe infrastructure that the obsession with security on the World Wide Web will not be relevant. Presently three SEALs are fully operational interconnecting SEAL China, Australia and United State with T1 Secure Lines fully protected by

certification servers. Each of these servers is now interconnecting Trade Points in their countries via the SEAL Link. The Secure ETO system was demonstrated and launched at the UN Conference and Secure ETO smart card distributed to over 1000 participants with their certificate storage at the smart card chip. With the Secure ETO smart card certified users will be authorized to transact over the SEAL links and with the GTPNet and related Trade Points. The Secure Browser was also distributed together with the UNTPDC Interactive CD-ROM which includes two CD-ROMs with all the software required to operate the Secure ETO system and a Mirror Site of the UNTPDC Web Site.

Basically the conference defined the need to integrate and in some countries build a high-performance, reliable and secure private communications environment, connecting the Global Trade Point Network on a Secure Business Internet/Intranet Solutions which will maximize the benefits of the Public Internet and private intranets for Trade Points around the world. The GTPNet will then become the first truly Global Secure Intranet using TCP/IP (Internet Protocol) technologies. The SEAL interconnectivity will bring value-added applications and systems integration - in more countries than any other existing network provider as SEAL will be using Trade Points, chambers of commerce, trade promotion organizations and other as local Intranet services providers and interconnecting securely to the SEAL Hubs on each country.

During the conference new products such as the Secure ETO Browsers and Electronic Trading Centers were presented at the UNTPDC CyberCafe which was available for participants to try and test the technologies presented. The UNTPDC CyberCafe was connected to the SEAL Hub in Australia from Bangkok and real-time transactions were executed for the first time on this time of Conferences and open the possibility to use this type of events as transactional fairs.

The conference adopted the Secure ETO and SEAL system design and network architecture. The Technical Track included presentations from participants from leading IT companies, Trade Point Directors, Government officials and Universities, members of the UNTPDC Technical Steering Committee. A Technical Steering Committee TSC was organized which the objective was to study and debate state of the art technologies on secure transactions, authentication, certification, electronic payment and network security to the overall system architecture of SEAL and Secure ETO system. A draft technical paper on the Secure ETO system and SEAL was presented, debated and accepted by all participants from Trade Points, Government, Universities and private sector. This draft paper will be used as the technical foundations for the development of the Secure ETO system and SEAL interconnectivities. The TSC was chaired by the Head of the UNTPDC with the participation of Representatives from ESCAP, International Trade Center, ITC, UNCTAD-WTO, Trade Points from Tampere, Tel-Aviv, Minnesota, Melbourne, Beijing, Shanghai, China Trade Point Development Center SEAL project manager, US SEAL project manager, SUN Microsystems, Silicon Graphics, Telstra, Netscape, and other private Sector experts.

2. The cooperation among national and international organizations

Expansion of the ETO was agreed to cover the work of other National and International Organizations UNTPDC Cooperation with other International Agencies on the expansion of the Secure ETO system to other services such as Quality Control, with the Australia Quality Council, ETO Investment with the World Bank IPNet Investment Network, ETO-TISNET with the Economic Commission for Asia and Pacific ESCAP and Company Certification with the International Trade Center ITC, UNCTAD/WTO and Kompas International and ETO-G77 Chambers of Commerce Network.

The World Bank IPNet Investment Network project (It was established by the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) of the World Bank Group. Its objective has been to promote international investment through the dissemination of operating conditions, investment projects, joint venture opportunities, and privatization initiatives. It encourages sharing of information and matching of partners) requested to join forces with the UNTPDC in further development of the ETO Investment system, which presently provides Investment Opportunities to Trade Points users around the world. The cooperation will include links at the UNTPDC ETO Investment switch to the World Bank IPNet Web Site for further classification and broadcast by the World Bank to their members. It will also include cooperation and standardization in the procedures to collect and classify ETO Investment with the objective to increase the Investment Matching capabilities of the system. A prototype of this System will be available at the

UNTPDC ETO Investment Web Site in the following weeks.

ESCAP initiatives in electronic commerce and information networking were presented. The APIX strategy was explained as well as a case study illustrating the need for provide a human interface for a small to medium enterprises in developing countries. The missing piece in the equation relates to the segments that are outside the main technological streams. The profile this segment represents would be a small-sized two-or three man operation, with access to one telephone, perhaps a fax on a sharing basis, and minimum computing facilities. APIX will attempt to respond to this need through the building up of a model of national networking capabilities, to reach district or local levels to enable to reach this disadvantaged segment

ESCAP operates the Trade Information System Network TISNET connecting Trade Promotion Organization and Chambers of Commerce in the Asia Pacific Region. It was agreed during the Bangkok conference that UNTPDC will assist ESCAP in the broadcasting of ETOs to all TISNET focal points and will work with ESCAP in the introduction of the Secure ETO system in the Asia Pacific region using ESCAP as a certification center for TISNET focal points and interconnecting ESCAP to the Secure Link to the UNTPDC.

It was requested to reinforce the cooperation between the UNTPDC and ITC with the objective to incorporate the COMREG data structure on the ETO system and use COMREG as first level company certification. It was requested further integration of COMREG and ETO into one system which will use COMREG data structure as certificate structure which will be storage on the Secure ETO smart card and databases and ETO EDIFACT message for the transactional component of the Secure ETO system. This integration of COMREG and ETO will allow to integrate ETO and COMREG existing Communities into an unique company register which will be use by UNTPDC and ITC as certification databases.

The Global Network of Chambers of Commerce members of the G77 requested to interconnect all members chambers (18,000) to the Secure ETO system using the network architecture presented for SEAL and operational between China, Australia and US and expand this infrastructure to the G77 Chamber network. Due The diversity of levels of development of chambers around the world the Project will include all aspects related to the ETO segmentation from simple ETO-FAX broadcasting to ETO-Email, ETO-Newsgroups, ETO-BBS, ETO-Gopher, ETO-WEB, Secure ETO, ETO Smart Card and SEAL. A pilot interconnecting 300 Chambers From different levels of development and technology will be implemented by the UNTPDC to study a possible global deployment of the ETO system at the G77 Chambers network and use chambers as certification nodes for SEAL. The session on cooperation among institutions underscored the importance of transparency and frequent contact with a range of institutions, and to seek the best possible solutions and contributions that such institutions may be able to make. This was illustrated in the Minnesota Trade Point, where the target beneficiaries are the rural poor and have little or no access to international trade matters. This activity is supported by extension programmes of the United States departments of agriculture, and commerce, the local governments and the University of Minnesota network.

3. The role of the private sector in the development of the Trade Point Programme

The presentation by Kompas International underscored the importance of validation to uphold the integrity of company information. The basic feature of Kompas' comparative advantage is its ability of update the profiles of over 1.3 million companies, using a franchise system and researchers who conduct field checks on the companies. Kompas and the UN Trade Point Development Centre are collaborating on a concept of establishing kiosks at major airports, which will enable businessmen to make instantaneous contacts upon their arrival.

Kompas International announced their intention to reconvert their Existing databases to the ETO EDIFACT standard so Kompas database could be used as a first level certification to the Secure ETO system. Kompas will develop in cooperation with the UNTPDC data bridges which will allow ETO users to check Kompas databases via the UNTPDC web Sites and Mirror Sites. A Interactive Secure ETO Kiosk will be developed by the UNTPDC using Kompas data in Australia interconnecting all Australian airports on a join UNTPDC-Kompas pilot project which will allow users to certify themselves via decentralized Kiosks interconnected via the SEAL to Trade Points.

The Silicon Graphics presentation gave an insight into the developments of Internet-based and multimedia presentations in the next decade, and greater expansion of bandwidth to permit the use of moving images in the

presentation of ideas and visualization of concepts. Electronic product catalogues will be converted from static images, into dynamic images (e.g., simulation of a piece of machinery in action, textures of material, etc.) Trade points will be making use of these technologies to reduce the dependence on physical contact and increase the producer-to end-user contact.

4. The role of the government in the development of the Trade Point Programme

The China Trade Point Development Center operated by the Ministry Of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation of the Rep of China MOFTEC, requested to move the existing cooperation project with the UNTPDC to the transactional phase. During the pre-transactional phase CNTPDC and UNTPDC connected in 1996 their servers in Beijing and Melbourne via the first SEAL Link operational in the world and via this link over 13 million ETOs were exchanged securely. Presently the intention of the CNTPDC is to operate the China Trade Intranet interconnecting all Trade Points, government agencies and trading institutions to the SEAL hub at the CNTPDC. The overall objective will be to interconnect via the Secure Intranet over 2.5 million Chinese companies which will receive electronic certification and authentication at the CNTPDC SEAL Hub. The CNTPDC will distribute a chinese version of the Secure ETO browser and will become the certification authority for the SEAL Intranet in China. The CNTPDC will distribute the Secure ETO smart card to their members and will test a pilot project with the UNTPDC on micro-payments using the smart card internally in the country.

The South Korea Trade and Investment Promotion Organization, KOTRA which is the largest Trading Organization in South Korea interconnecting a global network of South Korean Trade Overseas Offices requested to operate a SEAL project in Korea which will follow a similar approach to the Chinese SEAL project plus will interconnect the KOTRA national and international network of overseas offices. The UNTPDC will assist Kotra in building the certification process for SEAL and interconnecting KOTRA via a Secure Link to the UNTPDC Hub. Kotra Requested in this first phase to Incubate their databases at the UNTPDC Incubator.

The USA delegation officially requested a SEAL Hub in Minnesota, US which will be during the first phase hosted by the University of Minnesota in Close cooperation with the Office of Technology of Minnesota. This SEAL Hub is already connected to the UNTPDC Hub via a T1 SEAL and is operational since November 1996 interconnecting securely the Trade Point Minneapolis via a secure 64KB link. A feasibility study is presently being conducted at the UNTPDC and University of Minnesota to define if one SEAL Hub will be sufficient to Support the US Secure Intranet or if other SEAL Hubs located at main US Universities will be required specially the interconnection of SEAL to the Internet 2 consortium of Universities operating Secure Intranets.

A SEAL for Malaysia was requested which will interconnected the UNTPDC Hub to the Putra University Hub which presently interconnects the EnterpriseNet project and Multimedia Super Corridor.

The very advanced SEAL Senegal was presented with definitions of the Trade Facilitation workflow developed by the Senegal experts in cooperation with the UNTPDC and which is presently that base for a full scale Trade Facilitation project interconnecting Customs, Insurance, Banks, Ministries, Chambers, TPOs, IPOs and other trade facilitation institutions to the first Secure Intranet in Africa via SEAL to the UNTPDC Hub.

The SEAL concept was interconnected to Local Government Initiatives presented by the Australian delegation and US delegation on which SEAL will expand the reach via the Interconnection of Local Council and Counties in order to provide first-hand authentication and certification services to rural areas and decentralized locations. This type of projects will also allow the interconnection of SEAL via local Postal Offices and will allow the deployment of Secure ETO Kiosk technology and smart card.

Other SEAL projects were discussed for Israel, South Africa, Vietnam, Nepal, Singapore, India, UAE and Iran.

The Conference also introduced new technologies for distance education with particular focus to use the security process establish for the Secure ETO for educational purposes as both education and trade requires similar authentication and validation procedures. In particular it was discussed the possibility to expand the present curriculum developed by the UNTPDC Advance Certificate on Trade Efficiency which is now provided via the Web to include other areas such as Local Government Management courses, Quality Control, financial services, etc, etc. It was agreed

that organizations wishing to put value on ACTE will develop JAVA based courses which will be attached to the Secure ETO browser and distributed together to the browser to all ETO users.

5. Trade Points Issues

Also during the conference, the Trade Point programmes were discussed, and brought about a number of issues to be resolved at the company, national, regional, and global levels. These were:

- a. The need to move from unstructured to structured ETOS. At present there are only about 10% of ETOs, which use the structured standard. This makes it difficult at the Trade Point level to try to interlink the profiles with needs. The Trade Point managers agreed that a standard should be strictly adhered to. In his presentation, the International Trade Centre (ITC) representative explained that a new COMREG software was developed recently and will make it available, including its source codes, to the trade points. COMREG was decided to be the minimum standard database structure for company registers and profiles.
- b. The issue of streamlining the procedure of becoming a trade point was also raised especially those who are ready to embark on membership. The clearances at the ministerial and UNCTAD headquarters were found to be the most cumbersome and complex.
- c. The legal and political implications of the presence of a Trade Point in a country were raised. The liability question needs to build into contracts and other agreements and advice provided to overcome complications arising from transactions. Certification was viewed as a local issue while authentication was viewed as a centrally managed task.
- d. The move to use Smart Cards also presented a security and ownership issue, and needed some more contractual research to enable its operation to be free of such burdens.
- e. It was suggested that an Asia Pacific confederation of trade points should be established to address such common issues to allow for collective approaches to the Trade Point operations.
- f. The issue of intellectual property in the development of tools and programmes to exploit databases was raised.

6. UNTPDC Mirror Site and Incubator

The UNTPDC Global Mirror Sites network presently interconnecting 65 Servers received also special attention with 20 new requests for further decentralization of the UNTPDC context and ETO system. The SunSites network also requested further integration of the UNTPDC Global Mirror Sites to the SunSites university network.

The UNTPDC Incubator which presently incubates 97% of the GTPNet and over 12 GB of data content was also viewed as a great model to assist LDC and developing countries without the capability to establish Intranet or even to use efficiently the Internet. It was recommended that the UNTPDC should assist these Trade Points and Host their Virtual Servers at the UNTPDC Hub so they can benefit from the high bandwidth and hardware presently available at the UNTPDC data center.

The Secure Electronic Authentication Link project and concept were developed by the UNTPDC and presently operational in US, China and Australia. This project received full attention from all participants and was recognized a future solution to move Trade Points and related trading organizations from a Webcentric environment to Secure Intranet architecture on which the chain of trust required to execute transactions will be interconnected. The following SEAL related projects were introduced and requested:

Conclusions

The UNCTAD initiative on electronic commerce including the Global Trade Point Network GTPNet, Mirror Sites,

Electronic Trading Opportunities (ETO), and the Secure Electronic Authentication Link (SEAL) have, over a span since the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency in 1994, made a number of moves toward an evolution of the way trade is conducted. The initiative thrives on a transparent and open system, and greater global access through the Internet. It is still continually on the evolution curve, with a number of other players, including companies, collaborating to reach at applying more technology for improvements and new features.

The UNTPDC Secure Electronic Trading Conference proved to be a practical and effective combination of panels, sessions, demonstrations and transactions which convinced the audience that this new format to conduct UN conferences for Electronic Commerce is a model for the future. Three other UNTPDC Conferences on Secure Electronic Trading were officially requested by the city of Melbourne (30th October to 2nd November 1997) with an expected number of 40,000 participants and in Dubai first quarter of 1998 which will integrate the Arab world on electronic commerce and Singapore on 2nd quarter 1998. The next conference will feature full transactional capabilities using the Secure ETO system and SEAL concept and business will be concluded during the Conference with the support of the technology developed and integrated by this project.

Recommendations

In view of the need to agree on the technical standards and methodology of SEAL, the Technical Committee should review the documentation and to give their comments on a priority basis to enable the user guide to be completed. Each Committee member should follow up on the areas of expertise being contributed to SEAL.

To enable more trade practitioners to be made aware of the "Interact Asia Pacific Multimedia Festival" to be held at the Melbourne Exhibition Center from 30 October - 2 November 1997, ESCAP should disseminate the festival to members and associate members.

UNTPDC should give priority to the authentication and validation process through a strategic alliance with Kompas Asia-Pacific and to increase the scope for the installation of information kiosks for business travelers at major airports in the region.

ESCAP should encourage the participation of small and medium scale enterprises in electronic trading through its networking activities in trade, investment, and through its association with other international and regional institutions.

ESCAP should support initiatives concerning addressing of common issues in the Asia and Pacific region, such as an association of trade points.

ITC should arrange to establish a registration procedure for the distribution of the COMREG software, source codes, and manuals. ESCAP may be proposed as the distribution center for the Asia and Pacific region.

In view of the wide range of resource persons and exhibitors for the Conference and Exhibition, the presentations, papers, List of Participants, arrangements and other relevant information are made available at an Internet website at the following address:

<http://urgento.gse.rmit.edu.au/conference/bangkok97>

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<http://www.unicc.org/untpdc/welcome.html>

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