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June 25, 2014

Hon. Sunil Soni
Director General
Bureau of Indian Standards
9 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg
New Delhi 110 002
India
via email: dg@bis.org.in

Dear Director General Soni:

I am writing to you today at the suggestion of Mr. Sam Pitroda, with whom I have had the pleasure of communicating on a regular basis for the last two years. Mr. Pitroda has been kind enough to seek my advice on a number of technical issues and I have been very fortunate to get his advice on numerous matters.

Let me first begin by saying I am happy to renew our subscription for the DVDs of Indian Standards per your reference at HQ/DVD/000294/06/2014 with the option of one update every 6 months. I do have a number of suggestions as to how the update service is provided, and noted that in at least one of the DVDs I received last year, the files were not valid PDF files. In addition, it appears to me that the update service is perhaps incomplete, not providing all the standards that are being published by the Bureau. I would be happy to discuss this matter with your technical staff.

The purpose of my letter today is to offer assistance if that would be useful to the Bureau. Public.Resource.Org has spent considerable time working with the Indian Standards, and I have been very impressed with the high quality and important subject matter of the publications. As you know, we have been making these crucial public safety documents available to a broader audience on the Internet at this location:

<https://law.resource.org/pub/in/manifest.in.html>

As part of the process of posting these documents, we've spent considerable time on several key standards, such as the **National Building Code of India 2005** which we have converted to an HTML document and made the diagrams available in the open SVG format and formulas in the open MATHML format. A total of 192 documents have been converted in this manner, meaning that they are more compatible with modern browsers and that the artwork and text may easily be used in additional applications, such as cut and pasted into specifications done by government agencies.

In addition, an additional 592 documents have been converted to valid HTML format but we have not converted the graphics or formulas. The conversion process we've used is part of a mentoring program where schoolchildren are able to learn graphic design skills and modern markup languages (such as HTML5, SVG, and MathML) while they are working to help increase the public safety by making these important documents more accessible.

We would be very pleased if the Bureau of Indian Standards could use any of this work and we make it available to you (as to anybody else) for use without restriction. Please do not hesitate to let me know if I can provide more information or if there are members of your staff to whom we can provide additional details.

The last matter I would like to bring up is a suggestion from Mr. Sam Pitroda. He has had pioneered several “hackathons” in India where talented technical staff and subject experts gather together for a day or two and work on specific issues. We would be delighted to host two such hackathons, one in India and one in the US, to see if there are ways that we can make the tremendously valuable standards you publish even more accessible and useable.

These hackathons have, in the past, led to tremendous progress in building better facilities for access to government data. For example, my colleagues in the District of Columbia were able to produce a dramatically better version of the District Code that was of immense benefit to the General Counsel. Likewise, Mr. Pitroda has seen some dramatic effects from similar efforts in India.

Some of the tasks I could imagine we might undertake would be to build better search facilities, extract more metadata from the underlying documents to make them easier to categorize, and perhaps even automatic extraction of the text on “born digital” documents so that they can be turned into HTML files. We would also be happy to furnish you with more information on how the graphics and formulas are converted.

These hackathons would not be an administrative burden on the Bureau: we would be happy to undertake the work of organizing and conducting these events at our expense and with our own time. Of course, we would be delighted if you and your staff would have the time to participate along with the volunteers from universities and computer companies that we would ask to join us. Please don't hesitate to let me or Mr. Pitroda know if this would be of use or if I can provide any other service.

Again, thank you very much for the wonderful work you and the staff at the Bureau of Indian Standards do in making such high quality and important information available. Your work is crucial to the public safety in numerous areas of society in India and is crucial to the creation of new jobs and business inside of India and to international trade in our increasingly interconnected world.

Best regards,



Digitally signed by Carl
Malamud
DN: cn=Carl Malamud,
o=Public.Resource.Org,
ou, email=carl@media.org,
c=US
Date: 2014.06.25 10:03:40
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Carl Malamud
Public.Resource.Org

cc: Mr. Sam Pitroda



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Sir

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Encl : As above.