Foreign exchange restrictions and hyperinflation (IAS 21 *The Effects of Changes in Foreign Exchange Rates*)—November 2014

The Interpretations Committee received a request for guidance on the translation and consolidation of the results and financial position of foreign operations in Venezuela. The issue arises because of strict foreign exchange controls in Venezuela. This includes the existence of several official exchange rates that may not fully reflect the local rate of hyperinflation and of restrictions over the amount of local currency that can be exchanged.

Concerns were raised that using an official exchange rate to translate an entity’s net investment in a foreign operation in Venezuela appeared not to appropriately reflect the financial performance and position of the foreign operation in the group’s consolidated financial statements.

The Interpretations Committee identified two primary accounting issues:

a) which rate should be used to translate the entity’s net investment in the foreign operation when there are multiple exchange rates?
b) which rate should be used when there is a longer-term lack of exchangeability?

With respect to the first issue, the Interpretations Committee observed very little diversity in the application of IAS 21 regarding the principle to use when determining which rate, out of multiple rates, to use to translate an entity’s net investment in a foreign operation. The Interpretations Committee noted that predominant practice is to apply the principle in paragraph 26 of IAS 21, which gives guidance on which exchange rate to use when reporting foreign currency transactions in the functional currency when several exchange rates are available. Hence, despite the issue’s widespread applicability, the Interpretations Committee decided not to take the first issue onto its agenda.

With respect to the second issue, the Interpretations Committee observed that a longer-term lack of exchangeability is not addressed by the guidance in IAS 21, and so it is not entirely clear how IAS 21 applies in such situations. However, the Interpretations Committee thought that addressing this issue is a broader-scope project than it could address. Accordingly, the Interpretations Committee decided not to take this issue onto its agenda.

However, the Interpretations Committee noted that several existing disclosure requirements in IFRS would apply when the impact of foreign exchange controls is material to understanding the entity’s financial performance and position. Relevant disclosure requirements in IFRS include:

a) disclosure of significant accounting policies and significant judgements in applying those policies (paragraphs 117–124 of IAS 1);
b) disclosure of sources of estimation uncertainty that have a significant risk of resulting in a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next financial year, which may include a sensitivity analysis (paragraphs 125–133 of IAS 1); and
c) disclosure about the nature and extent of significant restrictions on an entity’s ability to access or use assets and to settle the liabilities of the group, or its joint ventures or associates (paragraphs 10, 13, 20 and 22 of IFRS 12).