



UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON  
INTERNATIONAL TRADE LAW (UNCITRAL)

*UNCITRAL Model Law on International Credit  
Transfers*

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C O N T E N T S

UNCITRAL MODEL LAW ON INTERNATIONAL CREDIT TRANSFERS

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UNCITRAL Model Law on International Credit Transfers

CHAPTER I. GENERAL PROVISIONS<sup>1</sup>

Article 1. Sphere of application<sup>2</sup>

- (1) This law applies to credit transfers where any sending bank and its receiving bank are in different States.
- (2) This law applies to other entities that as an ordinary part of their business engage in executing payment orders in the same manner as it applies to banks.
- (3) For the purpose of determining the sphere of application of this law, branches and separate offices of a bank in different States are separate banks.

## Article 2. Definitions

For the purposes of this law:

(a) "Credit transfer" means the series of operations, beginning with the originator's payment order, made for the purpose of placing funds at the disposal of a beneficiary. The term includes any payment order issued by the originator's bank or any intermediary bank intended to carry out the originator's payment order. A payment order issued for the purpose of effecting payment for such an order is considered to be part of a different credit transfer;

(b) "Payment order" means an unconditional instruction, in any form, by a sender to a receiving bank to place at the disposal of a beneficiary a fixed or determinable amount of money if

(i) the receiving bank is to be reimbursed by debiting an account of, or otherwise receiving payment from, the sender, and

(ii) the instruction does not provide that payment is to be made at the request of the beneficiary.

Nothing in this paragraph prevents an instruction from being a payment order merely because it directs the beneficiary's bank to hold, until the beneficiary requests payment, funds for a beneficiary that does not maintain an account with it;

(c) "Originator" means the issuer of the first payment order in a credit transfer;

(d) "Beneficiary" means the person designated in the originator's payment order to receive funds as a result of the credit transfer;

(e) "Sender" means the person who issues a payment order, including the originator and any sending bank;

(f) "Receiving bank" means a bank that receives a payment order;

(g) "Intermediary bank" means any receiving bank other than the originator's bank and the beneficiary's bank;

(h) "Funds" or "money" includes credit in an account kept by a bank and includes credit denominated in a monetary unit of account that is established by an intergovernmental institution or by agreement of two or more States, provided that

this law shall apply without prejudice to the rules of the intergovernmental institution or the stipulations of the agreement;

(i) "Authentication" means a procedure established by agreement to determine whether a payment order or an amendment or revocation of a payment order was issued by the person indicated as the sender;

(j) "Banking day" means that part of a day during which the bank performs the type of action in question;

(k) "Execution period" means the period of one or two days beginning on the first day that a payment order may be executed under article 11(1) and ending on the last day on which it may be executed under that article;

(l) "Execution", in so far as it applies to a receiving bank other than the beneficiary's bank, means the issue of a payment order intended to carry out the payment order received by the receiving bank;

(m) "Interest" means the time value of the funds or money involved, which, unless otherwise agreed, is calculated at the rate and on the basis customarily accepted by the banking community for the funds or money involved.

### Article 3. Conditional instructions

(1) When an instruction is not a payment order because it is subject to a condition but a bank that has received the instruction executes it by issuing an unconditional payment order, thereafter the sender of the instruction has the same rights and obligations under this law as the sender of a payment order and the beneficiary designated in the instruction shall be treated as the beneficiary of a payment order.

(2) This law does not govern the time of execution of a conditional instruction received by a bank, nor does it affect any right or obligation of the sender of a conditional instruction that depends on whether the condition has been satisfied.

### Article 4. Variation by agreement

Except as otherwise provided in this law, the rights and obligations of parties to a credit transfer may be varied by their agreement.

## CHAPTER II. OBLIGATIONS OF THE PARTIES

### Article 5. Obligations of sender

(1) A sender is bound by a payment order or an amendment or revocation of a payment order if it was issued by the sender or by another person who had the authority to bind the sender.

(2) When a payment order or an amendment or revocation of a payment order is subject to authentication other than by means of a mere comparison of signature, a purported sender who is not bound under paragraph (1) is nevertheless bound if

- (a) the authentication is in the circumstances a commercially reasonable method of security against unauthorized payment orders, and
  - (b) the receiving bank complied with the authentication.
- (3) The parties are not permitted to agree that a purported sender is bound under paragraph (2) if the authentication is not commercially reasonable in the circumstances.
- (4) A purported sender is, however, not bound under paragraph (2) if it proves that the payment order as received by the receiving bank resulted from the actions of a person other than
- (a) a present or former employee of the purported sender, or
  - (b) a person whose relationship with the purported sender enabled that person to gain access to the authentication procedure.

The preceding sentence does not apply if the receiving bank proves that the payment order resulted from the actions of a person who had gained access to the authentication procedure through the fault of the purported sender.

- (5) A sender who is bound by a payment order is bound by the terms of the order as received by the receiving bank. However, the sender is not bound by an erroneous duplicate of, or an error or discrepancy in, a payment order if
- (a) the sender and the receiving bank have agreed upon a procedure for detecting erroneous duplicates, errors or discrepancies in a payment order, and
  - (b) use of the procedure by the receiving bank revealed or would have revealed the erroneous duplicate, error or discrepancy.

If the error or discrepancy that the bank would have detected was that the sender instructed payment of an amount greater than the amount intended by the sender, the sender is bound only to the extent of the amount that was intended. Paragraph (5) applies to an error or discrepancy in an amendment or a revocation order as it applies to an error or discrepancy in a payment order.

- (6) A sender becomes obligated to pay the receiving bank for the payment order when the receiving bank accepts it, but payment is not due until the beginning of the execution period.

#### Article 6. Payment to receiving bank

For the purposes of this law, payment of the sender's obligation under article 5(6) to pay the receiving bank occurs

- (a) if the receiving bank debits an account of the sender with the receiving bank, when the debit is made; or

- (b) if the sender is a bank and subparagraph (a) does not apply,
- (i) when a credit that the sender causes to be entered to an account of the receiving bank with the sender is used or, if not used, on the banking day following the day on which the credit is available for use and the receiving bank learns of that fact, or
  - (ii) when a credit that the sender causes to be entered to an account of the receiving bank in another bank is used or, if not used, on the banking day following the day on which the credit is available for use and the receiving bank learns of that fact, or
  - (iii) when final settlement is made in favour of the receiving bank at a central bank at which the receiving bank maintains an account, or
  - (iv) when final settlement is made in favour of the receiving bank in accordance with
    - a. provides for the settlement of obligations among participants either bilaterally or the rules of a funds transfer system that multilaterally, or
    - b. a bilateral netting agreement with the sender; or
  - (c) if neither subparagraph (a) nor (b) applies, as otherwise provided by law.

Article 7. Acceptance or rejection of a payment order by receiving bank  
other than the beneficiary's bank

- (1) The provisions of this article apply to a receiving bank other than the beneficiary's bank.
- (2) A receiving bank accepts the sender's payment order at the earliest of the following times:
- (a) when the bank receives the payment order, provided that the sender and the bank have agreed that the bank will execute payment orders from the sender upon receipt;
  - (b) when the bank gives notice to the sender of acceptance;
  - (c) when the bank issues a payment order intended to carry out the payment order received;
  - (d) when the bank debits an account of the sender with the bank as payment for the payment order; or
  - (e) when the time for giving notice of rejection under paragraph (3) has elapsed without notice having been given.
- (3) A receiving bank that does not accept a payment order is required to give notice of rejection no later than on the banking day following the end of the execution period, unless:

- (a) where payment is to be made by debiting an account of the sender with the receiving bank, there are insufficient funds available in the account to pay for the payment order;
  - (b) where payment is to be made by other means, payment has not been made; or
  - (c) there is insufficient information to identify the sender.
- (4) A payment order ceases to have effect if it is neither accepted nor rejected under this article before the close of business on the fifth banking day following the end of the execution period.

Article 8. Obligations of receiving bank other than the  
beneficiary's bank

- (1) The provisions of this article apply to a receiving bank other than the beneficiary's bank.
- (2) A receiving bank that accepts a payment order is obligated under that payment order to issue a payment order, within the time required by article 11, either to the beneficiary's bank or to an intermediary bank, that is consistent with the contents of the payment order received by the receiving bank and that contains the instructions necessary to implement the credit transfer in an appropriate manner.
- (3) A receiving bank that determines that it is not feasible to follow an instruction of the sender specifying an intermediary bank or funds transfer system to be used in carrying out the credit transfer, or that following such an instruction would cause excessive costs or delay in completing the credit transfer, shall be taken to have complied with paragraph (2) if, before the end of the execution period, it inquires of the sender what further actions it should take.
- (4) When an instruction is received that appears to be intended to be a payment order but does not contain sufficient data to be a payment order, or being a payment order it cannot be executed because of insufficient data, but the sender can be identified, the receiving bank shall give notice to the sender of the insufficiency, within the time required by article 11.
- (5) When a receiving bank detects that there is an inconsistency in the information relating to the amount of money to be transferred, it shall, within the time required by article 11, give notice to the sender of the inconsistency, if the sender can be identified. Any interest payable under article 17(4) for failing to give the notice required by this paragraph shall be deducted from any interest payable under article 17(1) for failing to comply with paragraph (2) of this article.
- (6) For the purposes of this article, branches and separate offices of a bank, even if located in the same State, are separate banks.

Article 9. Acceptance or rejection of a payment order by  
beneficiary's bank

- (1) The beneficiary's bank accepts a payment order at the earliest of the following times:
- (a) when the bank receives the payment order, provided that the sender and the bank have agreed that the bank will execute payment orders from the sender upon receipt;
  - (b) when the bank gives notice to the sender of acceptance;
  - (c) when the bank debits an account of the sender with the bank as payment for the payment order;
  - (d) when the bank credits the beneficiary's account or otherwise places the funds at the disposal of the beneficiary;
  - (e) when the bank gives notice to the beneficiary that it has the right to withdraw the funds or use the credit;
  - (f) when the bank otherwise applies the credit as instructed in the payment order;
  - (g) when the bank applies the credit to a debt of the beneficiary owed to it or applies it in conformity with an order of a court or other competent authority; or
  - (h) when the time for giving notice of rejection under paragraph (2) has elapsed without notice having been given.
- (2) A beneficiary's bank that does not accept a payment order is required to give notice of rejection no later than on the banking day following the end of the execution period, unless:
- (a) where payment is to be made by debiting an account of the sender with the beneficiary's bank, there are insufficient funds available in the account to pay for the payment order;
  - (b) where payment is to be made by other means, payment has not been made; or
  - (c) there is insufficient information to identify the sender.
- (3) A payment order ceases to have effect if it is neither accepted nor rejected under this article before the close of business on the fifth banking day following the end of the execution period.

#### Article 10. Obligations of beneficiary's bank

- (1) The beneficiary's bank is, upon acceptance of a payment order, obligated to place the funds at the disposal of the beneficiary, or otherwise to apply the credit, in accordance with the payment order and the law governing the relationship between the bank and the beneficiary.
- (2) When an instruction is received that appears to be intended to be a payment order but does not contain sufficient data to be a payment order, or being a payment order it

cannot be executed because of insufficient data, but the sender can be identified, the beneficiary's bank shall give notice to the sender of the insufficiency, within the time required by article 11.

(3) When the beneficiary's bank detects that there is an inconsistency in the information relating to the amount of money to be transferred, it shall, within the time required by article 11, give notice to the sender of the inconsistency if the sender can be identified.

(4) When the beneficiary's bank detects that there is an inconsistency in the information intended to identify the beneficiary, it shall, within the time required by article 11, give notice to the sender of the inconsistency if the sender can be identified.

(5) Unless the payment order states otherwise, the beneficiary's bank shall, within the time required for execution under article 11, give notice to a beneficiary who does not maintain an account at the bank that it is holding funds for its benefit, if the bank has sufficient information to give such notice.

Article 11. Time for receiving bank to execute payment order and  
give notices

(1) In principle, a receiving bank that is obligated to execute a payment order is obligated to do so on the banking day it is received. If it does not, it shall do so on the banking day after the order is received. Nevertheless, if

(a) a later date is specified in the payment order, the payment order shall be executed on that date, or

(b) the payment order specifies a date when the funds are to be placed at the disposal of the beneficiary and that date indicates that later execution is appropriate in order for the beneficiary's bank to accept a payment order and execute it on that date, the order shall be executed on that date.

(2) If the receiving bank executes the payment order on the banking day after it is received, except when complying with subparagraph (a) or (b) of paragraph (1), the receiving bank must execute for value as of the day of receipt.

(3) A receiving bank that becomes obligated to execute a payment order by virtue of accepting a payment order under article 7(2)(e) must execute for value as of the later of the day on which the payment order is received and the day on which

(a) where payment is to be made by debiting an account of the sender with the receiving bank, there are sufficient funds available in the account to pay for the payment order, or

(b) where payment is to be made by other means, payment has been made.

(4) A notice required to be given under article 8(4) or (5) or article 10(2), (3) or (4) shall be given on or before the banking day following the end of the execution period.

(5) A receiving bank that receives a payment order after the receiving bank's cut-off time for that type of payment order is entitled to treat the order as having been received on the next day the bank executes that type of payment order.

(6) If a receiving bank is required to perform an action on a day when it does not perform that type of action, it must perform the required action on the next day it performs that type of action.

(7) For the purposes of this article, branches and separate offices of a bank, even if located in the same State, are separate banks.

#### Article 12. Revocation

(1) A payment order may not be revoked by the sender unless the revocation order is received by a receiving bank other than the beneficiary's bank at a time and in a manner sufficient to afford the receiving bank a reasonable opportunity to act before the later of the actual time of execution and the beginning of the day on which the payment order ought to have been executed under subparagraph (a) or (b) of article 11(1).

(2) A payment order may not be revoked by the sender unless the revocation order is received by the beneficiary's bank at a time and in a manner sufficient to afford the bank a reasonable opportunity to act before the later of the time the credit transfer is completed and the beginning of the day when the funds are to be placed at the disposal of the beneficiary.

(3) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraphs (1) and (2), the sender and the receiving bank may agree that payment orders issued by the sender to the receiving bank are to be irrevocable or that a revocation order is effective only if it is received earlier than the time specified in paragraph (1) or (2).

(4) A revocation order must be authenticated.

(5) A receiving bank other than the beneficiary's bank that executes, or a beneficiary's bank that accepts, a payment order in respect of which an effective revocation order has been or is subsequently received is not entitled to payment for that payment order. If the credit transfer is completed, the bank shall refund any payment received by it.

(6) If the recipient of a refund is not the originator of the credit transfer, it shall pass on the refund to its sender.

(7) A bank that is obligated to make a refund to its sender is discharged from that obligation to the extent that it makes the refund direct to a prior sender. Any bank subsequent to that prior sender is discharged to the same extent.

(8) An originator entitled to a refund under this article may recover from any bank obligated to make a refund hereunder to the extent that the bank has not previously refunded. A bank that is obligated to make a refund is discharged from that obligation to the extent that it makes the refund direct to the originator. Any other bank that is obligated is discharged to the same extent.

(9) Paragraphs (7) and (8) do not apply to a bank if they would affect the bank's rights or obligations under any agreement or any rule of a funds transfer system.

(10) If the credit transfer is completed but a receiving bank executes a payment order in respect of which an effective revocation order has been or is subsequently received, the receiving bank has such rights to recover from the beneficiary the amount of the credit transfer as may otherwise be provided by law.

(11) The death, insolvency, bankruptcy or incapacity of either the sender or the originator does not of itself operate to revoke a payment order or terminate the authority of the sender.

(12) The principles contained in this article apply to an amendment of a payment order.

(13) For the purposes of this article, branches and separate offices of a bank, even if located in the same State, are separate banks.

### CHAPTER III. CONSEQUENCES OF FAILED, ERRONEOUS OR DELAYED CREDIT TRANSFERS

#### Article 13. Assistance

Until the credit transfer is completed, each receiving bank is requested to assist the originator and each subsequent sending bank, and to seek the assistance of the next receiving bank, in completing the banking procedures of the credit transfer.

#### Article 14. Refund

(1) If the credit transfer is not completed, the originator's bank is obligated to refund to the originator any payment received from it, with interest from the day of payment to the day of refund. The originator's bank and each subsequent receiving bank is entitled to the return of any funds it has paid to its receiving bank, with interest from the day of payment to the day of refund.

(2) The provisions of paragraph (1) may not be varied by agreement except when a prudent originator's bank would not have otherwise accepted a particular payment order because of a significant risk involved in the credit transfer.

(3) A receiving bank is not required to make a refund under paragraph (1) if it is unable to obtain a refund because an intermediary bank through which it was directed to effect the credit transfer has suspended payment or is prevented by law from making the refund. A receiving bank is not considered to have been directed to use the intermediary bank unless the receiving bank proves that it does not systematically seek such directions in similar cases. The sender that first specified the use of that intermediary bank has the right to obtain the refund from the intermediary bank.

(4) A bank that is obligated to make a refund to its sender is discharged from that obligation to the extent that it makes the refund direct to a prior sender. Any bank subsequent to that prior sender is discharged to the same extent.

(5) An originator entitled to a refund under this article may recover from any bank obligated to make a refund hereunder to the extent that the bank has not previously refunded. A bank that is obligated to make a refund is discharged from that obligation to the extent that it makes the refund direct to the originator. Any other bank that is obligated is discharged to the same extent.

(6) Paragraphs (4) and (5) do not apply to a bank if they would affect the bank's rights or obligations under any agreement or any rule of a funds transfer system.

#### Article 15. Correction of underpayment

If the amount of the payment order executed by a receiving bank is less than the amount of the payment order it accepted, other than as a result of the deduction of its charges, it is obligated to issue a payment order for the difference.

#### Article 16. Restitution of overpayment

If the credit transfer is completed, but the amount of the payment order executed by a receiving bank is greater than the amount of the payment order it accepted, it has such rights to recover the difference from the beneficiary as may otherwise be provided by law.

#### Article 17. Liability for interest

(1) A receiving bank that does not comply with its obligations under article 8(2) is liable to the beneficiary if the credit transfer is completed. The liability of the receiving bank is to pay interest on the amount of the payment order for the period of delay caused by the receiving bank's non-compliance. If the delay concerns only part of the amount of the payment order, the liability shall be to pay interest on the amount that has been delayed.

(2) The liability of a receiving bank under paragraph (1) may be discharged by payment to its receiving bank or by direct payment to the beneficiary. If a receiving bank receives such payment but is not the beneficiary, the receiving bank shall pass on the benefit of the interest to the next receiving bank or, if it is the beneficiary's bank, to the beneficiary.

(3) An originator may recover the interest the beneficiary would have been entitled to, but did not, receive in accordance with paragraphs (1) and (2) to the extent the originator has paid interest to the beneficiary on account of a delay in the completion of the credit transfer. The originator's bank and each subsequent receiving bank that is not the bank liable under paragraph (1) may recover interest paid to its sender from its receiving bank or from the bank liable under paragraph (1).

(4) A receiving bank that does not give a notice required under article 8(4) or (5) shall pay interest to the sender on any payment that it has received from the sender under article 5(6) for the period during which it retains the payment.

(5) A beneficiary's bank that does not give a notice required under article 10(2), (3) or (4) shall pay interest to the sender on any payment that it has received from the sender

under article 5(6), from the day of payment until the day that it provides the required notice.

(6) The beneficiary's bank is liable to the beneficiary to the extent provided by the law governing the relationship between the beneficiary and the bank for its failure to perform one of the obligations under article 10(1) or(5).

(7) The provisions of this article may be varied by agreement to the extent that the liability of one bank to another bank is increased or reduced. Such an agreement to reduce liability may be contained in a bank's standard terms of dealing. A bank may agree to increase its liability to an originator or beneficiary that is not a bank, but may not reduce its liability to such an originator or beneficiary. In particular, it may not reduce its liability by an agreement fixing the rate of interest.

#### Article 18. Exclusivity of remedies

The remedies in article 17 shall be exclusive, and no other remedy arising out of other doctrines of law shall be available in respect of non-compliance with articles 8 or 10, except any remedy that may exist when a bank has improperly executed, or failed to execute, a payment order (a) with the specific intent to cause loss, or (b) recklessly and with actual knowledge that loss would be likely to result.

### CHAPTER IV. COMPLETION OF CREDIT TRANSFER

#### Article 19. Completion of credit transfer<sup>3</sup>

(1) A credit transfer is completed when the beneficiary's bank accepts a payment order for the benefit of the beneficiary. When the credit transfer is completed, the beneficiary's bank becomes indebted to the beneficiary to the extent of the payment order accepted by it. Completion does not otherwise affect the relationship between the beneficiary and the beneficiary's bank.

(2) A credit transfer is completed notwithstanding that the amount of the payment order accepted by the beneficiary's bank is less than the amount of the originator's payment order because one or more receiving banks have deducted charges. The completion of the credit transfer shall not prejudice any right of the beneficiary under the applicable law governing the underlying obligation to recover the amount of those charges from the originator.

Explanatory Note by the UNCITRAL Secretariat on the Model Law  
on International Credit Transfers<sup>4</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

1. The UNCITRAL Model Law on International Credit Transfers, adopted by the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) in 1992, was prepared in response to a major change in the means by which funds transfers are made internationally. This change involved two elements: the increased use of payment orders sent by electronic means rather than on paper, and the shift from the generalized use of debit transfers to the generalized use of credit transfers. One result

was that previous efforts to unify the law governing international debit transfers were not relevant to the new funds transfer techniques. The Model Law offers the opportunity to unify the law of credit transfers by enacting a text that is drafted to meet the needs of modern funds transfer techniques.

#### A. FUNDS TRANSFERS IN GENERAL

2. Until the mid-1970's a person who wished to transfer funds to another country, whether to pay an obligation or to provide itself with funds in that foreign country, had a limited number of ways in which to proceed. It could send its own personal or corporate cheque to the intended recipient of the funds, but international collection of such items was both slow and expensive. It could purchase from its bank a draft drawn by the bank on the bank's correspondent in the receiving country. Collection of such an international bank draft was faster than collection of a personal or corporate cheque since it was payable in the receiving country and in the funds of the receiving country.

3. A third and even faster procedure had also been available since the mid-nineteenth century. The originator's bank could send a payment order by telegraph to its correspondent bank in the receiving country instructing the receiving bank to pay the intended recipient of the funds. (The payment order could also be transmitted between the banks on paper. This is the common method for making funds transfers in many countries. However, it was less commonly used for international transfers.) While faster than the other two methods, the telegraph was a relatively expensive method of communication and it was prone to error. When telex replaced the telegraph, the basic banking transaction remained the same, but the cost was reduced and accuracy improved. That led to a gradual movement away from the use of bank cheques for international payments. With the introduction of computer-to-computer inter-bank telecommunications in the mid-1970's, the cost dropped still further, while speed and accuracy improved dramatically. The extension of computer-to-computer inter-bank telecommunication facilities to ever increasing numbers of countries means that the use of bank cheques for international funds transfers has drastically decreased and the role of telex transfers has been significantly reduced.

4. The collection of bank cheques, telex transfers and the newer computer-to-computer transfers have one important element in common: value is transferred from the originator to the beneficiary by a debit to the bank account of the originator and a credit to the bank account of the beneficiary. Settlement between the banks is also accomplished by debits and credits to appropriate accounts. Those accounts may be maintained between the banks concerned or with third banks, including the central bank of one or both countries.

5. There is also a striking difference between, on the one hand, the collection of a bank cheque (or the collection of a personal or corporate cheque) and, on the other hand, a telex or computer-to-computer transfer. The cheque is transmitted to the beneficiary by mail or other means outside banking channels. Therefore, the banking procedures to collect the cheque are initiated by the beneficiary of the funds transfer. A funds transfer in which the beneficiary of the funds transfer initiates the banking procedures is more and more often called a debit transfer. Collection of a bill of exchange or a promissory note is also a debit transfer, since the beneficiary of the

funds transfer initiates the funds transfer, and there are other debit transfer techniques available, including some that are based on the use of computers.

6. In telex transfers and computer-to-computer transfers it is the originator of the funds transfer who begins the banking procedures by issuing a payment order to its bank to debit its account and to credit the account of the beneficiary. A funds transfer in which the originator of the funds transfer initiates the banking procedures is often called a credit transfer, and that is the term used in the Model Law.

## B. UNIFICATION OF THE LAW

7. As a result of the wide-spread international use of debit transfers arising out of the collection of cheques and bills of exchange, there have been several different efforts at unification of the law governing negotiable instruments and their collection. Conversely, until recently there had been little interest in unifying the law governing the international use of paper-based and telex credit transfers.

8. The situation began to change in 1975 when the first international inter-bank computer-to-computer message system came into service. Concurrently, electronic funds transfer systems for business or consumer use were beginning to appear in a number of countries. Since it was not clear whether the rules governing paper-based funds transfers should or would be applied to electronic funds transfers in whole or in part, UNCITRAL's first effort was to prepare the UNCITRAL Legal Guide on Electronic Funds Transfers (A/CN.9/SER.B/1, Sales No. E.87.V.9). The Legal Guide explored the legal issues that would have to be faced in moving from a paper-based to an electronic funds transfer system. Since the focus of the Legal Guide was on the impact of the shift from paper to electronics, it discussed both debit and credit transfers.

9. When UNCITRAL authorized the publication of the Legal Guide in 1986, it also decided to prepare model legal rules so as to "influence the development of" national practices and laws governing the newly developing means of making funds transfers. Subsequently, it was decided that the model legal rules should be adopted in the form of a model law, and that the model law should be drafted with a view to its adoption by States.

## C. SCOPE OF APPLICATION

### 1. Categories of transactions covered by Model Law

10. As indicated by its title, and in contrast to the Legal Guide, the Model Law applies to credit transfers. It does not apply to debit transfers, even when made in electronic form. The Model Law is not restricted to credit transfers made by computer-to-computer or other electronic techniques, even though it was the explosive growth of electronic credit transfer systems that brought about the need for the Model Law. Many credit transfers, both domestic and international, begin with a paper-based payment order from the originator to its bank to be followed by an inter-bank payment order in electronic form. Definition of an electronic credit transfer would, therefore, be difficult and unproductive. The appropriate solution for only a few legal issues

seemed to depend on whether a payment order was in electronic or paper-based form. Appropriate rules have been drafted for those situations.

11. While many credit transfers require the services of only the originator's bank and the beneficiary's bank, other credit transfers require the services of one or more intermediary banks. In such a case the credit transfer is initiated by a payment order issued by the originator to the originator's bank, followed by payment orders from the originator's bank to the intermediary bank and from the intermediary bank to the beneficiary's bank. The credit transfer also requires payment by each of the three senders to its receiving bank. As expressed in article 2(a), a credit transfer, and therefore the transaction subject to the Model Law, includes the entire "series of operations, beginning with the originator's payment order, made for the purpose of placing funds at the disposal of a beneficiary".

12. The Model Law is by its own terms restricted to international credit transfers. In part that decision was taken in recognition of the fact that UNCITRAL was created to unify the law governing international trade. An additional reason was that, while all countries face essentially the same legal and practical problems in implementing international credit transfers, the circumstances in which domestic credit transfers are carried out vary significantly.

13. The criteria set out in article 1 to determine whether a credit transfer is international, and therefore subject to the Model Law, is whether any sending bank and any receiving bank in the credit transfer are in different States. Once there is a sending and a receiving bank in different States, every aspect of the credit transfer is within the scope of the Model Law.

14. Although the means of making domestic credit transfers in some countries vary significantly from the means used for international credit transfers, the Commission recognized that none of the substantive rules in the Model Law were appropriate only for international credit transfers. Therefore, some States might wish to adopt the Model Law to govern their domestic credit transfers as well as their international credit transfers, thereby assuring unity of the law. All that would be necessary would be to change the scope of application in article 1.

15. Credit transfers may be made by individuals for personal reasons as well as by businesses for commercial reasons. Some countries have special consumer protection laws that govern certain aspects of a credit transfer. The footnote to article 1 recognizes that any such consumer protection law may take precedence over the provisions in the Model Law. If an individual is an originator or a beneficiary of a credit transfer, its rights and obligations would be governed by the Model Law, subject to any consumer protection law that might be applicable.

## 2. Portions of an international credit transfer

16. Once it was decided that the Model Law should be drafted to apply to the entire "series of operations ... made for the purpose of placing funds at the disposal of a beneficiary", and not just to the payment order that passed from a bank in one country to a bank in another country, it was necessary to decide whether every aspect of a given international credit transfer should be subject to the Model Law as enacted in a

given country. It was recognized by all concerned that such a result would be desirable, since it would ensure the application of a single legal regime to the entire credit transfer. At one stage a proposal was made that a rule to that effect should be included in the Model Law. UNCITRAL decided that such a rule, although desirable in the abstract, was neither technically nor politically feasible. Therefore, it was accepted by UNCITRAL that each of the operations carried out in the credit transfer would be subject to the law applicable to that operation. It was hoped, of course, that the Model Law would be widely adopted so that the different operations in a given credit transfer would be subject to a consistent legal regime.

17. Throughout the period that the Model Law was in preparation UNCITRAL implemented its decision that each of the operations carried out in the credit transfer would be subject to the law applicable to that operation by means of an article on conflict of laws. That article allowed the parties to choose the law applicable to their relationship. Such a choice would probably be included in an agreement that pre-existed the credit transfer in question. In the absence of an agreement, the law of the State of the receiving bank would apply to the rights and obligations arising out of the payment order sent to that bank.

18. At the 1992 session when the Model Law was adopted, it was decided to delete the conflict-of-laws provision from the Model Law proper. However, the article was included in a footnote to Chapter I of the Model Law "for States that might wish to adopt it".

#### D. EXTENT TO WHICH MODEL LAW IS MANDATORY

19. Article 4 provides that "Except as otherwise provided in this law, the rights and obligations of parties to a credit transfer may be varied by their agreement." This simple sentence embodies three propositions:

In principle, the Model Law is not mandatory law. The parties to a credit transfer may vary their rights and obligations by agreement.

The agreement must be between the parties whose rights and obligations are affected. That means, for example, that the agreement of a group of banks in regard to the transactions between them could modify the rights and obligations of those banks as they are set out in the Model Law. However, the agreement would have no effect on the rights and obligations of their customers, unless the customers had also agreed to such a modification of their rights and obligations. This rule is somewhat modified in articles 12(9) and 14(6), both of which provide that specific paragraphs in the Model Law governing the means of making a refund under certain limited circumstances "do not apply to a bank if they would affect the bank's rights or obligations under any agreement or any rule of a funds transfer system".

Certain rights and obligations of the parties may not be varied by agreement, or may be varied only to a limited extent or under limited circumstances. Examples are to be found in articles 5(3), 14(2) and 17(7).

#### E. SALIENT FEATURES OF THE MODEL LAW

## 1. Obligations of sender of payment order

20. The sender of a payment order may be the originator of the credit transfer, since the originator sends a payment order to the originator's bank, or it may be a bank, since every bank in the credit transfer chain, except the beneficiary's bank, must send its own payment order to the next bank in the credit transfer chain.

21. Article 5(6) sets out the one real obligation of a sender, i.e., "to pay the receiving bank for the payment order when the receiving bank accepts it". There is a special rule for payment orders that contain a future execution date; in that case the obligation to pay arises when the receiving bank accepts the payment order, "but payment is not due until the beginning of the execution period".

22. But what if there is a question as to whether the payment order was really sent by the person who is indicated as being the sender? In the case of a paper-based payment order the problem would arise as the result of an alleged forged signature of the purported sender. In an electronic payment order, an unauthorized person may have sent the message but the authentication by code, encryption or the like would be accurate.

23. The Model Law answers the question in three steps. The first step is described in article 5(1): "A sender is bound by a payment order ... if it was issued by the sender or by another person who had the authority to bind the sender." The question as to whether the other person did in fact and in law have the authority to bind the sender is left to the appropriate legal rules outside the Model Law.

24. The second step described in article 5(2) is the most important:

"When a payment order ... is subject to authentication [by agreement between the sender and the receiving bank], a purported sender ... is ... bound if

(a) the authentication is in the circumstances a commercially reasonable method of security against unauthorized payment orders, and

(b) the receiving bank complied with the authentication."

25. The assumption is that, in the case of an electronic payment order, the receiving bank determines the authentication procedures it is prepared to implement. Therefore, the bank bears all the risk of an unauthorized payment order when the authentication procedures are not at a minimum "commercially reasonable". The determination of what is commercially reasonable will vary from time to time and from place to place depending on the technology available, the cost of implementing the technology in comparison with the risk and such other factors as may be applicable at the time. Article 5(3) goes on to say that article 5(2) states an obligation that the receiving bank cannot avoid by agreement to the contrary. Article 5(2) does not apply, however, when the authentication procedure is "a mere comparison of signature", in which case the otherwise applicable law on the consequences of acting on a forged signature must be applied.

26. If the authentication procedure was commercially reasonable and the bank followed the procedure, the purported sender is bound by the payment order. This reflects two judgments. The first is that the bank has no means to distinguish the authorized use of the authentication from the unauthorized use of the authentication. Banks would be unable to offer electronic credit transfers at an acceptable price if they bore the risk that payment orders that were properly authenticated were nevertheless unauthorized. The second is the judgment that if the authentication procedure is commercially reasonable and the bank can show that it followed the procedure, the chances are that it was the sender's fault that someone unauthorized learned how to authenticate the payment order.

27. That introduces the third step in the analysis as described in article 5(4). The sender or the receiving bank, as the case may be, would be responsible for any unauthorized payment order that could be shown to have been sent as a result of the fault of that party. For the rule as to who bears the burden of proof, see article 5(4).

## 2. Sender's payment to receiving bank

28. It happens, particularly in transfers by individuals, that an originator does not have an account with the originator's bank and that it pays the amount of the credit transfer plus the applicable fees to the originator's bank in cash. However, in most cases the originator, i.e., the sender, will have an account with the originator's bank, i.e., the receiving bank. It also often happens that a sending bank will have an account with the receiving bank. In any such case, payment to the receiving bank will normally be made by a debit to the account of the sender held by the receiving bank. Since the receiving bank is in a position to determine whether there is a sufficient credit balance in the account, or whether it is willing to extend credit to the sender to the extent of the resulting debit balance, article 6(a) provides that payment is made when the debit is made.

29. The reverse situation may also occur, that is, that the receiving bank maintains an account with the sending bank. Alternatively, both the sending bank and the receiving bank may maintain accounts with a third bank. Then the sending bank can pay the receiving bank by crediting the receiving bank's account or by instructing the third bank to credit the receiving bank's account, as the case may be. The result in either of those two situations is that the credit balance of the receiving bank with the sending bank or with the third bank is increased, with a concurrently larger credit risk. Normally that would be acceptable to the receiving bank. However, on occasion the credit balance, and the resulting credit risk, may be more than the receiving bank was willing to have with the sending bank or the third bank. Therefore, the Model Law provides in article 6(b)(i) and (ii) that payment takes place when the credit "is used [by the receiving bank] or, if not used, on the banking day following the day on which the credit is available for use and the receiving bank learns of that fact". In other words, if the receiving bank does not use the credit and does not wish to bear the credit risk, it has a short period of time to notify the sending bank that the payment is not acceptable to it.

30. When the third bank at which the receiving bank maintains an account is a central bank, whether the central bank of its country or of another country, there is no credit risk (at least when the credit is in the currency of the central bank). Therefore, article

6(b)(iii) says that the payment has been made "when final settlement is made in favour of the receiving bank".

31. A fourth principal means of paying the receiving bank is to net the obligation of the sending bank with other obligations arising out of other payment orders. The netting may be pursuant to a bilateral netting agreement between the two banks. The netting may also be pursuant to "the rules of a funds transfer system that provides for the settlement of obligations among participants either bilaterally or multilaterally". If netting takes place under any of these circumstances, article 6(b)(iv) provides that payment to the various receiving banks for each of the individual payment orders occurs "when final settlement is made in favour of the receiving bank in accordance with" the agreement or the rules.

32. A caveat should be entered at this point. Netting and the consequences of netting in case of the insolvency of one of the parties is a controversial matter. It is the subject of continuing study at the Bank for International Settlements. The Model Law does not take a position as to whether a netting agreement is valid or effective under the applicable law. All it does is to provide when a sending bank pays the receiving bank for an individual payment order where there is a valid netting agreement.

### 3. Obligations of receiving bank

33. The obligations of a receiving bank are divided into the obligations that are part of a successful credit transfer and the obligations that arise when something goes wrong. Most payment orders that are received by a bank are executed promptly and the credit transfer is completed successfully. In a real sense, a receiving bank in such a credit transfer never has an unexecuted obligation in regard to the payment order.

34. The Model Law provides in articles 8(2) and 10(1) the obligations of a receiving bank to execute a payment order that it "accepts". The obligation of a receiving bank other than the beneficiary's bank is to issue a payment order that will properly implement the payment order received. The obligation of the beneficiary's bank is to place the funds at the disposal of the beneficiary. Until the receiving bank "accepts" the payment order, it has no obligation to execute it. The rules as to when a receiving bank accepts a payment order are in articles 7(2) and 9(1).

35. In most cases a receiving bank that is not the beneficiary's bank accepts a payment order when it issues its own payment order intended to carry out the payment order received. A beneficiary's bank accepts a payment order when it credits the account of the beneficiary. In those two situations the receiving bank, whether it is or is not the beneficiary's bank, undertakes its primary obligation and discharges that obligation by the same act. However, a receiving bank may accept a payment order in some other way before it executes the payment order received.

36. Some funds transfer systems have a rule that a receiving bank is required to execute all payment orders it receives from another member of the funds transfer system. The Model Law provides that in such a case the receiving bank accepts the payment order when it receives it.

37. A receiving bank that debits the account of the sender as the means of receiving payment or that notifies the sender that it accepts the payment order, accepts the payment order when it debits the account or gives the notice.
38. A final method of accepting a payment order deserves special attention. The philosophy of the Model Law is that a bank that receives a payment order and payment for it must either implement the payment order or give notice of rejection. If the receiving bank does neither within the required time, the receiving bank is deemed to have accepted the payment order and the associated obligations. Article 11 provides that normally the receiving bank must execute the payment order by the banking day after it is received and for value as of the day of receipt.
39. The receiving bank also has obligations when something goes wrong. Some payment orders, or would-be payment orders, are defective. A message received may contain insufficient data to be a payment order or, being a payment order, it cannot be executed because of insufficient data. For example, a payment order that expresses the amount of money to be transferred in two different ways, such as in words and in figures, may indicate the amount in an inconsistent manner. The same thing may occur in identifying the beneficiary, for example, by name and by account number. Where there is insufficient data, the receiving bank is obligated to notify the sender of the problem. Where there is an inconsistency in the data and the receiving bank detects the inconsistency, the receiving bank is also obligated to notify the sender.
40. Other obligations may arise after the receiving bank has issued its own conforming payment order. Completion of an international credit transfer may be delayed and neither the originator nor the beneficiary knows what has happened. To help in such situations article 13 provides that each receiving bank is requested to assist the originator and to seek the assistance of the next receiving bank to complete the banking procedures of the credit transfer.
41. If the credit transfer is not completed, article 14(1) provides that "the originator's bank is obligated to refund to the originator any payment received from it, with interest from the day of payment to the day of refund." The originator's bank can in turn recover what it paid to its receiving bank, with interest, and that bank can recover from its receiving bank. The chain of responsibility for refunding stops at the bank that is unable to complete the credit transfer.
42. In practice, the chain of refunds may stop one bank before the bank unable to complete the credit transfer. A credit transfer may fail because a receiving bank becomes insolvent before it executes the payment order it has received, or because the State has issued an embargo on transfers of the type in question or because of war or unsettled conditions in the receiving bank's country. In those cases the same events that cause the credit transfer to fail may make it impossible for the bank to refund to its sending bank. Sometimes it is evident that use of a particular bank or of banks in a particular country would be risky. In such a situation a bank, and particularly an originator's bank, may refuse to accept the payment order unless it is directed by its sender to use a particular intermediary bank to complete the credit transfer. Where a receiving bank is directed to use a particular intermediary bank and it is unable to obtain a refund from the intermediary bank because that bank has suspended payment or is prevented by law from making the refund, the receiving bank is not required to

make a refund to its sender. However, in order to be sure that such special situations are not used as a pretext to undermine the obligation to refund, a receiving bank that systematically seeks directions from its senders as to the intermediary banks to be used in credit transfers remains obligated to refund in all cases.

#### 4. Bank's liability for failure to perform one of its obligations

43. It has already been noted that the originator's bank must refund to the originator the amount of the transfer plus interest if the credit transfer is not completed. That so-called "money-back guarantee" is, however, in the nature of restitution and is not in the nature of liability for failure to perform an obligation.

44. Upon closer analysis of the credit transfer transaction, it becomes clear that, if the credit transfer is completed, the only kind of failure by a bank that could occur is one that results in a delay in completion of the credit transfer. No matter which receiving bank causes the delay, the originator's account would be debited at the time expected, but the beneficiary's account would be credited later than expected. Therefore, the Model Law takes the position in article 17(1) that the liability of the receiving bank in delay runs to the beneficiary. That position is taken even though the beneficiary does not have a contractual relationship with any bank in the credit transfer chain other than the beneficiary's bank.

45. The liability of the bank for causing delay is to pay interest. It is current practice in many credit transfer arrangements for a bank that delays implementing a payment order received to issue its payment order for the amount of the transfer plus the appropriate amount of interest for the delay. If the bank does so, its receiving bank is obligated to pass on that interest to the beneficiary. Since the delaying bank has acted in a manner calculated to compensate the beneficiary, the delaying bank is discharged of its liability. If the interest is not passed on to the beneficiary as contemplated by article 17, the beneficiary has a direct right to recover the interest from the bank that holds it.

46. If the purpose of the credit transfer was to discharge an obligation owed by the originator to the beneficiary, the beneficiary may have recovered interest from the originator for delay in discharging that obligation. In such a case article 17(3) permits the originator, rather than the beneficiary, to recover interest from the delaying bank.

47. With one exception, the remedy of recovery of interest stated in article 17 is the exclusive remedy available to the originator or the beneficiary. No other remedy that may exist under other doctrines of law is permitted. According to article 18 the one exception is when the failure to execute the payment order, or to execute it properly, occurred "(a) with the specific intent to cause loss, or (b) recklessly and with actual knowledge that loss would be likely to result". In those unusual circumstances of egregious behavior on the part of the bank, recovery may be based on whatever doctrines of law may be available in the legal system outside the Model Law.

#### 5. Completion of credit transfer and its consequences

48. According to article 19(1), "a credit transfer is completed when the beneficiary's bank accepts a payment order for the benefit of the beneficiary". At that point the

banking system has completed its obligations to the originator. The beneficiary's bank's subsequent failure to act properly, if that should occur, is the beneficiary's concern. It is not covered by the Model Law but is left to the law otherwise regulating the account relationship.

49. Article 19(1) further provides that, "when the credit transfer is completed, the beneficiary's bank becomes indebted to the beneficiary to the extent of the payment order accepted by it". The Model Law does not enter into the question as to when the beneficiary's bank must credit the beneficiary's account or when it must make the funds available. Those are matters to be governed by the otherwise applicable law governing the account relationship, including any contractual arrangements between the beneficiary and the beneficiary's bank.

50. In many credit transfers the originator and the beneficiary are the same person; the bank customer is merely shifting its funds from one bank to another. In such a case completion of the credit transfer obviously does not change the legal relationship between the originator and the beneficiary. Completion of the credit transfer changes only the relationships between the customer as originator and the originator's bank and between the customer as beneficiary and the beneficiary's bank.

51. Other credit transfers are for the purpose of discharging an obligation due from the originator to the beneficiary. Many delegates to UNCITRAL thought that the Model Law should provide that completion of the credit transfer would discharge the obligation to the extent that the obligation would be discharged by payment of the same amount in cash. Other delegates did not think the Model Law should contain such a rule, either because they did not believe that a rule on discharge of an obligation arising out of contract or otherwise should be included in a law on the banking transaction or because they did not believe that the rule proposed was correct. The position finally taken in UNCITRAL was to include the rule in a footnote to article 19 "for States that may wish to adopt it".

*Further information about the Model Law may be obtained from:*

UNCITRAL Secretariat  
Vienna International Centre  
P.O. Box 500  
A-1400 Vienna  
Austria  
Telefax: (43-1) 26060-5813  
Telephone: (43-1) 26060-4060 or 4061

\* \* \*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Commission suggests the following text for States that might wish to adopt it:

Article Y  
Conflict of laws

(1) The rights and obligations arising out of a payment order shall be governed by the law chosen by the parties. In the absence of agreement, the law of the State of the receiving bank shall apply.

(2) The second sentence of paragraph (1) shall not affect the determination of which law governs the question whether the actual sender of the payment order had the authority to bind the purported sender.

(3) For the purposes of this article:

(a) where a State comprises several territorial units having different rules of law, each territorial unit shall be considered to be a separate State;

(b) branches and separate offices of a bank in different States are separate banks.

<sup>2</sup> This law does not deal with issues related to the protection of consumers.

<sup>3</sup> The Commission suggests the following text for States that might wish to adopt it:

If a credit transfer was for the purpose of discharging an obligation of the originator to the beneficiary that can be discharged by credit transfer to the account indicated by the originator, the obligation is discharged when the beneficiary's bank accepts the payment order and to the extent that it would be discharged by payment of the same amount in cash.

<sup>4</sup> This note has been prepared by the secretariat of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) for informational purposes only; it is not an official commentary on the Model Law. A commentary prepared by the secretariat on an earlier draft of the Model Law appears in A/CN.9/346, reproduced in UNCITRAL Yearbook, vol. XXII-1991 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.V.2).