

Accreditation of Halal Certification Bodies

Halal certification tells Muslims that they can lawfully consume a company's products based on syariah principles. This provides consumer confidence and prevents any confusion about the halal status of a product.

Accreditation of halal certification bodies is a formal declaration that the body is competent to certify halal products or services. STANDARDS MALAYSIA has been offering accreditation programme for certification of halal products since year 2004, whereby the accreditation is based on the international standard, *ISO/IEC Guide 65:1996 - General Requirements for Bodies Operating Product Certification Systems* and a supplementary document developed by STANDARDS MALAYSIA technical working group, namely the *ACB - Halal Product - STANDARDS MALAYSIA Requirements for Bodies Operating Halal Product Certification Systems*. ACB stands for the Scheme for the Accreditation of Certification Bodies and is operated under the Accreditation Division of STANDARDS MALAYSIA, which offers accreditation to any certification body (CB) that has complied with published accreditation criteria and requirements. The accreditation scope for halal products is applicable to the certification of tangible and non-tangible halal products, such as services. The accreditation process for CBs operating the halal product certification system follows the guidelines and procedures as specified by ACB Scheme. The Halal Product Certification is one of several accreditations programmes offered by STANDARDS MALAYSIA to CBs. The others include the Quality Management System (QMS), Environmental Management System (EMS) accreditations, etc.

In addition, STANDARDS MALAYSIA also accredits laboratories under the Laboratories Accreditation Scheme of Malaysia or Skim Akreditasi Makmal Malaysia (SAMM). Laboratories in Malaysia are deemed competent once they are accredited by STANDARDS MALAYSIA through SAMM that conforms to the relevant international standard. In so far as halal authentication is concerned, the SAMM includes laboratory accreditation to test the presence of porcine DNA and determination of qualitative profile of alcoholic beverages by gas chromatography. Testing of porcine DNA covers a wide range of finished products and raw products including food for both qualitative and quantitative identification by Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR), Real Time PCR and also physical determination of pig skin/

pig hair in leather products/brushes using microscopic examination.

The accreditation standard used is based on MS ISO/IEC 17025: General Requirements for the Competence Of Testing And Calibration Laboratories. SAMM only accredits those facilities that meet all its criteria for testing competence and sound laboratory practice. SAMM also continuously assess and re-assess every accredited laboratory. To date, SAMM has accredited two laboratories which are deemed competent to carry out tests on the above-mentioned parameters.

What Is Halal Certification?

Halal certification is a process where a credible organisation certifies that the products and or services offered by a company meet the specified halal standard. In the case of halal food certification, every stage of food processing is examined, "from farm to table". Halal certification tells Muslims that they can lawfully consume a company's products based on syariah principles. This provides consumer confidence and prevents any confusion about the halal status of a product. Halal certificates are given to companies that meet the criteria and they are allowed to use a halal mark on their products.

Halal product certification system also involves testing and inspection activities. The CB offering halal certification may subcontract the testing or inspection activity to another party. However, it is crucial for the CB to ensure the sub-contracted body or person is competent and complies with stipulated requirements relevant to testing, inspection or other technical activities.

Recent findings by IHI Alliance showed that less than five of the 57 Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) member countries have halal CBs. The requirements for halal CBs set in the OIC's "Guidelines for Halal Certification Bodies" draft are broadly similar to those for CBs in other fields in that CBs must be impartial, have adequate resources in terms of finance, personnel and facilities to execute their duties; and are responsible for granting, maintaining, extending, suspending and withdrawing certification. In addition, to uphold the integrity of halal certification activities, it is necessary that a sufficient

number of the CBs' staff be Muslims. However, it is important to note here that the OIC guidelines for accrediting halal CBs have yet to be finalised.

Meanwhile, halal certification activities will further progress to include not just food and beverages and their related products but also cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and personal care items. These items also contain ingredients derived from animal origins, hence raising concerns for the halal status of the products. Also of concern are the quality control processes, equipment used, premises and personnel involved in the production and distribution processes.

In related development, STANDARDS MALAYSIA has developed a standard for halal cosmetics, MS 2200:2008: Islamic Consumer Goods – Part 1: Cosmetics and Personal Care – General Guidelines. It is the first standard developed in a series of Halal Standards for Islamic Cosmetic Goods. STANDARDS MALAYSIA is also drafting a Halal Pharmaceutical Standards that covers nutrient supplements only, which will provide guidelines for the industry encompassing manufacturers and raw material producers to ensure that products are produced according to syariah requirements.

Benefits of Accreditation

What are the advantages of being the accredited CBs? Accreditation bolsters the credibility of CBs and its positive effects go down all the way to the end user. CBs pass the high standards they follow in maintaining accreditation to their clients – the halal manufacturers, who (through certification) provide quality products to the customer. In addition, accredited certification provides a means for companies to stand out among their competitors, which could mean a decisive business advantage in the increasingly expanding halal industry.

The potential for the halal industry is enormous and it will progress even higher if a common system of accrediting the numerous halal CBs worldwide can be developed. STANDARDS MALAYSIA, as the country's sole national standards and accreditation body, continues to collaborate with OIC in developing OIC-level guidelines for accreditation of halal CBs that will further facilitate international halal trade. 

References

1. <http://www.daganghalal.com/news/newsdetail.asp?intID=741>
2. <http://www.standardsmalaysia.gov.my>