*F*oundation for *I*ntelligent *P*hysical *A*gents

FIPA PRESIDENT

Donald Steiner

Date: June 20, 2001

Subject: Continuation of FIPA

Dear FIPA Member,

This letter is being sent to you as one of the official representatives of your company to the Foundation for Intelligent Physical Agents (FIPA).

FIPA, of which your company is a Principal Member, was established on September 5, 1996, with an initial term of 5 years. As this term draws to an end, it is important for us to consider the achievements of FIPA so far, FIPA's planned work, and to determine whether FIPA should be continued. Taking the recent business interest in web services architectures into account, there is a tremendous opportunity to build upon FIPA's technological basis, and to make FIPA much more relevant to the developing standards in this area.

FIPA has become a strong and well-established community; its membership is drawn from many of the major computing and telecommunications centers. The forum that it offers has been valuable in achieving a number of advances in agent systems interoperability. In some ways, however, this work has many major gaps as well as new opportunities reflecting the evolving industry. The FIPA Board of Directors strongly believes that FIPA should continue both to advance new efforts and to consolidate existing achievements. The community's need for an open forum to support and advance interoperability in agent systems is as true and vital today as it was in 1996.

Amongst FIPA's accomplishments in the last 5 years are:

- FIPA members and non-members have developed over 20 different public and private implementations of the FIPA specifications; some of them open source, with tens of thousands of downloads.

- FIPA was instrumental in the creation of thought leadership, mind-share and projects in the agent community across the world; in particular, in Europe, where many successful projects based on FIPA were supported by the European Commission.

- FIPA has released a substantial number of specifications with Preliminary (8) and Experimental (35) status in the areas of architectures for systems interoperability (Abstract Architecture), Agent Management, Agent Communication, and Agent Applications.

- FIPA established a mature process for advancing FIPA's work and the life-cycle of FIPA specifications.

- These specifications have been positively demonstrated to support FIPA's goal of interoperability among autonomous systems, at the 12th and 21st meetings in Seoul and London, respectively. (See the Inform! Issue 5 newsletter for a report on the Bake-Off held in London.)

- FIPA's work has gained high interest in a number of application domains, including the Telecommunication, Manufacturing, and AgentCities communities.

In the immediate short term, FIPA has begun and expects to continue the following work:

- Continue technical work. Aside from the ongoing work in the Technical Committees, the Special Interest Groups are developing workplans for handling ontology and security issues. There is recognition that the underlying semantics of ACL needs to be strengthened.

- Establish compliance tests. The test scenarios used in the interoperability experiments need to be formally established, so that a FIPA compatibility and conformance program can be formalized and put into place.

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- Promote FIPA specifications to Standard status. Many of the FIPA specifications are now implemented and have been verified to be sound. They need to be brought to Standard status by the FIPA membership, in order to provide a stable basis against which commercial implementations can be developed.

- Providing a unified framework and standards for deployment of interoperating agent networks around the world as an open testbed for the agent community. This is a precursor to commercial agent networks. Serving as a supporting and coordination effort for these activities.

- Further establish FIPA and FIPA's technology in application areas. The Manufacturing Community, as represented by the Holonic Manufacturing Society, is highly interested in pursuing close cooperation with FIPA. FIPA needs to initiate similar cooperations in other areas such as finance, enterprise application integration, and e-commerce. FIPA is in a strong technical position to make major contributions to these areas.

- Update the intellectual property policy in the Statutes, as per the policy of the IETF, to ensure unencumbered use of FIPA specifications and technology.

In the midterm, however, FIPA must strengthen its fundamental proposition to the business units of its member companies.

- Increase FIPA's relevance to the business community. There is a growing shift from client-server and n-tier distributed programming architectures towards a web services paradigm. This is evidenced, in part, by the recent Web Services initiatives of Microsoft (.NET, Hurricane), Sun Microsystems (Sun ONE) and IBM (Web Services). FIPA can contribute tremendously in this aspect, as FIPA represents a significant part of the web services vision.

- Position FIPA with respect to and contribute to Web Services standards in the eBusiness application community, such as ebXML, UDDI, RosettaNet.PIP, and BPML. The mentioned standards are not yet aware of FIPA, yet require technology similar to FIPA's in order to achieve their vision. Using the specifications developed by FIPA will significantly enhance these efforts.

This may very well involve a change to FIPA's organization, with possible increases in membership and/or meeting fees, hiring of full-time people dedicated to FIPA, and increased involvement from related companies and businesses. This change will be discussed thoroughly with the membership.

Successful execution of these goals will require continued commitment and participation by FIPA members. It is important that the members recognize that, ultimately, FIPA will impact the bottom line of our businesses. Interoperability among autonomous systems cannot be achieved without a technology similar to FIPA's. FIPA must be in a position to address the upcoming technological and business requirements for this interoperability, so that we can retain our thought and technology leadership.

Therefore, on behalf of the FIPA Board of Directors, I recommend that FIPA be continued.

According to Article 14.2 of the FIPA Statutes, which your company signed, a 2/3 vote of the Principal Members of FIPA is to determine whether FIPA should be continued. In consideration of the above statements, I encourage your company to vote positively for FIPA. Please sign and return the enclosed ballot by FAX to the FIPA Secretariat at +39-011-725-679 **by July 18**, 2001.

If you are not able to sign on behalf of your company, please forward this letter, the enclosed ballot, and your recommendation to that person of your company who can sign. Please also inform the FIPA secretariat (e-mail: secretariat@fipa.org) to whom you have forwarded the ballot.

It is imperative that ALL of the 50 FIPA principal members vote, so that an accurate representation can be made. Only one vote per company will be considered. (If a company has cast a vote, and would subsequently like to replace it, it must submit a new ballot, and a letter retracting the original vote.) The FIPA secretariat will count the votes on July 19, and the results of the vote will be announced at the 22nd FIPA meeting in Sendai, Japan (July 23-27, 2001) and on the FIPA membership mailing list. The cast votes will be made available only to FIPA members upon request.

For any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to contact the Board of Directors (board@fipa.org) or me (president@fipa.org).

Sincerely yours,

Donald Steiner
FIPA President

Encl: FIPA Ballot