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18th UITIC Congress

The 18th International Technical Footwear Congress of UITIC (International Union of Shoe Industry Technicians) was held in Guangzhou, China in November of last year and was considered to have been extremely successful. Once again, it attracted a large number of participants from across the world; in this instance, more than 300 from 30 countries.

Organised by UITIC in conjunction with the China Leather Industry Association (CLIA), the theme for this Congress was Corporate Social Responsibility. By all accounts discussions around what is still in many ways a sensitive and sometimes difficult subject were most positive. This is to be welcomed as the overall consensus of agreement expressed on the implications of CSR for the future of the footwear industry by such a wide spread and well qualified people is most encouraging. All the more so, as the Congress was also attended by representatives of many of the

industry's leading brands and organisations, not least among which was the European Confederation of the Footwear Industry.

UITIC was originally established in 1972 and is now active in 27 countries world wide. Its membership is composed of experts and technicians from associations and research centres and private companies covering all aspects of the industry.

Its aim is to develop technical knowledge within the industry. It does this partly by organising international conferences of industry experts on a regular basis and also by facilitating the exchange of information on new ideas and technical innovations between members.

In addition, it also offers the UITIC Award that recognises at international level, the work of people who make significant contributions to technological development in the footwear and related industries. There are three categories, technical, scientific and managerial, and it can be awarded

either for current work or something carried out in the past that has had a significant impact later on. It is normally only given to individuals rather than companies or groups of people.

Clearly, with such a spread and depth of expertise, UITIC and its conferences in particular are a great benefit to the industry as a whole. The latter feature many serious and thought provoking papers for further discussion and development. This most recent one has been no exception and included 37 presentations and posters covering a range of subjects that included product and process innovation, working conditions and human resources, customers and consumers, and business practices and CSR implementation. As only a limited number of people from the industry were able to attend and hear them at first hand, *World Footwear* has selected four that created considerable interest from which, with the generous assistance of the authors, it has produced the following articles. 