

The World Summit on the Information Society and the World Intellectual Property Organization

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The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations family, whose activities are aimed, in particular, at promoting intellectual property (IP) protection. Intellectual property is playing an increasingly important role on the international stage, as “works of mind”, or IP, such as inventions, designs, trademarks, books, music, and films, are now shared and enjoyed by people worldwide.

As a specialized agency of the United Nations, WIPO’s mandate concerns intellectual property protection at the international level. With its 182 Member States, WIPO is committed to a global vision of equal participation in policy-making on intellectual property issues for the Information Society. Through its Economic Development Sector and technical assistance programs, WIPO promotes equal opportunity for all countries in responding to the challenges and realizing the benefits of the digital age.

WIPO actively participated in the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which resulted in the adoption of the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action (Geneva, December 10 to 12, 2003). WIPO continues its work in preparing for the Summit, to be held in Tunis, in November 2005.

This Summit is expected to make a major contribution to the development of the Information Society, and the effective protection of IP rights is an essential component of this development.

Intellectual property is a powerful tool which is fundamental to economic, social and cultural development, and which supports the creation and innovation that are essential elements of

the Information Society. The intellectual property system protects creators and innovators and helps to sustain vibrant industries that support developing and developed economies alike, thus reducing the digital divide. All countries have limitless intellectual assets, seen, for example, in their intellectual heritage, traditional knowledge and human ingenuity. WIPO works with its Member States to ensure that appropriate recognition and protection of intellectual property exists. This is a critical component in promoting wealth creation and cultural diversity in the Information Society.

The Declaration of Principles and Action Plan reflect another important message. That is, a fundamental goal of the intellectual property system is to maintain a balance between intellectual property rights, on the one hand, and the legitimate interests and expectations of the public and users of information, on the other. The intellectual property system helps to create an enabling environment of trust and security, necessary for sharing our knowledge freely. Effective and balanced protection of intellectual property rights is fundamental to an inclusive Information Society.

Intellectual property is constantly evolving in the light of technological change, and WIPO is working to ensure the intellectual property system does not lag behind. The two WIPO Internet Treaties – the WIPO Copyright Treaty and WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty – came into force in 2002. They represent an international consensus on how best to adapt the protection of copyright and related rights to the networked environment. Copyright law is sufficiently flexible to support a variety of innovative business models – for example, it applies to both proprietary and open source models of software development. In the field of Internet domain names, WIPO has contributed to rules-based dispute resolution under the Uniform Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP) and has, to date, dealt with more than 7,000 cases. In addition, WIPO's two Internet Domain Name Processes address conflicts between trademarks and Internet domain names, resulting in implementation of a successful administrative system for resolving domain name disputes. Overall, the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center has dealt with more than 22,000 domain name cases. In addition, the WIPOnet project has established a permanent worldwide digital network of information on intellectual property. The first phase of the WIPOnet has now been deployed, with the aim of enhancing national digital capacity.

The World Summit is addressing the implications for policymakers of a world where value lies increasingly in intellectual rather than physical capital, and where access to knowledge is critical to many spheres of human activity, including human development. In this regard, WIPO welcomes the recognition by the World Summit of the contribution of intellectual property to the Information Society (see Article 42 of the Geneva Declaration of Principles). WIPO stands ready to assist in implementing the Plan of Action and to participate in the

next steps in this process. It also hopes to contribute to reaching the shared goals for the future of the Information Society.