

Pop Legend Calls for Action for the Visually Impaired



American pop legend Stevie Wonder added star quality to this year's meetings of WIPO Assemblies. The award-winning musician made an impassioned plea for action by the Organization's 184 member states, to improve access to published works for those living with visual impairment. Estimates suggest that only five percent of all published works are available in formats accessible to the estimated 314 million people around the world that live with such disabilities.

In his capacity as United Nations Messenger for Peace, the singer-songwriter, who lost his sight at an early age, launched the "declaration of freedom for people with disabilities." He said he was inspired by a desire to bring "hope and light to the millions around the world who live with disabilities" and specifically the blind or visually impaired. "It's... a plan that will empower the independence of people with disabilities by providing them with the tools to learn and grow," he said.

"Through your legislative efforts," he told delegates, "incentives can be created to advance

the blind and visually disabled toward the promise of a better life." He underscored that access to "books on science, medicine, history and philosophy" would help young people with disabilities "to be fully educated and to one day live out their dream to be a prime minister, doctor, writer or teacher."

He called on the international community to take urgent action "to declare a state of emergency, and end the information deprivation that continues to keep the visually impaired in the dark," adding "the untapped genius of the 300 plus million who have a visual disability are in need of our love and action; today, not tomorrow, but today."

Recognizing the importance of copyright to authors and musicians, Stevie Wonder urged policymakers to develop solutions that would ease access to copyrighted materials for people with print disabilities. "While I know that it is critical not to act to the detriment of the authors who labor to create the great works that enlighten and nourish our minds, hearts and souls, we must develop a protocol that allows the easy import and export

of copyright materials so that people with print disabilities can join the mainstream of the literate world," he said. "There are many proposals on the table that will create a safe clearinghouse for the exchange and translation of books; please work towards a consensus."

"Unlock the blinders that block accessibility of translating books into readable formats for people with print disabilities," the singer urged; "our work is not done". He encouraged policymakers "to put ideological differences aside and come up with a practical solution," to give print-disabled persons the "tools to think their way out of poverty and the darkness that is created when the mind does not have access to something as simple, but as powerful, as a book."

Stevie Wonder teased member states, saying "please work it out or I'll have to write a song about what you didn't do." On a more serious note, he said, "it is our legacy and our gift to the future. Let's do this."

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The charismatic singer then took to his keyboard and drove his message home by playing excerpts from some of his most well-known hits, such as "Ma Chérie Amour" and "I just called to say I love you". "People know the songs," he explained, "because they have been able to hear them and to get them; there are people who... probably have far more to offer than myself who are locked in a kind of prison because information is not available to them."

After his speech, the artist spoke of his own experiences in starting out as a blind musician, noting, "musically, that wasn't so difficult, I really started music by ear... My mother did have a



radio, and I was able to listen and hear music and wonder how all those people fit inside a radio." He also spoke of how he was able to benefit from the "affirmative steps" that had been taken in the United States "to ensure equal access to a quality education for all Americans."

He explained that he was committed to "unlocking... awareness" and that, "just because you are a blind person, it doesn't mean you can't learn." He noted that many people with disabilities have "great things to offer as well, so we cannot allow the information highway to block... or stop anyone's opportunity."

Reflecting on the new opportunities technologies offer to those living with disabilities in overcoming the challenges of daily life, he said, "it's a very exciting time." Web and smart phone applications for the blind, such as iPhone's voice-over reader, are making a real difference to the quality of life for those living with disabilities. "When things are... made accessible it gives us all a sense of independence and freedom... but the systems have to be put into place as I know they can be," he observed.

The singer is currently working with the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) to make the lyrics to his songs

Stevie Wonder is a prolific singer-songwriter with 49 top-40 hits, 32 number-1 singles and over 100 million unit sales.

In an interview available on WIPO's YouTube Channel, the artist spoke about his inspiration: "life itself is what drives me," he said, "there's always something new out there."

On the importance of copyright to musicians, he said, "I don't want to imagine a world without copyright protection... this is our livelihood." Asked if he could imagine a world without music, he responded, "I can't, I won't and I hope there never is."

available in Braille, with a view to making them "accessible to everyone." "The bottom line," he said, is, "let's find a way for this to happen – it can't be that difficult."

If policymakers make headway on this issue and a solution is found within the next 12 months, the world-famous singer promised to return in full voice next year and to perform live in concert.

WIPO's member states are currently discussing proposals to create an enabling legal environment for better access to copyright-protected works for reading impaired persons within the Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights (SCCR).

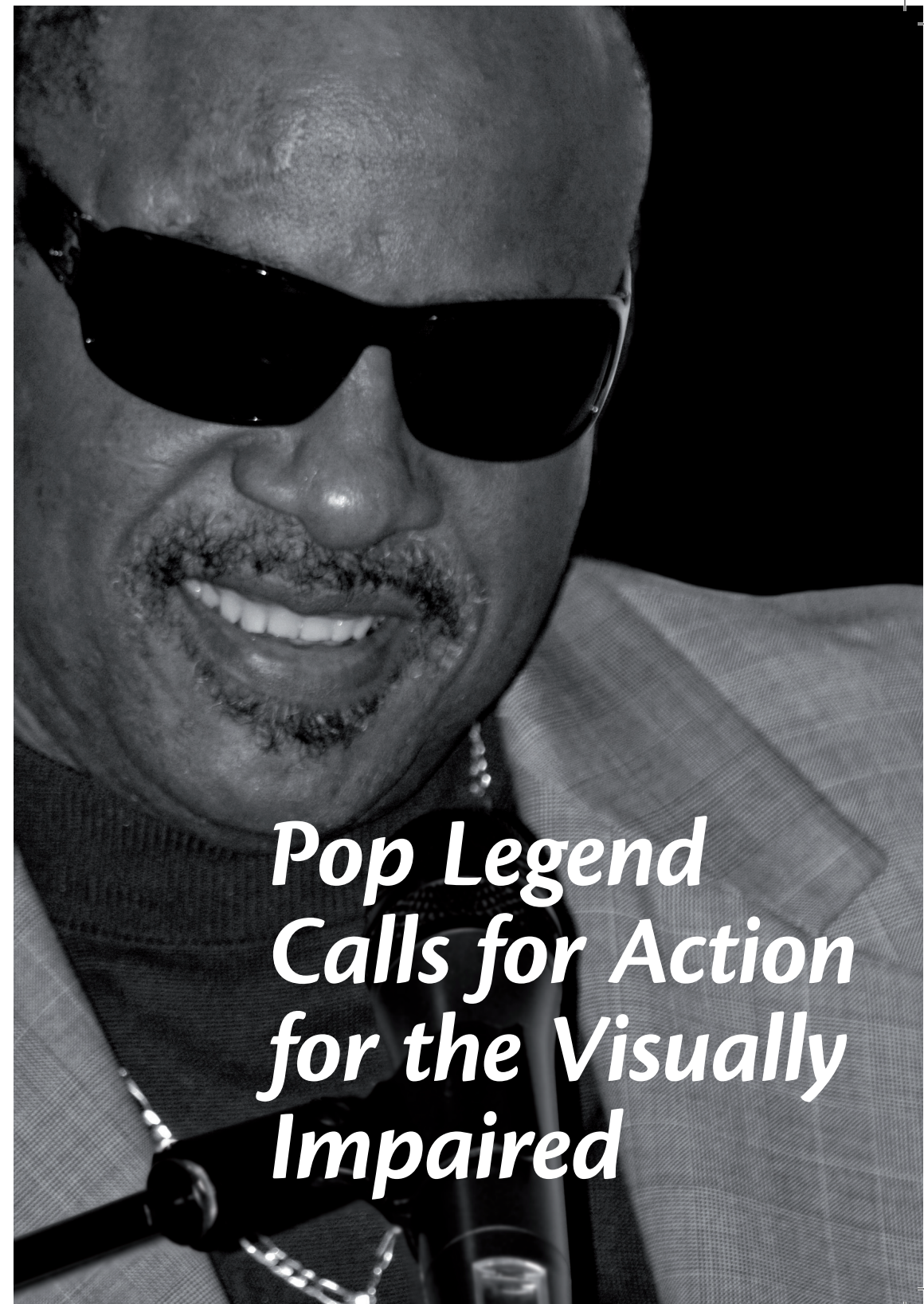
Launch of TIGAR

A groundbreaking public-private initiative that promises to improve access by the world's 314 million visually impaired persons (VIPs) to published works was launched by WIPO's Stakeholders' Platform at a meeting in New Delhi, India, in October 2010. The trusted intermediary global accessible resources project - TIGAR - will enable publishers to make their titles easily available to trusted intermediaries (TI) who will create and share works in formats accessible to VIPs. TIGAR promises to allow VIPs anywhere in the world to search for content across distributed TI collections and to download a selected title onto a local device in the format of their choice.



TIGAR is a three-year pilot project and the result of close collaboration between WIPO and organizations representing authors, publishers, the VIP community and institutions that serve persons with print disabilities. These include the World Blind Union (WBU), the International Publishers Association (IPA), the International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organisations (IFRRO), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the Daisy Consortium.

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