

ANNEX III

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IPC

INTRODUCTION

1. The International Patent Classification (IPC) represents the only patent classification used worldwide. For this reason, it is considered as an universal, language-independent search tool for the retrieval of patent information. However, the IPC has been designed, and developed for many years, mainly as a paper-based search tool. Necessary changes should be made to the IPC structure and to methods of its revision and application in order to ensure its efficient and effective use in the electronic age. To achieve this objective, the IPC Committee of Experts has decided to launch the reform of the IPC which should be carried out in the years 1999-2002.
2. During the period of the reform, the IPC should become more accommodated for use in the electronic environment. To provide detailed guidance for the development of the reformed IPC, the Committee defined principal tasks of the reform and entrusted the ad hoc IPC Reform Working Group with their elaboration. The Committee realized that the tasks of the reform could be only considered as medium-term goals and that, for the further development of the IPC in the twenty-first century, long-term goals should also be defined. Those long-term goals will serve as a basis for the IPC strategic development plan.

LONG-TERM GOALS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IPC

3. The following long-term goals are envisaged for the development of the IPC:
 - (a) The IPC should be applied worldwide to all invention and invention-like information contained in patent documents as specified in the Strasbourg Agreement, so as to serve as the standard international patent search and retrieval tool. Intellectual property offices should be encouraged to apply the IPC in the same way also to technical non-patent literature where it is deemed necessary for patent search.
 - (b) The IPC should be applied consistently worldwide.
 - (c) A single master classification database should encompass the IPC data relating to the world's patent documents and classified non-patent literature.
 - (d) It should be possible to use the current IPC edition to perform a patent search, thus eliminating the necessity for users to rely on superseded editions.
 - (e) The IPC should be a readily available, readily understood and easily used tool.

(f) The IPC should be designed in such a way that it satisfies the needs of both users searching international patent collections and users searching only smaller collections.

(g) The IPC should be fully accommodated to an electronic environment to further increase its search power, facilitate its maintenance and revision, and adapt it for use with other electronic search tools.

GENERAL STRATEGY

4. Continued efforts will be made for further revision of the IPC needed to keep it in line with technical progress. The provision in the Classification of places covering new technologies will be done in cost-effective and timely manner with the predominant use of electronic communication. The revision procedure will continuously be adapted to new emerging technical facilities.

5. The achievement of the long-term goals of the IPC development will be pursued through conducting inter-related projects which will be closely coordinated to ensure compatibility of results. Project costs, schedule performance and quality assurance of the results will be evaluated by a management control system.

USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

6. Information technology will play a vital role in the further development of the IPC. New computer- and Internet-based tools will increase the ease and efficiency of the IPC use and revision, and facilitate accurate and consistent IPC application. Projects aiming at the investigation of automated systems for assistance in classification and reclassification, and their integration into search systems, will be conducted.

7. The established working relationship between the Committee and the Standing Committee on Information Technologies (SCIT) will continue to contribute to the development of the IPC and of the search resources available through the Intellectual Property Digital Libraries (IPDL) program carried out by the SCIT. Mutual exchange of information on ongoing activities of the two Committees will facilitate better coordination of the work. Specific information technology projects, where cooperation between the Committees would be desirable, will be implemented.

APPLICATION OF THE IPC

8. Constant efforts will be made to ensure that IPC symbols are assigned to all patent documents published worldwide. To this end, intellectual property offices of the States which are not members of the IPC Union will be encouraged to classify according to the IPC their published patent documentation and to make it available through the WIPONet. The IPC promotion program for those States will be elaborated. Intellectual property offices will also be encouraged to apply the IPC to technical non-patent literature where it deemed necessary for the patent search.

9. Consistent application of the IPC worldwide will be further pursued. This will be attempted to achieve by standardization of the IPC structure and introduction in the IPC of classification definitions and more uniform classification rules. Their implementation in the IPC will be realized in the course of IPC revision, as well as by conducting special standardization projects covering broad IPC areas with insufficient structure. Introduction in the IPC of additional electronic data illustrating the contents of IPC entries will also contribute to the consistent classification.

MASTER CLASSIFICATION DATABASE

10. A master classification database encompassing full bibliographic identification data, including the IPC data, relating to the world's patent documents and technical non-patent literature will be developed, taking account of existing databases. This database will contain the IPC data of patent and non-patent documentation classified according to the current edition of the IPC and provide links to electronic versions of these documents. The provision of such classification data will be achieved by common reclassification projects carried out by volunteering intellectual property offices and by using automated reclassification tools. The development of the master classification database, which will represent an important part of worldwide digital libraries, will be accomplished in cooperation with the SCIT.

11. The availability of the master classification database should allow performance of a patent search using only the current edition of the IPC and elimination of the need to rely on superseded IPC editions in the retrospective search. This should help to increase the efficiency of information retrieval. Improved access to patent information should also be provided by the inclusion of patent family information in the master classification database. Access to the master classification database will be free, at least for intellectual property offices.

TWO-LEVEL STRUCTURE OF THE IPC

12. The overall structure of the IPC will be designed to be a two-level system which will better satisfy the needs of different categories of users. Its core level will be used for obligatory classification of patent documents, for general information purposes, for example, dissemination of information, and for searching smaller, national patent collections. Its advanced level, which will be completely compatible with the core level and will represent a more extensive elaboration of the core level, will be used for searching larger, international patent collections. All documents available in the advanced level will be also available in the core level.

13. Different internal IPC-based classification systems developed by some major offices will be harmonized and made fully compatible with the core level, so that to form an unified IPC advanced level which will facilitate searching of international patent collections. When such harmonization is achieved, a central system of the revision and administration of the IPC advanced level could be introduced.

IPC USE IN THE ELECTRONIC ENVIRONMENT

14. The IPC will be fully accommodated for use in the electronic environment. Its searching power will be significantly increased by systematic introduction in its structure of multi-aspect classification schedules. Various electronic data illustrating IPC entries or explaining them more in detail, for example chemical formulae and other graphical information, informative notes and references, will enrich the IPC contents. This electronic data will also enhance understanding and ease of use of the IPC for intellectual property offices and the general public.

15. The IPC will be more adapted for use in concert with other electronic searching tools and will enable integration with additional searching tools. Its maintenance and revision will be greatly facilitated by developing modern technical means which will also contribute to speedy publication of new versions of the IPC on different carriers and to its availability to users. Electronic versions of the IPC will become the principal form of its publication.

TRAINING IN THE USE OF THE IPC

16. Computer- and Internet-based IPC training tools will continuously be developed. They will be targeted at different types of IPC users, such as novice users, professional users of patent information or patent examiners. Those tools will rely on modern training techniques, for example, distance-learning. In elaboration of such tools, enhanced support will be provided for users in developing countries.

[Annex IV follows]