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**WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION**  
GENEVA

**SPECIAL UNION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PATENT CLASSIFICATION  
(IPC UNION)**

**AD HOC IPC REFORM WORKING GROUP**

**Third Session  
Geneva, May 1 to 5, 2000**

REPORT

*adopted by the Working Group*

## INTRODUCTION

1. The ad hoc IPC Reform Working Group (hereinafter referred to as “the Working Group”) held its third session in Geneva from May 1 to 5, 2000. The following members of the Working Group were represented at the session: Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America, European Patent Office (EPO) (17). Slovenia and the publishers of the journal *World Patent Information* (WPI) were represented by observers. The list of participants appears as Annex I to this report.

2. The session was opened by Mr. M. Makarov, Head, International Patent Classification Section, Inter-Office Information Services, WIPO, who welcomed the participants on behalf of the Director General.

## OFFICERS

3. The Working Group unanimously reelected Mr. J. Calvert (United Kingdom) as Chair and elected Mr. G. Guzzo (Canada) as Vice-Chair.
4. Mr. Makarov acted as Secretary of the session.

## ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

5. The Working Group unanimously adopted the agenda, which appears as Annex II to this report.

## CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND DECISIONS

6. As decided by the Governing Bodies of WIPO at their tenth series of meetings held from September 24 to October 2, 1979 (see document AB/X/32, paragraphs 51 and 52), the report of this session reflects only the conclusions of the Working Group (decisions, recommendations, opinions, etc.) and does not, in particular, reflect the statements made by any participant, except where a reservation in relation to any specific conclusion of the Working Group was expressed or repeated after the conclusion was reached.

## REPORT ON THE TWENTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE IPC COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS

7. The Working Group noted an oral report by the International Bureau on the twenty-ninth session of the IPC Committee of Experts (hereinafter referred to as “the Committee”) (see document IPC/CE/29/11), at which session the Committee had considered the results of the IPC reform process in 1999, established the IPC reform program for 2000 and adopted the strategic plan for the development of the IPC which provided policy guidance for converting the IPC into a reformed Classification for the twenty-first century.
8. The Working Group was informed that the Committee had adopted a number of its recommendations related to the introduction of electronic data illustrating the contents of IPC entries, multi-aspect classification, factors influencing the consistency in the application of the IPC, emanating from the consideration of the tasks of the IPC reform.

## DETERMINATION OF THE MOST APPROPRIATE CONTENTS OF THE CORE LEVEL OF THE REFORMED IPC

9. The Working Group was informed that the Committee, at its twenty-ninth session, had discussed in depth the contents that the core level of the two-level reformed IPC should have but had not been in a position to take a decision concerning the contents of the core level in view of the need to reach consensus on this question, critical for the IPC reform process. The Working Group had been entrusted, therefore, with the consideration of the new Task “Determine the most appropriate contents of the core level of the reformed IPC” to which the highest priority had been assigned.

10. The Working Group considered several documents relating to the Task which were available in the project file IPC/R 14/00, in particular the background paper prepared by the International Bureau and the proposal by the EPO on establishing the restricted core level of the IPC (see Annexes 8 and 9 to the project file), as well as comments by France on the said proposal.

11. In considering the background paper prepared by the International Bureau, the Working Group noted different factors which should be taken into account in determining the most appropriate contents of the core level, as indicated by the International Bureau (see paragraph 10 of the background paper), and agreed that the core level being a restricted version of the seventh edition of the IPC would provide higher benefits to the users in the light of the factors indicated.

12. The Working Group decided, consequently, that the core level of the reformed IPC should be a restricted version of the seventh edition of the IPC.

13. As indicated by some delegations, the decision taken, involving a drastic change in the structure of the IPC, should not have negative influence on the ready availability and quality of the French versions of the core and advanced levels, which versions, according to the Strasbourg Agreement, represented one of the authentic versions of the IPC. In this regard, the International Bureau informed the Working Group that it intended, under Task No. 16 of the IPC reform program "Study ways and means for the establishment of the French version of the advanced level of the IPC," to prepare a background paper, for consideration at the fourth session of the Working Group, relating to a possible procedure and required financial resources for the establishment of the said French version.

14. It was also indicated by several delegations that, given the importance of the decision by the Working Group with regard to the core level of the IPC, their respective offices might request to convene an extraordinary session of the Committee for adoption of that decision.

15. The Working Group considered the proposal by the EPO on establishing the restricted core level of the IPC and expressed its thanks to the EPO for the investigation of an automated and practical procedure for obtaining the restricted core level. The Working Group indicated that, although that procedure gave satisfactory results in the single subclass used for testing, the testing should be extended to other fields of the IPC, including actively developing areas with deep hierarchy.

16. The Delegation of the EPO volunteered to deliver, by September 1, 2000, the results of the application of the proposed procedure to the whole section A of the IPC. The Delegation explained that file size would be the main parameter used in the automated procedure and the data relating to the rate of growth would be included in the accompanying statistics.

17. The Working Group requested its members to submit comments on the results of the study to be conducted by the EPO and on the parameters used, by October 1, 2000.

18. The Working Group finally agreed that the initial establishment of the restricted core level of the IPC could be made in an efficient and practical manner only by using automated means, but, at the final stage of selection of IPC groups for the core and advanced levels, some expert contribution could be needed. In particular, consideration of the division between the core and advanced levels in localized areas of the IPC should take into account existing and possible future placement rules.

#### CONSIDERATION OF THE IPC REVISION POLICY, THE REVISION PROCEDURE AND THE CRITERIA FOR ACCEPTING NEW REVISION PROPOSALS IN RELATION TO THE CORE AND ADVANCED LEVELS OF THE REFORMED IPC

19. The Working Group noted that the Committee had agreed to combine Tasks Nos. 2 and 9 on the IPC reform program.

20. The Working Group briefly considered the recommendations by the Trilateral Offices relating to the revision procedure for the advanced level of the IPC (see Annex 2 to the project file IPC/R 2/99) and agreed that the IPC revision policy and the revision procedure for the reformed IPC should be elaborated in detail, separately for the core and advanced levels. In such elaboration, principal types of the revision should be specified, taking into account the different reasons for the revision, such as evolution of new technologies, excessive file size or high rate of growth of IPC groups, need for updating obsolete IPC areas.

21. The International Bureau was requested to submit a draft proposal on the revision policy and the revision procedure for the reformed IPC by August 1, 2000. Comments on the draft proposal were invited by October 1, 2000, in order for the International Bureau to circulate the final proposal by October 15, 2000.

22. The Delegations of the Trilateral Offices informed the Working Group that the third meeting of the Trilateral Working Group on Classification would be held in September 2000, and that the meeting discussions would include the IPC revision procedure.

#### INTRODUCTION OF ELECTRONIC DATA ILLUSTRATING THE CONTENTS OF IPC ENTRIES

23. Discussions were based on the rapporteur report (see Annex 22 to project file IPC/R 3/99 Rev.3) summarizing the work carried out by the Definition Task Force and containing the Rapporteur's recommendations and action plan.

24. The Working Group agreed that classification definitions, representing the most important type of electronic data to be introduced in the IPC, should provide additional information in respect of classification entries and serve for their clarification, but should not change the scope of classification entries. Definitions should be relatively short, practical for use and explain terminology used in classification entries without merely repeating it. The Working Group indicated that classification definitions should be present only in the informative layer of the electronic version of the IPC and should not appear in the paper version of the Classification.

25. The Working Group agreed that a process of creation of definitions should be initiated already in 2000. The definitions relating to subclasses A 44 B, B 66 B, B 81 B, B 81 C, B 82 B, F 23 B and C 07 C, elaborated by the Definition Task Force, should be reviewed by the IPC Revision Working Group at its fourth session, with a view towards incorporation of those definitions in the eighth edition of the IPC.

26. The IPC Revision Working Group was also requested to attempt, at its fourth session, to elaborate definitions under revision projects leading to the creation of new subclasses or substantial restructuring of existing subclasses and to consider the procedure to be used for the implementation of new definitions.

27. The Working Group agreed that a prioritized list of subclasses should be created for the future systematic introduction of definitions in the framework of the IPC maintenance process. The basis for priorities should be established, including new technology subject matter, activity in a subclass (recent revision, rate of growth of patent documents, etc.), “problem” or “confusing” areas in the IPC.

28. The Working Group also considered the draft definition format (guidelines) presented by the United States of America. It was noted that this draft should be further elaborated by the Definition Task Force, taking into account the following remarks:

(a) limiting references and other limiting-type information should be presented in a clear manner in the title of the subclass and further developed in the electronic layer;

(b) the need for the proposed subdivision “related search in other classification systems” should be reconsidered;

(c) the format of definitions could more closely follow the present format of notes in the IPC.

29. The Task Force was also requested to evaluate explanatory-type information contained in the Doc 46 file of the EPO database, using the material to be provided by the EPO.

#### GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CLASSIFICATION; ELABORATION OF RULES FOR MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION IN THE IPC

30. Discussions were based on the recommendations by the Trilateral Offices relating to some general principles of classification and possibilities for multiple classification in the IPC (see Annex 14 to the project file IPC/R 4/99 Rev.3).

31. The Working Group considered in detail the proposed policy statement relating to the subject matter in a patent document that should be classified and, following some modifications made, approved the following principle of classification of patent documents:

“– all invention information, i.e., technical information representing an addition to the state of the art, should be classified, using the claims as guidance;

“– it is recommended to classify also other information which could be useful for search purposes.”

32. The Working Group also considered the recommendations of the Trilateral Offices intended to ensure the applicability of multiple classification and to increase consistency in the classification and agreed to the following:

- to reconsider the rules of classification stated in paragraphs 52 and 60 of the Guide to the IPC with the intention to clearly enable classification of useful information relating to constituent parts;
- to include in paragraph 59 of the Guide to the IPC a statement to the following effect: “When there is a doubt whether a document is to be classified in a function-oriented or an application-oriented place, it should be classified in both places.”

33. The Working Group agreed that the approved above recommendations should form part of the global revision of the Guide to the IPC which was planned to commence in 2001. The Working Group indicated that, in the future revised version of the Guide, it should be, *inter alia*, described in detail how to classify different kinds of patent documents, namely granted patents, examined and unexamined published patent applications.

34. In order to provide a basis for further elaboration of Task No. 4 on the IPC reform program, the Working Group requested the EPO to prepare, by September 1, 2000, a background paper concerning different forms of multiple classification which could be implemented in the IPC.

#### REVIEW OF THE HYBRID SYSTEMS IN THE IPC

35. The Working Group considered the recommendations presented by the Hybrid Systems Task Force (see Annex 15 to project file IPC/R 5/99 Rev.2) and approved the following principles of treatment of the existing hybrid systems:

- (1) Delete indexing codes if they are superfluous or are not practically used.
- (2) (a) Convert separate indexing schemes into classification schemes and use them for multiple classification.
  - (b) Move separate indexing schemes, which are useful and cannot be converted into classification schemes, to the advanced level of the IPC.
  - (c) Consider moving the converted indexing schemes to the advanced level of the IPC.
  - (d) Abolish double-purpose use of classification groups and consider use of those groups for multiple classification.

36. It was realized that, since the existing hybrid systems are so different, the above principles should be seen as general guidance and not as strict instructions, and the hybrid systems should be treated individually.

37. The Working Group approved the proposal to provide for special marking of classification or indexing symbols which are used for recording additional information. The Delegation of the EPO offered to develop the application of this principle in the background paper referred to in paragraph 34, above.

38. In relation to future hybrid systems, the Working Group approved the following principles:

- (3) (a) Abolish the linked mode of presentation of indexing schemes.
- (b) Elaborate guidelines for the creation and use of indexing schemes.
- (c) Provide definitions for indexing schemes.

39. The Working Group instructed the Hybrid Systems Task Force that the principles indicated in paragraph 35, above, should serve as guidance for conducting, by the Task Force, of a complete review of all existing hybrid systems aimed at their categorization on the basis of the principles of treatment. Following that categorization, the IPC Revision Working Group would be requested to carry out an appropriate revision of the hybrid systems, taking into account specific features of each hybrid system concerned.

40. The Working Group appreciated an offer by the Delegation of the EPO to provide statistics on the allocation by offices of indexing codes in order to estimate the extent to which they are practically used.

41. The Working Group also instructed the Task Force to consider how certain indexing schemes and classification schemes used for secondary classification in the advanced level could be reflected in the core level.

42. In relation to the principle given under subparagraph 38(3)(b), above, the Working Group agreed that it would also be desirable to elaborate guidelines for the creation and use of schemes for secondary classification and decided that elaboration of such guidelines should be considered at the next session of the Working Group.

43. The Working Group took note of the recommendations by the Trilateral Offices relating to Task No. 5 and concerning the replacement of indexing codes for additional constituents in a mixture by multiple classification (see Annex 14 to project file IPC/R 5/99 Rev.2) and requested the Task Force to consider those recommendations, in the light of an explanatory document expected to be prepared by the EPO.

#### STUDY OF THE POSSIBILITY OF COOPERATION BETWEEN OFFICES IN THE RECLASSIFICATION OF BACKLOG PATENT FILES

44. The Working Group noted the decision by the Committee that, in view of the functionalities already available in the DOC d.b. database of the EPO and its coverage of a major part of the worldwide classification data, the DOC d.b. database should serve as a basis for the Master Classification Database (see document IPC/CE/29/11, paragraph 37).

45. The Delegation of the EPO introduced its paper describing the structure and functioning of the DOC d.b. database (see Annex 12 to the project file IPC/R 8/99 Rev.3) and clarified its contents by responding to questions raised by other delegations.

46. In order to start preparatory work for the creation of the Master Classification Database, the Working Group requested the EPO to prepare, for consideration at its next session, a proposal regarding changes in data fields, tags and indicators, which would be necessary to be made in the DOC d.b. database in order to implement classification data resulting from the reformed IPC.

47. The Working Group noted the recommendations by the Trilateral Offices concerning the presentation of classification symbols (see Annex 11 to project file IPC/R 8/99 Rev.3) and agreed that a new mode of presentation of the classification symbols, showing more clearly, in particular, the difference between invention information symbols and additional information symbols, should be elaborated.

48. In this regard, the Working Group requested the International Bureau to prepare, for consideration at its next session, a proposal regarding a new presentation of classification symbols appropriate for the classification data of the reformed IPC, indicating also changes that would be necessary to be reflected in relevant WIPO Standards, for example, Standards ST.8 and ST.9.

49. Finally, the Working Group agreed that the functioning of the Master Classification Database, the procedure of the information exchange and the provision of the reclassification data in the Database should be completely specified in 2001.

#### FEASIBILITY OF INTRODUCING A SIMPLIFIED SET OF RULES IN THE IPC, IN PARTICULAR A UNIFORM PRECEDENCE RULE

50. The Working Group noted the recommendation by the Trilateral Offices that, as a long-term goal, a general precedence rule should be introduced in the IPC, which should be compatible with a broader use of multiple classification (see Annex 2 to project file IPC/R 15/00).

51. The Delegation of the United States of America explained its proposal relating to the introduction in the IPC of a standardized sequence of main groups in subclasses, a uniform top-to-bottom precedence rule and a uniform inclusive rule (see Annex 3 to project file IPC/R 15/00) and indicated that the proposed overall precedence rule would not prevent a classifier from assigning further relevant classification symbols.

52. It was agreed that the introduction of a standardized IPC layout was highly desirable because it would make the IPC easier to use.

53. In order to initiate work under Task No. 15, the Working Group agreed to create a Rules Task Force, and instructed the Task Force to consider, at the first stage, the elaboration of a standardized sequence of main groups in IPC subclasses and the possibility of the implementation of a standardized sequence in the existing areas of the IPC.

54. The Working Group noted, with appreciation, that the following Offices volunteered to participate in the Task Force: Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States of America, EPO, and that the International Bureau would act as coordinator of the Task Force.

#### IMPROVEMENT OF IPC TRAINING BY PROVIDING MODERN TRAINING TECHNIQUES

55. The International Bureau informed the Working Group of its plans to update the IPC explanatory material, already available on the Internet, according to the seventh edition of the IPC and to post on the Internet also two sets of IPC training examples. The International Bureau indicated that the Internet version of the IPC training examples would include hyperlinks to the IPC and patent databases and would implement an interactive mode of providing training information, by using available software packages.

#### PRESENTATIONS

56. The Delegation of Japan made a presentation of the Patent Map Guidance System developed for providing assistance to classifiers in determining appropriate classification symbols. The system facilitated access to the FI Classification, the IPC, ECLA and F-terms by using computer-assisted browsing in the classification texts and also incorporated retrieval functions on the basis of keywords, the IPC Catchword Index and the FI-IPC concordance table.

57. The Delegation of the Republic of Korea made a presentation of a publication supplementing the Korean issue of the seventh edition of the IPC, which contained classification entries of subclasses C 07 C and C 07 D accompanied by illustrating structural chemical formulae. The Delegation informed that, for facilitating the use of chemical areas of the IPC, further publications with incorporated chemical formulae would embrace subclasses A 61 K, C 07 F, C 07 G and C 12 N.

58. The Delegation of the United States of America gave an overview of the historical development of the US Patent Classification System starting from 1831. The Delegation outlined the background of the process initiated by Congress at the end of the nineteenth century that, over a period of 65 years, had resulted in the current structure of their Classification System containing uniform rules and classification definitions.

59. The Working Group expressed its gratitude for the presentations made.

## STATUS OF THE IPC REFORM PROGRAM FOR THE YEAR 2000

60. The Working Group reviewed the tasks included in the IPC reform program for the year 2000 and noted the work which remained to be done in respect of those tasks. The status of the tasks is shown in Annex III to this report.

## NEXT SESSION OF THE WORKING GROUP

61. The Working Group noted the tentative dates for its fourth session: October 30 to November 3, 2000.

*62. This report was unanimously adopted by the Working Group at its closing meeting on May 5, 2000.*

[Annexes follow]