

Opening statement

WIPO Seminar on SMEs and IP, Tallinn, Estonia,
April 29 and 30, 2003

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and honor to welcome you on behalf of Dr. Kamil Idris, Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to this WIPO -Estonian Seminar on Small and Medium -Sized Enterprises and Intellectual Property, organized by WIPO in cooperation with the Estonian Patent Office.

First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Matti Pääs, Director General of the Estonian Patent Office, for inviting us and his readiness to host and co-organize the Seminar in the Estonian capital – Tallinn.

We think that the topic chosen for this Workshop is extremely important, since SMEs are considered today as an engine of economic development. Intellectual property and its effective protection could be considered as oil that lubricates all parts of the engine, providing it smooth rotation and movement.

We have to admit that in the ever and ever interdependent world an effective work of SMEs, their success is more related to IP protection. In this connection I would like to say that a awareness of SMEs of a big potential related to IP is especially important and we face each challenge or raises such awareness through the means of spreading adequate information. This seminar represents by itself such means, an opportunity to raise the awareness.

Since the subject is multilateral, it is reasonable that more actors are welcomed to the scene, apart from our traditional partner IP office. I mean first of all, representatives of business here.

An idea of the present seminar is to help SMEs in countries in transition to market economy to use the IP system to improve their competitiveness. We have to bear in mind the background of today's world, i.e. globalization, advent of the Internet, the rapidly advancing information technologies in the increasingly knowledge-driven, intellectual capital oriented marketplace. There are several advantages for SMEs to manage change more effectively which re-destines their enhanced interest for innovation and IP:

- they have resources and staff but the natural advantage of small size, flexibility and low start-up costs in competition;
- they have an enhanced dynamism and adaptability to the technological and market changes and start-up ventures, often as sub-contractors of larger companies;
- they have an increased sensibility and receptivity regarding new and original creations as well as individuality, uniqueness, quality and innovation culture.

As a result, SMEs play an important role in the creation and development of new companies, the emergence of new economic activities, the diversification of the goods and services and the generation of employment and more equitable income distribution.

To-day in many countries governments and para-governmental agencies, research and development institutions are promoting SME activities in view of their special SME-friendly programs (awareness-raising workshops, training courses), preferential measures (e.g. discount on patent fees), special services (free-of-charge consultations, brokers services for SMEs licensing, etc.), financial assistance to help SMEs to enforce their IP rights (e.g. patent insurance for SMEs).

International organizations, especially the United Nations and its Agencies, such as WIPO, UNDP, UNCTAD, UNIDO, UNESCO, ILO, as well as OECD, the World Bank, regional development banks, regional economic commissions, chambers of commerce, SME organizations and donor agencies are focusing on the needs of SMEs.

WIPO General Assembly (Geneva, September 2000) expanded WIPO's program of activities to assist SMEs worldwide to enhance their competitiveness through the effective use of the IP system.

In conclusion, I would like to say that if this seminar would make its input to raise awareness of the community and to attract attention of the governments of the countries represented here, it could be considered as another step in enhancing SMEs, their capacity to use IP, which in the end should lead to the economic developments.

Thank you for your attention.