

**WIPO Director General Daren Tang,
Speech to Hague Anniversary Symposium
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Ambassador Paul van den Ijssel,

Hugues Derème, Director General, Benelux Office for Intellectual Property,

Erwin Nijssse, Director-General for Business Policy and Innovation at the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs,

Colleagues and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for joining us on this very special day.

Design Over Time

Since time immemorial, our ancestors have shaped the materials around us – stone, clay, metal, wood and fiber, into things that not only worked well but also looked good.

We can see this from the stone sculptures like those of Gobekli Tepe in Turkiye, dating back an incredible 12,000 years ago, where huge monoliths that were laid out based on mathematical and geometric patterns to track the stars and skies were also etched with beautiful and mysterious carvings depicting animals.

We see this in museums all over the world which display all types of products dating back thousands of years ago, decorated and embellished with patterns and designs,

And we see it in our modern world, where design has become critical for business success, and where industrial design is increasingly joined by artisanal design as well as new forms of digital designs.

So today, we celebrate not just 100 years of an international registration system, but something deeper – the work we are doing

with you to support the human instinct to merge utility with beauty, to combine aesthetics with functionality, and to make things that work but that also delight our senses.

Arrival of Hague

At the turn of the century, as momentum gathered for the Hague agreement, new forces were impacting on the world of design.

First, industrial progress was transforming not just how things were made, but how they looked and felt. Steam power, electricity, new materials like aluminum and Bakelite gave rise to products like the Ford Model T and the Remington typewriter that were designed to appeal to the mass market and the rising middle class.

Second, the first modern wave of globalization was moving more of these products further than ever before. By 1914, exports were worth around 14% of global GDP - more than double their mid-19th century share. While this wave ebbed in the '20s, the rise of consumer culture and the growth of urbanization meant that trends and fashions continued to travel quickly. Design, always a universal impulse, was now also international.

Alongside these twin developments, was a third response – the reaction against industrialization and uniformity and a return to craft and individual expression. From the Bauhaus movement to Japan's Mingei tradition, the Mexican Folk Art Revival to the Bengal School in India, the early 20th century saw creators reassert design as a vessel of history and culture -- as something that connects the craft, heritage and culture in everyday products.

A century later, new trends are driving the development of design, including the rise of technology and digital driven design, but I am pleased that the Hague system continues to be even more relevant than ever.

What began with 11 countries has blossomed into a global community covering nearly 100 countries.

This evolution was gradual - between 1970 and 2004, over 99% of registrations came from Europe - before accelerating dramatically over the past 20 years. By joining the club, Members like the EU and OAPI, the Republic of Korea, Japan and the United States, and more recently, China, Brazil and our newest member, Saudi Arabia, have strengthened the Hague system, making it more accessible and serving more designers around the world.

A new chapter in designs

Today, global design protection has never been stronger, more diverse or more dynamic. Once the “forgotten sibling” of intellectual property, design is moving center stage – recognized for its power to create value, support jobs, promote culture and bring a sense of beauty and sensuality into our daily lives. We are witnessing a design renaissance.

In this centenary year, the Hague System is being used more than ever. Designs in applications rose nearly 7% last year to a record 27,000 and are projected to climb again by around 3% this year. Over 2 million designs have now been protected through the Hague System, with registrations climbing across Africa, Asia, North America and Latin America. Renewals have also grown in each of the past 8 years, including a more than 40% increase from Europe. Today, the Hague System accounts for almost 4 in 10 non-resident design filings worldwide.

Globally, design filings are also at record highs, with growth outpacing patents and trademarks.

The range of applications is expanding too. If the first Hague registration - fabrics for women’s hats – reflected the economy of 1925, then today’s top classes, led by transport and digital, show how design protection is driven by tech and consumer electronics.

But designs is not just for big multi-nationals. In fact, many designers work as sole proprietors or in design studios, essentially SMEs.

And it is this diversity of usage that is also one of the great strengths of the Hague system.

Under the same umbrella, we find top applicants like LG, Swatch, Procter & Gamble and Huawei, as well as innovative SMEs like Poland's Xdeep and Singapore's Secretlab. We also see highly skilled artisans like Brazilian designer Mauricio Marquez and inspiring entrepreneurs such as Ghana-based Olayo Matthew Fabian, creator of an innovative water bottle design, and a guest here today.

All use the same simple system to protect and promote their IP.

Tied to this is the growing economic power of design. Research shows that design holders assign significant value to their IP, with a median value of between 30,000 and 100,000 US dollars. In mature markets like Europe, design-intensive industries support around 20% of jobs and 15% of GDP. Elsewhere, design related industries are surging. In Asia, the furniture market is projected to grow 6% annually through to 2030. Demand for African fashion and haute couture is expected to rise by over 40% in the coming decade.

These forces will continue to push design into the global spotlight. We saw this just one year ago, when the IP community came together to conclude the Riyadh Design Law Treaty by consensus - a milestone agreement that will make design protection simpler, and more accessible for everyone, everywhere.

More broadly, technology is again transforming the design landscape, expanding what's possible and changing how we create. New materials, from 3D-printed forms to bio-based plastics, are impacting production. Digital tools are augmenting and, in some areas, merging with traditional craftsmanship and design processes. Many designers are innovating with a renewed focus on sustainability.

Design will also play a critical role in the next wave of technological adoption. Just as the Walkman, the Gameboy, the Macintosh and the iPhone changed how we work, live and play, a new wave of industrial

design will be critical to the adoption of artificial intelligence and other technologies.

Strengthening Hague

Against this backdrop, we will keep on strengthening the Hague system. Last year, Member States froze the 1960 Act, meaning that the Hague system now operates under a single act, providing a clearer foundation for the future.

At the same time, our committees and working groups are tackling the issues that will shape Hague's second century: how best to protect designs in the digital age, and how to harness frontier technologies, including artificial intelligence, to make our processes faster, smarter and easier to use.

We're also investing in service excellence. Our e-Hague system, including portfolio management, is becoming more powerful, with new features that support teamwork, streamline notifications and simplify workflows. And we are rolling out a modern CRM system that will make our support faster, more responsive and more personalized.

These are not just technical upgrades, but are bridges to real-world success and translating IP registration into IP commercialization.

While rising Hague filings are welcome, what really inspires us are the stories of those using IP to bring their ideas to the world.

For Khatanbaatar Khandsuren, an entrepreneur from Mongolia, Hague has saved both time and cost while ensuring vital legal protection. In Ukraine, thanks to his design registrations, Anatolii Burbeza has been able to get copycats off the market. And for Stephen Drake, founder of the Icelandic green-tech company IceWind, there is, and I quote him, "nothing else like this available." Later today, we will hear more stories like theirs, living proof of design's power to change lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with the success of the Hague system over the last century and its recent growth, it is time now for design rights, long the forgotten sibling of its more famous IP siblings, to take center stage.

WIPO pledges to keep working with all of our partners to ensure that designers continue to obtain cross-border protection, and that the IP system serves those who work hard to bring beauty and utility together into our daily lives.

My final words go to the many experts, officials and IP office colleagues, past and present, whose dedication built and sustained the Hague System. May we build on your legacy to open the 2nd century of the Hague system on a strong and successful note.

Thank you.