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WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION
GENEVA

SPECIAL UNION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PATENT CLASSIFICATION
(IPC UNION)

AD HOC IPC REFORM WORKING GROUP

**First Session
Geneva, May 25 to 28, 1999**

REPORT

adopted by the Working Group

INTRODUCTION

1. The ad hoc IPC Reform Working Group (hereinafter referred to as “the Working Group”) held its first session in Geneva from May 25 to 28, 1999. The following members of the Working Group were represented at the session: Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America, European Patent Office (EPO) (15). Croatia, the Patent Documentation Group (PDG) 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 and Operational Affairs Department, WIPO, who welcomed the participants on behalf of the Director General.

OFFICERS

3. The Working Group unanimously elected Mr. J. Calvert (United Kingdom) as Chairman and Mr. B. Geyer (Germany) as Vice-Chairman.
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 (see document AB/X/32, paragraphs 51 and 52), held from September 24 to October 2, 1979, the report of this session reflects only the conclusions (decisions, recommendations, opinions, etc.) of the Working Group and does not, in particular, reflect the statements made by any participant, except where any reservation in respect of any specific conclusion of the Working Group was made or repeated after the conclusion was arrived at.

REPORT ON THE TWENTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE IPC COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS

7. The Working Group noted an oral report by the International Bureau on the twenty-eighth session of the IPC Committee of Experts (hereinafter referred to as "the Committee") (see document IPC/CE/28/5), at which session the Committee had decided to launch the IPC reform in order to accommodate the Classification to the electronic age and to create the ad hoc IPC Reform Working Group for carrying out the preparatory work needed for achieving the expected results of the reform.
8. The Working Group was informed that the Committee had elaborated a recommendation to the Assembly of the IPC Union, scheduled to meet in September 1999, to take note of the need for the IPC reform, the strategy applied by the Committee in pursuing the reform, and to invite members and observers of the IPC Union to provide internal resources necessary for the implementation of the reform.

STATUS AND MANDATE OF THE AD HOC IPC REFORM WORKING GROUP

9. The Working Group noted that its mandate included the drafting of the Committee strategic plan to create a reformed international patent classification for the new millennium and the full elaboration, in the light of the IPC long-term goals, of the further tasks which it was entrusted with so that the results of the elaboration could be implemented as of the year 2003.

10. The Working Group also noted that the Committee had empowered it to create, if necessary, task forces for consideration of certain tasks on its program.

ELABORATION OF LONG-TERM GOALS AND A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IPC (project file IPC/R 1/99)

11. Discussions were based on Annex 7 to project file IPC/R 1/99, containing the rapporteur report submitted by the United Kingdom.

12. Following the detailed consideration of the rapporteur report, the Working Group agreed on a list of long-term goals of the IPC development, as given in paragraph 17, below. The Working Group noted that those long-term goals would serve as a basis for the elaboration of the Committee strategic plan to create a reformed international patent classification for the new millennium. During the discussions, the following remarks were, in particular, made.

13. It was considered extremely important that the IPC be systematically applied to technical non-patent literature containing invention-like information to provide better possibilities for searching that type of technical literature representing an indispensable source of data, especially at early stages of development of new technologies. Consequently, it was decided that goal (a), below, should also be directed to relevant non-patent literature.

14. As regards the proposed establishing of a master classification database encompassing the world's patent documents and technical non-patent literature, it was indicated that such a database would be highly desirable for increasing the efficiency of the patent search. It was suggested that the creation of the master classification database which would represent an important part of worldwide digital libraries should be pursued in the framework of the cooperation between the Committee and the Standing Committee on Information Technologies (SCIT). The International Bureau informed the Working Group that a request for cooperation between the Committee and the SCIT, prepared on the basis of proposals submitted by member States of the IPC Union, had been transmitted to the SCIT Secretariat.

15. In order to facilitate understanding and use of the IPC, the work directed to both standardization of the IPC structure and rules and elaboration of improved IPC training tools should be carried out. In this context, the Working Group noted the diverse practice of including the IPC data in available patent information databases as regards the completeness and format of the data. The Working Group agreed that harmonization of the presentation of the IPC data in electronic form should be achieved, especially in view of the proposed creation of the master classification database, and that producers of commercial patent information databases should also be contacted to that end.

16. Following an extensive discussion of an overall structure of the reformed IPC, the Working Group arrived at the conclusion that an optimal structure of the IPC would be represented by a two-level system which would better satisfy the needs of different categories of users. It was agreed that the IPC core level could be used for classifying patent documents, searching national collections of patent documentation and for general patent information purposes, whereas the IPC advanced level could be used for searching international collections of patent documentation, for example, the PCT minimum documentation. The Working Group noted that the IPC-based advanced search tools representing a possible further elaboration of the core level were already available in the form of more detailed internal versions of the IPC developed by some major offices, but those internal versions significantly differed in their contents and classification approach. The Working Group indicated that, in the long term, the different IPC-based advanced search tools should be harmonized and made fully compatible with the core level in order to form a unified IPC advanced level, which would facilitate searching of worldwide patent collections. It was also pointed out that, when such harmonization has been achieved, a central system of the revision and administration of the IPC advanced level could be introduced.

17. The Working Group approved the long-term goals listed below:

(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) The IPC data should be integrated into a single master database encompassing the world's patent documents and classified technical 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 have two levels:
- a core level for classifying patent documents, for general patent information purposes and for searching, for example, smaller, national collections of patent documents;
 - an advanced, more extensive elaboration of the core level, for searching, for example, larger, international collections of patent documents.
- (g) The IPC should make maximum use of an electronic environment, for example, to:
- enable multi-aspect classification;
 - facilitate IPC maintenance and revision;
 - enrich IPC content;
 - enable a more powerful role for the IPC as an electronic search tool;
 - enhance IPC usefulness to industrial property offices and the public;
 - develop and make more widely available effective, low cost IPC training;
 - adapt the IPC to coexist with other electronic search tools.

18. The Working Group accepted an offer by the International Bureau to prepare, on the basis of the approved list of the IPC long-term goals, a draft strategic plan for the development of the IPC, which draft should take into consideration the strategic plan action matrix submitted by the United States of America (see Annex 2 to the project file) and the SCIT strategic information technology plan under elaboration. The Working Group requested the draft strategic plan to be submitted by August 1, 1999, and invited comments thereon by October 1, 1999, and the rapporteur report by November 1, 1999.

INTRODUCTION OF ELECTRONIC DATA ILLUSTRATING THE CONTENTS OF IPC ENTRIES (project file IPC/R 3/99)

19. Discussions were based on Annex 6 to project file IPC/R 3/99, containing the rapporteur report submitted by the United States of America and, in particular, on the six points summarizing the written comments.

20. Concerning point 1 of the rapporteur report, the discussion was concentrated on whether the inclusion of links to exemplifying patents was needed for classification entries. The Working Group concluded that links to exemplifying patents could be introduced in new groups in the electronic versions of the IPC, if necessary. However, caution should be exercised in their introduction because developments in technology might make a patent less representative for the classification entry it should exemplify. When a sufficient number of patent documents for the new entries has been accumulated, exemplifying patents could be removed from electronic data.

21. With regard to point 2, the Working Group agreed that the inclusion of chemical formulae in the IPC would be desirable, in particular in the places where only generic chemical names are used. It was recommended that the IPC Revision Working Group should decide in which places those formulae would be included as part of the text of the IPC and where only hyperlinks to the formulae should be introduced. Furthermore, it was decided that drawings and other graphical information should also be introduced, when necessary, in order to better illustrate the contents of an entry.

22. The creation of classification definitions was strongly supported when discussing point 3 of the rapporteur report. It was agreed that these definitions should be part of the IPC and appear both in the electronic and the paper versions of the IPC. This consideration was also applied to expanding and modifying notes and references, as recommended by the Rapporteur.

23. Given the difficulty in the elaboration, the cost of development and the maintenance of synonyms or catch-term lists, proposed in point 5 of the rapporteur report, and the fact that such lists could not be part of the IPC, their introduction in the IPC was not considered as a matter of priority.

24. Finally, it was agreed to introduce hyperlinks in the electronic versions of the IPC to the terms having special meanings, which are explained in the Guide to the IPC.

ELABORATION OF RULES FOR MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION IN THE IPC (project file IPC/R 4/99)

25. Discussions were based on Annex 5 to project file IPC/R 4/99, containing the discussion paper submitted by Japan. The advantage of multi-aspect classification schemes in the electronic environment was noted. In this respect, it was decided to recommend to the Committee that the IPC Revision Working Group should systematically consider the possibility of introducing parallel multi-aspect classification schemes in the ongoing revision projects.

26. Following the discussion of the possible introduction of multiple classification in the IPC areas covered by the last and first place rules, the Working Group decided to create a Task Force to review those places. The following offices agreed to participate in the Task Force: Germany, France, Japan, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States of America, EPO. The Task Force was further instructed to consider the rules for multiple classification in function-oriented/application places and estimate the value of precedence notes and precedence references in the last place rule areas, in the light of the possible multiple classification. The project leader (Japanese Patent Office) was invited to submit a report on the results of the review by October 15, 1999.

REVIEW OF THE HYBRID SYSTEMS IN THE IPC (project file IPC/R 5/99)

27. The Working Group considered the rapporteur report prepared by the International Bureau, which was contained in Annex 6 to project file IPC/R 5/99.

28. The discussion that followed revealed different advantages and disadvantages of using the hybrid systems in the IPC. In particular, it was noted that information made available by using indexing schemes for coding patent documentation was incomplete but already included in several databases and, thus, could be considered as value-added information. At the same time, it was argued that, in the opinion of some industrial property offices, the advantages of using the hybrid systems did not compensate the costs of the additional burden of assigning indexing codes to patent documents.

29. In this regard, the Working Group agreed that the nature of the hybrid systems as representing information additional to the information represented by classification symbols did not allow making them obligatory for use. It was suggested therefore that the hybrid system could be considered as belonging to the advanced level of the future reformed IPC. However, the exact definition of the status of the hybrid systems was postponed until the time when the composition of the IPC advanced level has been clarified.

30. The Working Group indicated that some of the indexing schemes in the IPC representing the most important aspects of the respective subject matter could be converted into classification schemes and become part of the IPC core level. Consequently, the Task Force created for the consideration of the enhanced multiple classification in the IPC (see paragraph 26, above) was also instructed to conduct the review of the existing indexing schemes. The objective of the review should be the selection of the indexing schemes suitable for converting into classification schemes and investigation of the usefulness of other indexing schemes in the light of the possibilities provided by the full text search. The Working Group also requested the Task Force to study how the indexing schemes which would be considered appropriate for retaining in the IPC could be standardized as regards their structure and presentation. It was noted that the EPO would coordinate the work of the Task Force relating to the hybrid systems.

31. Some members of the Working Group pointed out that the linked mode of presentation of the indexing codes, although desirable for increasing the accuracy of the search, created additional costs when coding patent documents and recording information in databases. The Working Group agreed that the need for retaining of that mode of presentation should be considered at its next session, in November 1999, on the basis of surveys that the members of the Working Group were requested to conduct among examiners of their respective offices.

STUDY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING AN INSUFFICIENT LEVEL OF THE CONSISTENCY IN THE APPLICATION OF THE IPC AND ELABORATION OF MEASURES FOR INCREASING THE CONSISTENCY (project file IPC/R 6/99)

32. Discussions were concentrated on the factors influencing the consistency in the application of the IPC, indicated by the United States of America (see the rapporteur report in Annex 6 to the project file IPC/R 6/99).

33. With regard to those factors and possible ways of limiting their influence, the following remarks and recommendations were made:

(a) In principle, the use of concordances between other classification systems and the IPC for classifying according to the IPC should be avoided.

(b) The Working Group noted difficulties in classifying published unexamined patent applications in view of unclear claims, possible lack of novelty and other reasons, but underlined the importance of those publications as the most complete source of information on potential inventions. In order to provide the full classification data relating to published unexamined applications, the Working Group recommended that industrial property offices be encouraged to classify additional information, i.e. non-trivial technical information given in the description, which is not claimed. It was also indicated that classification changes occurring in respect of patent documents published at subsequent publication levels should be reflected in the planned master classification database.

(c) The standardization of the IPC structure and the introduction of uniform rules and classification definitions could be achieved in the long term, in the course of the development of the IPC. The need for such standardization, rules and definitions should always be taken into account by the IPC Revision Working Group when considering IPC revision projects. The ways of practical implementation of these long-term objectives should be outlined in the strategic plan for the development of the IPC.

(d) Additional electronic data illustrating the contents of the IPC entries could significantly contribute to the consistent classification.

(e) Modern Internet- and computer-based training tools would be needed for classifiers in industrial property offices in order to provide uniform approach to the classification procedure.

(f) To increase the efficiency of the patent search using the IPC, patent family information should be included in the master classification database.

(g) The IPC should provide classification places for any patentable subject matter. Insufficient coverage of the IPC in this respect should be remedied by an X-notation revision procedure.

(h) In order to ensure the consistent application of the IPC by classifiers working with different language versions of the Classification, all attempts should be made, in revising the authentic English and French versions, to use adequate, well defined technical terminology.

STUDY OF THE POSSIBILITY OF COOPERATION BETWEEN OFFICES IN THE RECLASSIFICATION OF BACKLOG PATENT FILES (project file IPC/R 8/99)

34. Discussions were based on Annex 4 to project file IPC/R 8/99, containing the rapporteur report prepared by the European Patent Office. It was agreed that it was feasible to collect reclassification data, at least relating to the core level of the reformed IPC, which should be included in the master classification database. A detailed plan should be elaborated to specify the way of collecting, updating and disseminating the reclassification data. As a first step, the International Bureau was requested to issue a circular inviting offices to submit information on the availability of IPC classification data at their disposal and on their plans to reclassify respective patent collections according to the seventh edition of the IPC. The information obtained should be made available in time for the next session of the Working Group.

REPORT BY THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU ON THE STUDY OF AUTOMATED CLASSIFICATION AND INDEXING TOOLS

35. The Working Group noted an oral report by the International Bureau on the preparations for conducting a pilot project on the use of automated tools for the reclassification and indexing of patent documents, in particular, that the International Bureau intended to commence, in autumn 1999, a tendering procedure for carrying out automated reclassification and indexing tests in limited IPC areas, where substantial changes in classification and indexing schemes had occurred in the seventh edition of the IPC, and on the basis of PCT applications.

REPORT BY THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU ON IMPROVEMENTS IN TRAINING IN THE USE OF THE IPC

36. The International Bureau informed the Working Group of its plans to develop, on the basis of the WIPO Worldwide Academy, IPC Internet training tools, including the material available in the *WIPO Handbook on Industrial Property Information and Documentation*, which tools would be addressed to different categories of IPC users and rely on modern training techniques, for example, distance-learning.

NEXT SESSION OF THE WORKING GROUP

37. The Working Group noted that the Secretariat had provisionally reserved the following dates for its second session:

November 15 to 19, 1999.

38. Having considered possible workload at its next session and noted that the second session of the IPC Revision Working Group had provisionally been scheduled to be held from November 22 to December 3, 1999, the Working Group agreed to request the IPC Revision Working Group to consider feasibility of shortening by two days its two-week session so that extra time could be used for the second session of the Working Group.

39. This report was unanimously adopted by the Working Group at its closing meeting on May 28, 1999.

[Annexes follow]