

WIPO Conference on Innovation and Climate Change
Geneva July 11 and 12, 2011

Opening Remarks

Francis Gurry, Director General, WIPO

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you here this morning and to thank you for attending this conference. Let me also extend my very warm thanks to the many speakers who have agreed to speak at the Conference in the next two days, and allow me to begin by introducing those who are seated with me at the podium this morning.

Immediately on my left is His Excellency Mr. Luis Alfonso de Alba, Ambassador and the Special Representative for Climate Change of Mexico. As you are all familiar, COP 16 took place in Cancun very successfully last year. Seated next to Ambassador de Alba is Mr. Mnikeli Ndabambi, General Manager for Operations of the South African Weather Service. In that capacity, he also represents South Africa as the host country for COP 17, which will be taking place in Durban later this year. Next to Mr. Ndabambi is Mr. José Romero from the Federal Government of Switzerland, which has been very involved in the negotiations relating to climate change. Seated on my right is someone who is well known to all of you, Ms. Wanna Tanunchaiwatana of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Each of these persons will speak to you in one moment after I have made some very brief introductory remarks.

We are delighted at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to be able to host this conference as a sign of our solidarity with respect to a process which, over the last several years, has in many ways dominated both the UN system and, more broadly, the whole international community.

In this conference, we are addressing the very specific and limited contribution that WIPO may make with respect to this large and all-encompassing process. That contribution, as you are aware, focuses on innovation. It is very clear that if we are to overcome the challenge of human-induced climate change, we are going to have to change the way we do things. Intellectual property is a vehicle of change. It is concerned with the new; by definition, it is concerned with that what changes. The reason that we have intellectual property as a social and economic policy is to encourage innovation and to provide a framework within which an idea may be brought from a very incipient stage through to a market reality.

Intellectual property as a public policy is also very much concerned with achieving a balance of often competing interests in relation to the change that is taking place. In this instance, it is a question of the sometimes competing interests of the individual creator as against society, which wishes to benefit from the creation; of the producers as opposed to the consumers; of the interests in encouraging the creation of new technology as against the interests in encouraging the diffusion of that newly created technology. These balances lie at the heart of intellectual property policy, and they are what intellectual property as a discipline is all about. The question that I think we hope to see discussed in the course of the next two days is indeed: What sort of balances do we want to achieve in trying to encourage innovation in clean technologies and in the area of environmentally sustainable technologies?

Let me briefly make reference to WIPO's existing program in this area. More detail will be given by my colleagues Mr. Christian Wichard, Mr. James Pooley, and Mr. Yoshiyuki Takagi in a session that will take place tomorrow specifically on these questions. At the moment, however, I would like to refer to three areas in which our Organization is active.

The first of these is the area of technology knowledge access, or access to knowledge about technology. The patent system constitutes the single most comprehensive, systematic and accessible record of humanity's technology. At WIPO, we are trying to maximize the benefit of that function of the patent system by providing an accessible record of technology that has been developed through our database, Patentscope. At present, this database has some 8 million records available, and this number will move to about 20 million by the end of the year. We have also developed a number of tools to make the accessing of that record a simpler matter. These tools include a search inventory under the International Patent Classification to make it easier to locate, identify, and search environmentally friendly technologies. Another of these tools is a common portal that we have developed with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), where information is provided through the patent system on renewable energies. A third tool is our establishment in developing countries of technology and innovation support centers, which serve as centers of documentation for developing countries to access this record and to participate in the associated capacity building.

The second area of our activities focuses on support for technology markets—not the replacement of technology markets, but support for the efficiency and good functioning of technology markets. In this regard, my colleagues will talk about WIPO Green, which is a sustainable technology exchange that we are developing with member companies of the Japan Intellectual Property Association, and which will, we hope, enhance the transparency of the market for climate friendly technologies.

Finally, let me say that we remain very active in the fields of capacity building with respect to licensing and of the technical expertise that is necessary in order to effect efficient technology exchanges, technology transfers, and efficient usage of the patent information I had mentioned earlier.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my great pleasure to turn to our speakers for this morning. I have the great honor now in introducing Ambassador de Alba, the Special Representative for Climate Change of Mexico.