

DG Opening Remarks – IGC 41

30 August 2021

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to open the Forty-First Session of the WIPO Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC).

Due to current circumstances, we are convening in a hybrid format this week. I would like to thank Member States and observers for accommodating these arrangements and demonstrating your strong commitment to the work of the IGC.

Since it has been some time since the last meeting of the Committee in June 2019, it may be opportune for me to recollect some intervening developments.

In October 2019, the General Assembly agreed to renew the IGC's mandate for the 2020/21 biennium, and set the objective of finalizing an agreement on an international legal instrument(s), without prejudging the nature of outcome(s), relating to intellectual property which will ensure the balanced and effective protection of genetic resources (GRs), traditional knowledge (TK) and traditional cultural expressions (TCEs). It also reached an agreement on a work program for the IGC.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic soon intervened and Committee meetings could not convene, severely disrupting the IGC's deliberations over the biennium.

After consultations in May and June of 2020, Member States agreed to carry out various activities to facilitate the work of the Committee even in the absence of a Committee meeting.

I am pleased to share that pursuant to this, a virtual *Seminar on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources* was organized in January 2021. In addition, three voluntary online commenting processes were established in 2020 and a series of information sessions took place in June this year on the history and status of the IGC negotiations. I believe that these activities have kept the work of the IGC alive in the hearts of IGC participants, even in the midst of disruptions to the usual rhythms of our meetings.

Dear IGC participants,

The work of this Committee forms an important part of WIPO's mission to develop a balanced and effective global IP ecosystem.

As outlined within our recently published Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP), it is important to build an inclusive global IP ecosystem. The Secretariat will also continue to support and facilitate the norm-setting activities of our Organization in a neutral, inclusive and transparent way.

The issues before the IGC are technically and politically complex, and formal, concrete outcomes remain undetermined despite many efforts over the years. The two-year hiatus in negotiations have unfortunately not been helpful. We should however not be deterred. Where there is a will, there is a way, and WIPO will work closely with Member States to facilitate any idea that may energize the negotiation process.

We must also never forget that the work of this Committee is ultimately in support of indigenous peoples and local communities around the world.

While these communities are rich sources of traditional innovation and creativity, many groups are unaware of how they can use IP to leverage these attributes to create jobs for the community, support livelihoods, raise standards of living, and should they desire, bring their heritage to the world.

Through WIPO initiatives such as our *Creative Heritage Project*, the *Indigenous and Local Community Women Entrepreneurship Program* and the recently launched *Photography Prize for Indigenous Peoples and Local Community Youth*, we are committed to using our expertise and role as the UN agency for IP to support these communities around the world.

For example, the Sámi people in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia use registered collective trademarks to identify and preserve traditional and authentic Sámi handicrafts. For the Sámi, IP helps to keep their culture alive.

Likewise, Lucille Anak Awen Jon, a young jewelry designer from the Bidayuh Community in Malaysia is working with WIPO and the International Trademark Association (INTA) to brand

her tradition-based products. Lucille's designs not only sustain her community's heritage, but also provide sustainable income for her people.

This week the IGC will address a range of procedural matters as agreed by Member States. I would like to take this opportunity to thank regional coordinators and Member States for your engagement with the IGC Secretariat in advance of this session.

One of the main items on the agenda concerns reaching agreement on a recommendation to the forthcoming WIPO General Assembly on the renewal of the IGC's mandate for the 2022-23 biennium. I am pleased to have been advised that an informal agreement has been reached on this matter.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of indigenous people and local community experts to the work of the IGC.

Unfortunately, current circumstances mean that the WIPO Voluntary Fund has been unable to support indigenous people and local community representatives to attend this session in person.

Notwithstanding this, WIPO extends a warm welcome to those representatives who are able to join us virtually this week and participate in the important discussions of the IGC. We also encourage Member States to consult and identify ways to raise further contributions to the WIPO Voluntary Fund.

In conclusion, the work of this Committee is critical in helping indigenous peoples and local communities all over the world to use IP to create economic opportunities, sustain livelihoods and ultimately share their heritage on equitable terms, and I wish all of you a fruitful meeting ahead.

Thank you.