

experience SINGAPORE

LOOKING BEYOND THE HORIZON



focus

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WIPO'S NEW DIRECTOR GENERAL MR DAREN TANG IS THE FIRST SINGAPOREAN TO HEAD A UNITED NATIONS AGENCY.

in singapore

REIMAGINING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

A bold new vision for an age-old law – that's what Singaporean Mr Daren Tang, the World Intellectual Property Organization's new Director General, has in mind.

The term "intellectual property" (IP) conjures up images of the copyright symbol, music piracy and the millions of patents that are in force around the world. But if the new Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has his way, we would have to fundamentally reimagine the way we view IP. "I hope the global community will shed its narrow perception of IP as being solely about legal issues such as trademarks and patents. It does encompass those things, but I think it offers so much more: IP is about how we can help innovators and ideators take their ideas and products to the market. It's about supporting the creators and artists around us," said

Mr Daren Tang, who assumed his role last October.

This reimagining of IP is not new to Mr Tang. After all, he adopted a change in perspective himself. "I'll admit, IP was never my first love," he quipped. "Even as an international lawyer, I saw it purely as a legal issue." But his views started to evolve after he joined the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore (IPOS), a statutory board which helps innovators use IP to take their ideas to market.

A BALANCING ACT

During his stint as IPOS' Chief Executive, Mr Tang came to understand IP's potential to be a force for development. He noted

how brands with an overseas presence were able to spread their wings only because they were protected by trademark. "So indirectly, IP creates jobs, drives enterprise growth and spurs economic development," reflected Mr Tang, who is the first Singaporean to helm a United Nations (UN) agency. Mr Tang used the example of Cambodia's prized Kampot Pepper to illustrate his point. "In Cambodia, Kampot Pepper was registered as a geographical indication, like Champagne in France. This allowed it to be marketed as a premium product and has raised revenues for the community."

Maximising the potential of IP requires those who administer the IP regime to maintain a fine balancing act, or as Mr Tang puts it, being in the "Goldilocks" zone. "You can't be too overzealous with your



MR TANG TAKING THE OATH OF OFFICE IN OCTOBER 2020.



At first glance, IP may seem dry and unexciting. But when you see it in its broader context, when you see how it impacts our lives, it suddenly comes alive.

Mr Daren Tang, Director General, World Intellectual Property Organization



MR TANG OPENING THE THIRD SESSION OF A MEETING ON INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE.



WIPO MAINTAINS STRONG TIES WITH ITS MEMBER STATES.

protections or you stifle competition. But if you're too lax with them, you won't encourage innovation and creativity," he shared, adding that there's no one-size-fits-all approach to finding this balance. "It really varies from country to country." A raised awareness of this has sparked brisk demand from countries for WIPO's assistance to help build a good IP ecosystem. In addition, there is also increasing demand for WIPO's services, which include the running of international filing systems and registries for patents, trademarks and designs. These help entrepreneurs and innovators move brands, technologies and ideas seamlessly across borders.

MORE THAN JUST IP

Through agreements and treaties, WIPO also helps set international rules for IP that can have important knock-on effects. Mr Tang cited the example of the Marrakesh Treaty, which WIPO adopted in 2013. "That

was a great boost for visually-impaired communities as it allowed them to have greater access to copyrighted works in Braille and other formats accessible to them," said Mr Tang, who will helm WIPO for a six-year term.

The impact of WIPO can also be felt in the sustainability sphere, thanks to initiatives such as the WIPO Green. This online platform connects providers and seekers of environmentally-friendly technologies, which can catalyse green technology innovation and diffusion across borders. "These are just some ways that IP can take on a new meaning in people's minds." To achieve these, WIPO maintains strong ties with Member States and other stakeholders. Mr Tang calls these relationships the cornerstone of the agency's success and efforts. "In the coming years, we will deepen these relationships to identify and enhance WIPO's contributions in working with others to address issues like health, sustainability and climate change," he said.

Apart from legal frameworks and initiatives, more must be done to demystify IP and bring the IP message to the man in the street. "WIPO is embarking on programmes to help global communities realise IP's relevance to them. We want them to see IP as being a part of their daily lives and not something mysterious, foreboding or even intimidating. We will also identify ways to communicate the potential of IP to new audiences, ranging from start-ups and SMEs, to youths who want to bring these great ideas that they have to the world."

THE WORLD OF IP

- Around **15 million patents** were in force globally in 2019. The highest numbers were in the:
 - United States of America (3.1 million)
 - China (2.7 million)
 - Japan (2.1 million)
- **South Korea** files the most patents per unit of GDP.
- Close to **seven out of 10 IP filings** with WIPO now come from **Asia**, compared with four out of 10 at the start of the millennium.
- **WIPO** employs **1,500** employees and has a biennial budget of **S\$1.15 billion**.

SOURCE: WIPO IP FACTS AND FIGURES 2020, THE STRAITS TIMES

