

Address to the 48th Assemblies of the World Intellectual Property Organization

Stevie Wonder

Good morning Director General, world leaders, distinguished guests, friends and my United Nations family.

I am grateful to Dr. Francis Gurry, Director General of W.I.P.O. and Trevor Clarke who have invited me to address this very important gathering of world leaders whom I know can turn inaction into action, and dreams into reality.

I am also very grateful to have been appointed as a Messenger of Peace by Secretary General Ban Ki Moon.

In this role, I am further empowered and inspired to work towards my mission of bringing hope and light to the millions around the world who live with disabilities, and specifically today, those like me who are blind or visually impaired.

What I would like to do today is launch what I call the "Declaration of freedom for people with disabilities".

It's a call to action, a plan that will empower the independence of people with disabilities by providing them with the tools to learn and grow.

In America for instance, many African Americans owe their educational success to the government's mandate that all individuals be treated fairly and equally. This proactive approach to inclusion created opportunities for people of color to have access to a quality education and employment.

So now, I ask the question, where would President Obama be if the U.S. courts

and government did not take affirmative steps to assure equal access to a quality education for all Americans.

This is why I am calling for this body and your member countries to enact a "Declaration of freedom for people with disabilities". Through your legislative efforts, incentives can be created to advance the blind and visually disabled towards the promise of a better life.

I want everyone in this room to think, to think about how many young people that live in your various countries could be the next Barack Obama, but will never get there because they are visually impaired or have other print disabilities, and do not have access to the billions of books on science, medicine, history and philosophy that will allow them to be fully educated and one day live out their dream to be a prime minister, doctor, writer or teacher.

We must declare a state of emergency, and end the information deprivation that continues to keep the visually impaired in the dark. We must spread the word that the untapped genius of the 300 plus million who have a visual disability are in need of our love and action, today; not tomorrow, but today.

While I know that it is critical not to act to the detriment of the authors who labor to create the great works that enlighten and nourish our minds, hearts and souls, we must develop a protocol that allows the easy import and export of copyright materials so that people with print disabilities can join the mainstream of the literate world. There are many proposals on the table that will create a safe clearinghouse for the exchange and translation of books, please work towards a consensus. I beg you, now is the time to love.

And your love is the key to unlock the blinders that block the accessibility of translating books into a readable format for people with print disabilities.

As I look around this room I know that many of you are dedicated public servants and have made quite a difference in this world.

But your work and my work is not done. There is a huge constituency of God's children who need you to put ideological differences aside, and come up with a practical solution.

And I am respectfully asking you to join my declaration of freedom for the many print disabled and visually impaired by giving them the tools to think their way out of poverty and the darkness that is created when the mind does not have access to something as simple, but as powerful as a book.

I understand that the E.U., the group of Brazil, Mexico and Paraguay, the U.S. and the Africa group have proposed different plans on how to address the cross border transfer of information.

And there are issues on how to develop a protocol that has a binding effect, and at the same time respects the rights of all involved. It can be done.

We have the greatest minds in the world right here in this room. Please work it out.

Or I'll have to write a song about what you didn't do.

Please, please, please help Gods' light shine on the 300 plus million that live in the dark read their way into the light.

I would like each country represented here to adopt and develop with W.I.P.O. or in their own countries a "Declaration of freedom for people with disabilities".

It is our legacy and our gift to the future. Let's do this.

But before I go I have another perspective that I'd like to share with you. Please give me a minute to get to my key board.