

Caribbean Governments Commit to using Intellectual Property as a Tool for Economic Development

Update 213/2003

Geneva, December 1, 2003

Subject: Caribbean Governments Commit to using Intellectual Property as a Tool for Economic Development

Governments of several Caribbean countries have committed to use intellectual property as a tool to promote sustainable economic development and social welfare in the region with the signature of a landmark multilateral agreement with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) last week. At the WIPO Ministerial Level Meeting on Intellectual Property for Caribbean Countries organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda at St. John's on November 27 and 28, ministers signed a comprehensive cooperation agreement to promote the use of intellectual property (IP) as a tool for economic growth and social benefit. The meeting was opened by WIPO Director General Dr. Kamil Idris and the Prime Minister and Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda, Mr. Lester B. Bird. The governments of Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago were invited to participate in the meeting.

The agreement establishes the terms of a project that is designed to support a more effective integration of the region into the global economy by fostering technological innovation, creativity and competitiveness through intensive and effective mobilization and use of intellectual property.

The project will support on-going regional initiatives for economic development and integration of IP policies and strategies into government economic and social development plans at regional and national levels. It aims to create conditions for the development, protection, ownership, management and use of IP assets in the region, by fostering technological innovation and enterprise competitiveness, as well as cultural industries. The project will also promote technology transfer, strengthen regional research and development initiatives, encourage local invention and creativity, promote an IP culture and national and regional identity and branding.

The participating governments so far include Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. It is expected that other governments in the region will sign the agreement in the next three months.

On the sidelines of the ministerial meeting, Dr. Idris held a round of bilateral discussions with a number of senior officials within the government of Antigua and Barbuda, including the Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda, Sir James B. Carlisle, the Speaker of the House, Dame Bridget Harris, President of the Senate, Ms. Millicent Percival, the Minister of Education, Dr. Rodney Williams, the Minister for Trade, Mr. Gaston Browne and the Minister of Tourism, Mr. Molwyn Joseph. The ministerial event followed a meeting of the heads of IP offices for Caribbean countries which met in Saint John's on November 25 and 26. At that meeting, participants reviewed progress made in establishing a set of independent, national organizations to manage intellectual

property rights in the Caribbean region in line with the plan approved by Caribbean ministers in June 1999. Under the plan, it was agreed to incorporate a regional strategy for the development of a collective management system whereby national collective management organizations would be established and linked by standard internet facilities to a separate, jointly-owned-and-operated-organization (the Caribbean Copyright Link (CCL) that would provide back-office services to the national offices.

Participants noted that after two years of operation, all existing national collective management organizations (CMO's) in the region were fully operational and were making good overall progress both from a regional and a national perspective. It was noted that since 2001, the cumulative total gross royalty distributions have risen to USD1.879 million. The Caribbean regional database now includes documentation on more than 26,000 Caribbean works. This database enables Caribbean music to be identified and accounted for when it is performed in public in the Caribbean and foreign countries. Emphasis has been placed on entering the works documentation data and ensuring the necessary agreements are in place to allow export of the data in the standard international format to other CMO's worldwide for performance identification purposes. While the regional database comprising Caribbean works is beginning to generate royalties for Caribbean authors from performances in the region, Caribbean CMO's are engaged in the process of signing agreements with their counterparts in foreign territories to collect royalties from exported Caribbean works.

More than 300 creators had joined a Caribbean CMO over the last two years. This indicates a growing level of confidence by creators in their own organizations. The participants also reported a steady increase in licensing activity within the region.

WIPO welcomed the progress made and pledged its continued support in creating and integrating organizations representing the related rights of performing artists and producers in the region.

For further information, please contact the Media Relations and Public Affairs Section at WIPO:

Tel: (+41 22) 338 81 61 or (+41 22) 338 95 47;
E-mail: publicinf@wipo.int
Fax: (+41 22) 338 88 10