

Diplomatic Conference on Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge

WIPO Director General Daren Tang's Opening Speech

Geneva, May 13-24, 2024

Excellencies,

Delegates,

Colleagues, Friends,

It is my great honor to welcome you as the host of this historic event and to open the Diplomatic Conference to conclude an international legal instrument relating to Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Traditional Knowledge associated with Genetic Resources.

Today marks the culmination of a long and intense journey that has taken 25 years.

But to understand the significance of this journey, we must look back not just 25 years, but 550 years to 1474.

This was the year when the Republic of Venice established the world's first formal patent system, with the aim of protecting "new and ingenious devices".

While innovation has always been part of the human story, this development changed what had previously been an unpredictable, ad hoc and arbitrary process, introducing concepts like a requirement for novelty and a legal right backed by the State, which remain the cornerstone of the global IP system to this day.

But even more importantly, the development of the IP system fundamentally changed who could be an inventor or creator. With this, the fate of an idea depended not just on the whimsical support of feudal lords or monarchs, but on the power of this idea to engage with people, the market and society through IP. IP became a bridge to connect an idea with the world.

Since then, the IP system has constantly evolved. What started as national laws became an international system with the Paris and Berne Conventions.

By taking the long view of not just 25 years but 550 years, we see that just like innovation itself, IP has always been evolving. Our story, the story of WIPO and the global IP system is therefore not one of stasis, or of rigidly adhering to the status quo, but one of adjustment, change and dynamism, of responding and adapting to an ever-changing world and meeting the evolving expectations of our Members and their peoples.

Sometimes this is driven by technological revolutions, for example, in the late 1990s, when we successfully came together to address the arrival of digital technologies through the WIPO Internet Treaties.

At other times, this was to be more inclusive and to take care of specific beneficiaries, for example in the 2010s when we worked as one to deliver for performers and those who are visually impaired through the Beijing and Marrakesh treaties.

In these next two weeks, we have a precious and rare opportunity to continue this great tradition and show that the global IP system is capable of considered and balanced evolution. And just as our predecessors did in the past, our task is to thread the needle and use this opportunity to move the IP system forward, together as one family.

A successful outcome will deliver on three fronts. First, it will better reflect the pivotal role played by genetic resources in innovation. Although humanity has long utilized genetic resources for sustenance, medicine and technological advancements, these connections are becoming deeper and more consequential, driven by bold new advances in digital technologies and the life sciences.

Take some of the most pressing challenges that we face: Genetic resources help to bolster global food supply, increasing crop yields and fortifying agriculture against

the stresses and strains of a warming planet. Genetic resources are indelibly linked to economic development, serving as a vital source of jobs, income and opportunity, especially for remote communities in developing and least developed countries. And genetic resources support a healthier world, aiding the creation of medicines and therapies.

Against this backdrop, further enhancing the efficacy, transparency and quality of the patent system is in our common interest and an issue whose time has come.

Second, a positive outcome will help to strengthen the global compact we have with our Members that intellectual property is here to deliver for the good of all of us.

Day in, day out, WIPO not only supports Members to put in place the legal and regulatory frameworks for IP, but also to help them use IP as a powerful catalyst for growth and development. Strong and robust IP systems enable our innovators and creators to prosper. And their success benefits us all.

But there are many others whose great ideas never see the light of day, or who remain underserved by IP. Just over three years ago, I pledged to build a dynamic, inclusive and forward-looking IP system – one that works for everyone, everywhere. Since then, my colleagues and I have worked tirelessly to make this a reality – strengthening global IP frameworks, demystifying IP, and showing, concretely, how it delivers for innovators and creators in all parts of the world.

At this Diplomatic Conference, we can show that there is no contradiction between a robust and predictable IP regime – one that incentivizes innovation, attracts investments and drives game-changing research – and one that responds to the needs of all countries and their communities everywhere, including those from Indigenous Peoples as well as from Local Communities. A more inclusive and diverse IP system is not just a more dynamic IP system, it is a stronger IP system.

Aligned with this, we are also determined to ensure that the negotiating process itself is inclusive and transparent. We are delighted to be joined by Indigenous Peoples as well as members of Local Communities from different parts of the world, and we are grateful to Australia, Germany, Mexico and Spain for their recent contributions to WIPO's Voluntary Fund to support their participation. I also want to warmly welcome all NGOs, industry representatives and other observers in attendance. Your engagement is critical to our work, and our work is stronger for your presence.

Third, a favorable outcome will deliver a strong boost to multilateralism. Over the next two weeks, our responsibility is therefore not just to WIPO and the IP community, but also to a world whose eyes are upon us.

Let me be candid – negotiations will not be easy. Negotiations dealing with significant and important topics rarely are. But I call on all of you to marry passion with pragmatism, and channel the same spirit of flexibility, accommodation and consensus that has brought us now to the cusp of a truly landmark agreement.

To help reach this goal, the Secretariat is committed to providing you with the best environment that we can, so that you can arrive at the best possible outcomes. I want to thank all delegations for the hard work done in the lead up to this conference and especially mention, Uruguay, Indonesia, Algeria, Poland, China and Namibia for hosting and co-organizing a series of regional and cross-regional meetings. These efforts contribute to the constructive atmosphere needed for multilateralism to prosper and deliver.

Dear Friends, Dear Colleagues,

Two years ago, we achieved a stunning breakthrough, built on mutual understanding, trust and flexibility, with the desire for consensus. Over the next two weeks, we will need to call on that same spirit in order to cross the finishing line together.

Let us once again make history as one WIPO family, for the world.

Thank you.