

**DG Tang Speech – ARIPO Council of Ministers
24 November 2023**

Your Excellency, President Masisi of Botswana,

Your Excellency, Mmusi Kgafela, Botswana's Minister of Trade and Industry,

Your Excellency, Ziyambi Ziyambi, Zimbabwe's Minister of Justice, Parliamentary and Legal Affairs, and Chair of the ARIPO Council of Ministers,

Honorable Members of ARIPO's Council of Ministers,

ARIPO Director General, Bemanya Twebaze,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. It is a great honor to join you for the 19th Session of the ARIPO Council of Ministers in the handsome and modern city of Gaborone.

Let me begin by congratulating DG Twebaze on a successful 47th Session of the ARIPO Administrative Council, whose decisions impact not just in one country but 22 countries.

I also want to thank President Masisi and the government of Botswana, including our colleagues at CIPA, for your warm hospitality and excellent arrangements. WIPO had the honor of hosting the President in Geneva this May and it is a sign of our closeness to Botswana, and the region, that we are together again this week.

When I met President Masisi earlier this year, he shared an insight which has remained with me ever since.

He said that while Botswana is blessed with diamonds, the real diamonds are the ideas of his people, and he wants to have an IP ecosystem that allows these diamonds to be brought into the light where they can truly sparkle.

I cannot agree more wholeheartedly, nor could I have put it more memorably. Africa is blessed not just with the richness of your land and natural resources, but with a future that will increasingly be shaped by the ideas and ingenuity of your people.

This transformation is already underway.

First, start ups are growing and venture capital is flowing in. Venture capital deals grew by almost 50 percent in Africa last year, despite the global VC crunch. In fact, Africa was alone in avoiding a decline in VC investments in 2022. This year, capital has continued to pour into home-grown startups from your region like Degas from Ghana, WeLight from Madagascar,

Yellow from Malawi, and Emata from Uganda – with each of these firms active in areas like agri-tech and green technology, critical to putting the UN SDGs back on track.

Second, African creators are driving a cultural renaissance. Think about Nollywood or Ghallywood and Afrobeats. Already Africa's creative industries generate over 4 billion dollars in revenue, and this is really just the beginning. This explains why Netflix has invested 160 million dollars in African content in recent years, and why Sony has launched a new innovation fund for the continent's entertainment startups.

Third in trade and economic connections, Africa is driving its own development, including through the world's largest free trade area. This has been another year of progress for the African Continental Free Trade Area, which will continue leveraging the full potential of intra-African trade across a growing market of 1.4 billion people.

Propelled by these and other trends, intellectual property continues to shift from the periphery to the center of ARIPO economies, serving not just as a legal right, but, increasingly, as a powerful catalyst for jobs, entrepreneurship, investments, business growth and sustainable economic and social development. And let me put on record WIPO's full support for this.

Indeed, African patent filings reached their highest level in more than 20 years last year. Over the past 10 years, only patent filings in Asia have grown faster.

Filings through ARIPO are also performing well. Trademark applications grew by 13 percent last year, with design applications up by almost 50 percent, driven by homegrown African innovators.

These numbers tell a story of growth in IP filings. But what is interesting and encouraging is that other data backs up these trends. Just a few months ago, WIPO released the results of a survey of 25,000 laypersons from across the globe about attitudes towards IP. It showed that those in Africa have the highest awareness of trademarks in the world, and a more positive attitude towards IP than those surveyed in Europe or North America.

All these are signs and indications that innovation, creativity, technology and entrepreneurship are increasingly driving African dreams, ambitions, hopes and growth. This is why we in the global and regional IP community must not be content with "business as usual" but must instead transform the global IP ecosystem to help turn these dreams into reality.

IP offices in the region are listening to the ground and many are transforming from IP regulators and registries to innovation catalysts and agencies. WIPO is excited to support you on this journey. I am pleased to share that we are supporting 7 ARIPO Members to develop, implement and update National IP Strategies, and that soon 20 ARIPO Members will use IPAS, our IP Administration software that we provide for free to allow offices to become fully digital.

Beyond strengthening the IP infrastructure in your countries, we are also delivering concrete, impactful projects to support those innovating and creating at the grassroots level in your countries. We have launched 90 impact-driven projects around the world in the past two years,

many of which are in ARIPO Member States. These including supporting women entrepreneurs in agribusiness, new training and mentoring for youth and SMEs, bringing IP closer to traditional medicine practitioners and supporting local handicrafts and knowledge through IP driven projects.

The best way of bringing all this work alive is to share the stories of those we are reaching on the ground.

One story I want to tell is that of Babui Nyepetsi who runs Oliphant Market Garden, a farming business here in Botswana. She is also one of the women from 16 ARIPO Member States part of our new coaching and mentoring program on agribusiness.

Recent years have been tough. Babui expanded her enterprise only for the pandemic and bad weather to disrupt her business.

But her entrepreneurial spirit continues to shine bright. Now, as well as seeing how IP can help build her brand, she is, through this program, networking with peers from the likes of Ghana, Malawi and Zimbabwe whose products have a market in Botswana.

As Babui told us, "I call it a dream come true...being in a room with women from different African countries all doing something new, I saw the opportunity for Africa to trade with itself."

This is the impact we want to have on the ground, but we cannot do it alone. This is why partnerships are at the heart of our approach and why we are proud of our close and longstanding cooperation with our friends and colleagues at ARIPO.

So let's continue to work together to bring IP to the grassroots, and build a more balanced and inclusive global IP ecosystem that works for everyone, everywhere.

Thank you.