

Director General's remarks to the VII Ministerial Meeting of Central America and the Dominican Republic

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Buenos días.

It is a pleasure and an honor to be here with all of you in the Dominican Republic at the seventh edition of the Ministerial Meeting of Central America and the Dominican Republic.

I first want to thank our host, the Dominican Republic, for the excellent arrangements and for the hospitality that you have shown us.

Your warmth, but also the warmth of your people, has been touching. We appreciate very much the arrangements you have made to make us comfortable and to give us a good setting to engage.

I want to take this opportunity my dear Excellencies, Ministers, Directors-General, friends and colleagues, to share with you some of the broader developments in the world of intellectual property and innovation.

I will then share with you where I see the possibilities for this region and for this forum, and then what we can do to help you in this next stage of your development as a region that is increasingly using IP, innovation and creativity to drive your economy and to develop your societies.

And the first trend I want to share with you is that from the global perspective – from the WIPO perspective – innovation is becoming globalized.

Innovation is no longer a phenomenon confined to the industrialized countries in Europe and North America. It has grown beyond these regions.

Let me share some statistics that exemplify this. Seven out of ten IP filings in the world now come from outside of Europe and North America. They come from Asia. They come from Africa. And they come from Latin America as well. So there is more activity, IP activity, outside of Europe and outside of North America than in these industrialized countries.

For example, six out of ten research and development dollars are now being spent in Asia. And the biggest movie industry in the world? It is not Hollywood, but it is India's Bollywood, followed by Nigeria's Nollywood.

So my friends, when we think about innovation, let us not think only about the places where innovation started, but let us think about the places where innovation is happening now – which is not just in one part of the world, but all over the world.

The second big perspective that I want to share with you is that the pandemic has accelerated pre-existing trends towards technology, towards digitalization and, therefore, towards innovation and IP.

Many of you are old friends and dear colleagues from IP offices and I am very proud to be the first WIPO Director General to come from an IP office.

As many of you know, over the last two years your trademark filings have exploded.

We are seeing, all over the world, national IP filings for trademarks increasing by 10 to 25 percent. This is a tremendous rate of increase, especially as the previous increase for trademark filings was usually around three to five percent. At WIPO itself, our trademark filings last year in the Madrid system increased by 15 percent.

What is interesting is that this growth is being driven by small and medium enterprises. What this means is that all over the world, even though SMEs are struggling to use IP for their business growth, we are beginning to see a change in the structure of the IP system – where it is not just the biggest companies using the IP system, but also, increasingly, startups and small and medium-sized enterprises. This is a very welcome trend given the importance of MSMEs to not just this region, but to countries all over the world, including developed countries.

And these trends: the globalization of IP, as well as the acceleration of IP, presents challenges, but also provides opportunities for transformation.

And just as the economies, the institutions and the region that you represent are transforming, WIPO has to transform as well.

I represent the new administration at WIPO - me and my colleagues – Deputy Director General Hasan Kleib, Beatriz Amorim, Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Division, and other colleagues who you know well. Together, we bring a new vision of IP and of WIPO.

In a world where innovation is becoming more open, more global and moving faster, IP can no longer just remain a legal right. It must become a catalyst for jobs, for investments and to help develop economies and societies.

IP must not just be focused on IP registration and enforcement, but it must broaden to include IP commercialization and even IP financing, and other activities related to how we use IP as an asset class.

The region understands this because you already have the roots and the foundations of technology, of creativity and of heritage that are coming together in ways that are dynamic.

We hear of startups such as Criptext, the free messaging encryption service from Panama, and El Salvador's TreeCloud that uses AI and big data to provide software solutions for multinationals.

We hear of MSMEs like SIBO BV from Costa Rica that is seeking to improve food security and tackle pollution by using the world's first water-based insect protein to develop alternative sources of food.

We are inspired by entrepreneurs like the designer Isabella Springmuhl from Guatemala who, in collaboration with indigenous communities, is using traditional fabrics to grow her fashion business and take her products to London, Rome and Mexico City.

And we hear of emerging policies in support of small businesses across the region, including the creation of “Sello Blanco” in Guatemala and the “Improving My Business” program in Panama.

So the region is really a region where you understand the power of innovation and IP to transform and you are making moves in that direction.

And what do I see as the strengths of the region having come here for the first time?

First, I see a very strong spirit of cooperation and a sense of common challenges. Even though you remain proud of your individual countries, you are also proud of coming together as a region. And that is quite unusual because in the world of IP, you are taking the lead in bringing together Ministers in a regional context. Not many other regions are doing this, certainly not in the rest of the Latin American region and certainly quite rare in other parts of the world. So your sense and your spirit of cooperation is very unique.

Secondly, your sense of openness – socially and culturally. This is a region that is open and connected. For example, in Dominican Republic, I understand that you have created a network of free trade agreements that gives you access to a market of 800 million people. And as a group of Spanish speaking countries, you have a connection to the Spanish speaking community in the world, the second largest community in the world and the fastest growing.

And third, as countries that are smaller you have agility, you have the ability to be nimble and you have vibrancy. These are the three characteristics of the region and they are your areas of strength.

What we think we can do at WIPO is to help you to play to your strengths. What we want to be is a U.N. agency that doesn't just organize talks and seminars and workshops, but goes beyond that to work with you to find concrete projects and concrete initiatives that can deliver results fast, and on the ground.

So first, may I suggest for your consideration, that since you have finished a cycle of the Ministerial Forum, that as you think about the next chapter of the Ministerial Forum, you consider the possibility that it could move towards a more workplan-driven Forum.

This view comes from personal experience being the former Director General of the Singapore office. We worked very closely with the Southeast Asian countries in an ASEAN context and we evolved our work into one where we also met together as the DGs to talk about specific workplans.

WIPO has experience to help you with this. And if this is something of interest to the region, we are prepared to support you as you evolve your Ministerial Forum to having both the political as well as a workplan aspect to it.

The second suggestion is for the countries in the region to look at yourselves as a hub – as a regional hub and as individual hubs. Because your countries are open you have the ability to accept and to be open towards new ideas and be of service to the flow of ideas.

And apart from the flow of agricultural goods, the flow of commodities, the flow of resources, I would like to suggest for your consideration that IP, innovation and creativity can be part of that flow as well.

Certainly, I believe that as smaller countries, the focus should be on quality and not quantity because the domestic markets - the size of the population - may not be suitable for quantity based approach towards IP. But you certainly possess a lot of quality in terms of innovation and creators, and we can help you with that.

We also would like to suggest that a holistic approach would be very suitable, for instance I believe that already you have an Orange Economy concept that many of you are espousing, and WIPO can help you develop that holistic approach in several areas.

First, IP for communities and IP for tourism. You have in this region a richness and heritage such as "Cafe Dipilto" from Nicaragua, "Cafe Marcala" from Honduras, "Banana de Costa Rica" and of course, "Dominican Rum".

And so we want to see whether we can work with you on an IP and tourism perspective, to support your country brand, as the Minister mentioned. So that is one area that we can work together.

The second area is IP for creators. This is a region that's rich in culture, rich in content. With poets like Ruben Dario from Nicaragua and Juan Luis Guerra who created Merengue and Bachata. In this area we have a program called WIPO for Creators where we are trying to create a platform where musicians talk to fellow musicians about IP from a musician's perspective.

And of course, IP for startups and for micro, small and medium sized enterprises. I mentioned many of the innovations and these startups that you have in the region. And this is another area where we can support you. We can look for initiatives that that help to train your startups and your MSMEs – not just in looking at IP from the legal angle, but in using IP from a business angle.

In conclusion, I think that it has been a difficult two years, and that it has been a challenging two years, but also that the transformation that you have put in place over the last 12 years has been accelerated by the pandemic.

And I see this region as a region of immense potential in the areas of IP, innovation and creativity. So count on WIPO to be your close ally and supporter and partner as we work together to try to bring the innovation and creative ecosystems of the countries and region to the next level and support the future of this Ministerial Forum.

¡Muchas gracias!