

UN peace messenger Stevie Wonder calls for copyright steps for the blind



Stevie Wonder

20 September 2010 – The soul music star and United Nations Messenger for Peace Stevie Wonder today **urged** the international community to facilitate access to copyright material to people with visual disabilities, saying such a move would help them acquire more learning tools and enable them to live independent lives.

Mr. Wonder launched his “Declaration of freedom for people with disabilities” at the start of the annual meeting of Member States of the UN World Intellectual Property Organization (**WIPO**) in Geneva.

He said the declaration was “a call to action, a plan to empower the independence of people with disabilities by providing them with the tools to learn and grow.”

“Through your legislative efforts, incentives can be created to advance the blind and visually disabled towards the promise of a better life,” Mr. Wonder told the ministers and policy-makers from WIPO’s 184 Member States. He challenged delegates in the 10-day event to strike an agreement on improved access to copyright protected works by visually impaired persons (VIPs) within a year.

“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,” the award-winning United States singer and songwriter said.

“While I know that it is critical not to act to the detriment of the authors who labour 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,” he said.

“There are many proposals on the table that will create a safe clearing house for the exchange and translation of books, please work towards a consensus,” he added.

WIPO Member States are currently discussing better access to copyright-protected works for the blind, visually impaired and other reading-disabled persons in the agency’s Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights. A number of proposals aimed at creating an enabling legal environment for better access to copyright-protected works for reading impaired persons are under discussion.

In his opening statement today to the WIPO gathering, the body’s Director General, Francis Gurry, said innovation was central to economic growth and to the creation of new and better jobs.

“It is the key to competitiveness for countries, for industries and for individual firms. It is the process by which solutions are developed to social and economic challenges,” Mr. Gurry told to some 70 government ministers who will be exploring the theme “Innovation, Growth and Development: The Role of Intellectual Property and Member States’ National Experiences” in a two-day ministerial segment.

Mr. Gurry stressed the growing complexity of “the journey from idea to commercial reality,” which had led to “a broadening of the understanding of what constitutes innovation.”

In a related development, WIPO today launched an on-line global intellectual property (**IP**) reference resource which provides up-to-date information on national IP laws and treaties.

This centralized search facility, known as WIPO Lex, offers a user-friendly interface and functionalities, is in line with one of the agency's strategic goals – to serve as a world reference source for IP information and analysis.

WIPO Lex features the complete IP legal texts for more than 60 countries with substantial coverage for a further 100 legal systems.

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