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UN agency hails move to protect African folklore and traditional knowledge



Francis Gurry, Director General of WIPO

31 August 2010 – The United Nations agency charged with protecting intellectual property worldwide has welcomed the adoption by a number of African States of a new legal instrument that seeks to protect the continent's traditional knowledge and folklore.

The instrument, adopted earlier this month in Swakopmund, Namibia, by member states of the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO), is designed to preserve and protect the use of Africa's diverse knowledge systems and cultures for the continent's sustainable development.

It will enter into force following ratification by six ARIPO member states.

Francis Gurry, Director General of the UN's World Intellectual Property Organization ([WIPO](#)) welcomed the adoption of the Swakopmund Protocol on the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Folklore as "an historic step for ARIPO's 17 member states, and a significant milestone in the evolution of intellectual property."

Developed by African experts over a six-year period, the Swakopmund Protocol is a response to the misappropriation and misuse of the continent's traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

It was developed in coordination with a similar instrument prepared over the same period by the 16 West African countries comprising the Organization Africaine de la Propriete Intellectuelle (OAPI), and adopted in July 2007.

WIPO provided support to both organizations in the process of developing those instruments. Mr. Gurry said that WIPO was also ready to respond to requests from ARIPO and OAPI member states for support in the development of national laws for the protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

Meanwhile, WIPO's Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore is working towards the development of a legal instrument for the effective protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions that would be international in scope.

Following a productive intersessional working group meeting last month, that Committee will meet again in December to continue its work.

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