

WIPO and International Copyright

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is an agency of the United Nations that deals with different aspects of intellectual property protection on behalf of its 179 member nations. Because each country grants different intellectual property rights and enforces them in various ways, WIPO works with intergovernmental groups, such as the World Trade Organization, to create mechanisms for intellectual property protection and enforcement that will minimize these problems.

Due to its jurisdiction over treaties dealing with copyright and related rights, WIPO is an important venue for libraries. Libraries should be a vital part of the strategies of WIPO and its member states in promoting intellectual property law. The WIPO General Assembly meeting took place September 24 to October 3, and two significant initiatives were put into action that are of direct interest to the library community.

On September 28, WIPO member states adopted a development agenda, which included a series of recommendations to enhance the development dimension of the organization's activities.

Member states agreed to establish a Committee on Development and Intellectual Property to examine, evaluate, discuss, and report on the implementation of all recommendations adopted by member states. These tasks will be accomplished by coordinating the relevant WIPO bodies to discuss intellectual property and development-related issues as agreed upon by the committee and decided by the General Assembly.

On October 2, member states agreed to continue accelerated work on intellectual property and traditional knowledge, genetic resources and folklore/traditional cultural expressions, with a focus on the international dimensions.

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The General Assembly extended the mandate to the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC).

The decision by the member states renews the General Assembly's 2005 directions to IGC to accelerate its work and to focus in particular on the international dimensions of intellectual property and genetic resources, traditional knowledge, and folklore or traditional cultural expressions. The mandate excludes no outcome, including the possible development of an international instrument or instruments in the field without prejudice to the work pursued in other forums.

Delegates urged the committee to work toward a substantive conclusion in the coming two years. Delegates drew attention to the need to build on the existing work of IGC, and highlighted the importance of IGC coming to grips with the complex and sensitive issues before it. While stressing the need not to prejudice other multilateral outcomes, many called for a binding international legal instrument as the only full effective response to the global phenomenon of the misappropriation and misuse of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions for industrial and commercial use.

Copyright scholars

In other copyright news, three International Copyright Advocates were selected in a new effort initiated by ALA's Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) and the Library Copyright Alliance (LCA): Janice T. Pilch (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign); Barbara Oakley (University of Connecticut); and Jonathan Franklin (University of Washington).

Though the formation of the advisory committee is in its nascent stage, these three individuals will be working closely with OITP and LCA, traveling internationally to help support the interests of libraries at multinational intellectual property meetings held by WIPO and other United Nations affiliates. ¶¶