

## 13<sup>th</sup> Round Table Meeting: Bhutan

Thimpu, March 15 & 16, 2017

Statement by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

Honorable Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Royal Government of Bhutan

His Excellency, Mr. Haoliang Xu, UN Assistant Secretary-General  
of the UN and Executive  
Secretary of ESCAP

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me at the outset, to place on record our deep appreciation to the Government of Bhutan for inviting the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to participate in the Thirteenth Round Table Meeting and to convey to you warm greetings from Dr. Francis Gurry, Director General of WIPO, and his best wishes for successful and productive deliberations.

### **The International Context**

Intellectual property can often be construed as a policy space best suited to large, industrialized economies backed by considerable expenditure on R&D and vast cultural industries. The reality is quite different and, as Director General Gurry has often pointed out, "the centre of wealth creation has been shifting from tangible assets or physical capital to intangible assets or intellectual capital".<sup>1</sup>

Intellectual property as a mechanism to incentivize and promote innovation and creativity – these intangibles of which we speak – has become increasingly important for all economies, developed, developing and least developed.

I think that anecdotal demonstration of this can be seen in the membership of WIPO itself. In 1975, the year after the Organization was established as a UN Specialized Agency, it had 60 Member States. Today, WIPO has 189 Member States, spanning all regions of the global and covering countries at all levels of development, all of whom benefit in different ways from the services, products and assistance which we offer.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Re-Thinking the Role of Intellectual Property', speech delivered at the University of Melbourne, Australia, August 22, 2013

## **Situation of Intellectual Property in Bhutan's Development Efforts**

In the case of Bhutan, the importance of intellectual property comes through at all levels of its development efforts.

In terms of Bhutan's unique development philosophy of Gross National Happiness, it is clear that intellectual property has an important role to play, particularly through the contributions it can make to socio-economic development and to the preservation and promotion of culture.

In terms of Bhutan's policy settings, it is noteworthy that intellectual property figures directly in the Economic Development Policy 2016 as an enabling mechanism for business.

In terms of planning, the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan articulates a specific project designed to develop and strengthen intellectual property.

### **WIPO's cooperation to date with Bhutan**

Against this backdrop, the World Intellectual Property Organization has a history of constructive cooperation with Bhutan since it joined the Organization in 1994, working to develop and strength the intellectual property architecture in the country.

In particular, WIPO has worked closely with the Department of Intellectual Property of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and:

- provided advice and assistance in the development of a national intellectual property policy;
- assisted with the modernization of intellectual property legislation and provided legislative advice in the areas of patents, trademarks, designs, geographical indications and copyright;
- helped establish a Technology and Innovation Support Center (TISC) network which provides Bhutanese innovators with access to locally based technology information and services;
- augmented the capacity of the Intellectual Property Office through the deployment of automation equipment and software;
- helped strengthen human resources through the provision of targeted training;

- engaged with national stakeholders to sensitize them to the intellectual property options to protect Bhutan's rich store of traditional knowledge, cultural expressions and genetic resources; and
- provided technical assistance and capacity building to develop and promote the copyright based industries.

While progress has been achieved, much remains to be done. In close coordination with the Department of Intellectual Property, WIPO is engaged in a number of activities designed to further develop Bhutan's intellectual property architecture. For example, WIPO has prepared an intellectual property Roadmap laying-out the priority areas to develop in the coming years. In connection with this, a WIPO delegation will be in Thimpu next week working with the Department of Intellectual Property to identify ways of strengthening the intellectual property regime. Another upcoming project relates to selecting some of the traditional crafts and products of Bhutan to see how brands and designs can add value to help increase their market competitiveness.

The strengthening of Bhutan's intellectual property system stands to benefit Bhutan's development efforts in many ways, across sectors and at all levels, including Districts. For example:

- **Building Brand Bhutan** is identified as an important economic opportunity and seen as a component of developing tourism and, thereby, diversifying the rural economy and providing employment for the growing population. A brand *is* intellectual property and effectively utilizing the intellectual property system will be key to realizing success in this area. This will involve promotion of Brand Bhutan in increasingly crowded overseas markets where eco, agro and spiritual tourism are no longer new concepts. Bhutan's membership of the Madrid System for protecting brands internationally will likely be important for these efforts.
- The **protection and promotion of Bhutan's unique cultural identity** has been identified as a critical element of reinforcing national cohesion, unity and sovereignty. The effective utilization of the copyright system will be important to extracting value from the cultural sector, encouraging the production of cultural works and preserving traditions. The signs are encouraging. Bhutan has been producing more and more local content in recent years and some of this has penetrated foreign markets. For

