

Diplomatic Conference to Conclude and Adopt a Design Law Treaty
Opening Remarks
WIPO Director General Daren Tang
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As Delivered

Excellencies,
Delegates,
Dear colleagues, Dear friends,

Good afternoon and welcome again to the Diplomatic Conference to Conclude and Adopt a Design Law Treaty.

Let me at the outset reiterate the appreciation that I expressed earlier this morning to our hosts, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the many colleagues at the Saudi Authority for Intellectual Property (SAIP) that have been working tirelessly to present us with this stunning venue for our negotiations over the next two weeks.

Let me also reiterate my gratitude to the many Member States, negotiators, delegates, observers and WIPO colleagues, past and present, who have been instrumental in our 19-year journey to where we are today.

Dear colleagues, Dear friends,

If IP is a family of siblings, it is sometimes said that designs is its sometimes forgotten child. Newspaper headlines and TV shows – if and when they mention intellectual property – almost always focus on patents, trademarks and copyright, never designs. Design filings lag behind the other major types of registrable IP, and as a matter of IP policy, it is more fragmented than other types of registrable IP rights.

But this is changing. Design filings globally and before WIPO hit record levels last year, and its pace of growth has surpassed patents or trademarks. Some of the most landmark IP disputes in the past decade have centered around design rights, and the designs industry is experiencing strong growth as more enterprises and entrepreneurs understand its value in distinguishing their products and services in the marketplace.

Designs literally shape our world. They define the look and feel of a product or service, and are, therefore, deeply connected to beauty and aesthetics. At a deeper level, designs are also rooted in culture and heritage, since what pleases our senses is intimately connected to who we are and the societies that shape us. This is why designs are becoming more visible and valuable.

Economically, we know that design holders assign considerable value to this IP, with a median value of between \$30,000 and \$100,000. In mature markets like Europe, design-intensive industries support around 20% of jobs and 15% of GDP. Elsewhere, design related industries are surging. In Asia, the furniture market is projected to grow 6% annually through to 2030. In Latin America, the video games industry is expected to expand nearly 9% each year over the same period. And demand for African fashion – African *haute couture* – is forecasted to rise by over 40% in the coming decade.

Consumers, too, increasingly recognize the importance of design. Seven in 10 Americans consider a product's packaging when making purchasing decisions. Across the world, eight in 10 consumers say that they are willing to pay more for sustainably sourced and produced products, well designed with connections to local heritage and culture.

All of this increased interest in designs is showing in our IP data. Last week, WIPO released the World IP Indicators Report, the global benchmark of IP activity. It showed a record-breaking 1.19 million design applications last year, containing around 1.52 million designs – a 2.8% increase from 2022 and a 30% increase over the past 10 years.

This growth trajectory is not just clear, it is global. In every region of the world, design filings increased last year. Nationally, Italy recorded the fastest growth amongst top filers, followed by China and the US. Seven of the world's top 20 design filing jurisdictions saw double digit-growth, led by Indonesia and India. We also saw a record number of filings and designs in force through the Hague System last year. Quite simply, demand for design protection has never been higher.

With this growth comes an opportunity for us to make the process for protecting designs across the world better. From entrepreneurs in bustling cities to artisans in rural communities, designers worldwide tell us the same story: that the process of securing design rights can be difficult. Extensive paperwork, inconsistent processes and complex requirements consume their time, their energy, and their resources.

The result? Life is harder for our designers than it needs to be.

Over this next fortnight, we have a unique, once-in-a-generation opportunity for change. Together, we can make design protection simpler and more accessible. We can streamline and harmonize processes, and we can make it easier and more affordable for designers to protect and move their designs across borders. In so doing, we can empower designers to take bold risks, push boundaries and surprise and delight us with ground-breaking ideas that fuel further innovation and creativity.

Soon we will turn our full attention to the technical matters at hand, but let me at this opening share some stories of the people our work will serve.

Starting here in Riyadh, the trailblazing sisters Basma and Noura Bouzo are celebrated designers in their own right, and champions of the local creative community. They founded Saudi Design Week, curated the national pavilion at last year's Venice Biennale, and are amplifying Saudi designs and talent on the global stage. Earlier this morning, SAIP also showcased other famous and up and coming Saudi designers.

In so doing, they join others like Bibi Seck, creator of the Madame Dakar sofa, named as one of the defining pieces of furniture from the last 100 years by the New York Times. What makes Bibi's work so special is that he draws upon his Senegalese heritage to create pieces that are based on traditional weaving techniques and threads used in traditional fishing nets but are strikingly modern and eye catching.

Another powerful example is Filipino designer Kenneth Cobonpue who has won international acclaim for the way he integrates rattan and other natural materials into his work. Kenneth's story also underscores the importance of design protection. In the 1980s, his mother, also a

designer, saw her work copied without consent. That's why Kenneth has shared with us that he always ensures his own designs are protected right from the start.

I am also mindful of the extraordinary designers I have personally met across the globe, many with inspiring stories. During an official visit to Central America last month, I had the privilege of meeting Isabella Springmuhl, a remarkable Guatemalan fashion designer with Down's Syndrome. Isabella has turned her challenge into a unique vision of fashion, crafting beautiful garments that are entirely drawn from the traditional textiles of Guatemala in collaboration with local communities.

In El Salvador, I also visited the studio of Lula Mena, a designer and entrepreneur who has built a community of over 100, mainly female artisans, who draw on their heritage and local designs to produce local handicrafts. Her products sell in 15 countries, and through it, she has created a local foundation to support women, children and communities. Most inspiringly, she has empowered these women to earn a living and contribute to their family and community.

For Basma, Noura, Bibi, Kenneth, Isabella, Lula, and millions of others, design rights are not just a matter of law or a technicality – they are a means supporting livelihoods, building businesses and forging a future.

Dear colleagues and friends,

For 19 years, we have worked toward this moment. Now, the finishing line is in sight. To cross it, we must be prepared to build bridges, find areas of convergence and be creative in achieving the needed compromises.

This is a challenge we are ready to meet. In May, we made history, overcoming difficulties and challenges to reach consensus amongst all 193 Member States on the landmark WIPO Treaty on IP, Genetic Resources, and Associated Traditional Knowledge.

Over the next 10 days, let us draw on this same spirit to achieve success during this Diplomatic Conference. Together, let us support the lives and livelihood of designers everywhere, let us build a more vibrant IP ecosystem, and let us show that multilateralism can deliver a better future for all of us.

Thank you.