

# WIPO Director General Welcomes Moves to Enhance Protection of Traditional Knowledge & Folklore in Africa

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WIPO Director General Francis Gurry has welcomed the adoption by member states of the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO) of a new legal instrument that seeks to protect African traditional knowledge and folklore.

Mr. Gurry described the adoption in Swakopmund, Namibia, earlier this month, of the *Swakopmund Protocol on the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Folklore* as “an historic step for ARIPO’s seventeen member states, and a significant milestone in the evolution of intellectual property.”

The Protocol, which is designed to preserve and protect the use of Africa’s diverse knowledge systems and cultures for the continent’s sustainable development, will enter into force following ratification by six ARIPO member states.

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.

The Protocol was developed in coordination with a similar instrument prepared over the same period by the *Organization africaine de la propriete intellectuelle (OAPI)*, which was adopted in July 2007. OAPI brings together sixteen countries in West Africa. WIPO provided support for both processes at the request of ARIPO and OAPI.

Mr. Gurry underlined WIPO’s readiness 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.

Negotiations are currently underway in WIPO’s Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC) towards the development of an international legal instrument for the effective protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions. After a productive intersessional working group meeting in July 2010, the WIPO IGC will meet again in December 2010.

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