

WIPO



IPC/A/17/1

ORIGINAL: English

DATE: July 19, 1999

E

WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION
GENEVA

SPECIAL UNION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PATENT CLASSIFICATION
(IPC UNION)

ASSEMBLY

Seventeenth (12th Ordinary) Session
Geneva, September 20 to 29, 1999

IPC REFORM

Document prepared by the International Bureau

1. The International Patent Classification (IPC) has become a universal system for classifying patent documents. However, with the rapid changes in technology and the on-going changeover from paper documents to electronic databases, the IPC faces new challenges, as the IPC structure has basically remained unchanged since its establishment almost 30 years ago.
2. At its twenty-eighth session, held in March 1999, the Committee of Experts of the IPC Union (hereinafter referred to as "the Committee") agreed to fundamentally reform the IPC and the method of the revision of the IPC during the current revision period from 1999 to 2002. The Committee realized that the IPC reform would require firm commitment by the member States of the IPC Union in terms of allocation of the resources and international cooperation, and appropriate coordination with other relevant program activities of WIPO. The Committee agreed to submit to the Assembly of the IPC Union the recommendation concerning the IPC reform as contained in the Annex to this document. The recommendation was noted by the Standing Committee on Information Technologies (SCIT) at its third Plenary session in June 1999, agreeing that "Reform of the IPC" should be included in the SCIT Strategic IT implementation plan currently under preparation.
3. *The Assembly of the IPC Union is invited to take a position on the recommendation of the Committee of Experts of the IPC Union concerning the IPC reform as contained in the Annex.*

[Annex follows]

ANNEX

RECOMMENDATION TO THE ASSEMBLY OF THE IPC UNION

(submitted in accordance with Article 5(3)(ii) of the Strasbourg Agreement)

NEED FOR THE IPC REFORM

1. The IPC, being the only patent classification used worldwide, retains its value as a universal search tool indicated in the Strasbourg Agreement Concerning the International Patent Classification. However, development of modern methods of electronic access and retrieval of information requires accommodation of the patent classification for use in the electronic environment. The IPC has been designed, and developed for many years, mainly as a paper-based search tool. Changes need to be made to methods of revision and application of the IPC, while preserving its general structure which has successfully served the patent information community since its inception, to allow new functions in the electronic era. To achieve this objective, the Committee of Experts of the IPC Union has decided to introduce a transitional revision period (1999-2002) in order better to equip the IPC for its role as a reliable search tool, used in concert with electronic searching means. Due to the urgency of this task, it was decided to start the work already in May 1999.

STRATEGY APPLIED DURING THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

2. For maintaining the IPC as the primary search tool with relation to the state of the art worldwide, reform of the IPC is foreseen in the following areas:

- understanding and use of the IPC;
- procedure for revising the IPC and implementation of the results of the revision;
- training in the use of the IPC.

3. In accommodation of the IPC to the electronic age, information technology should be widely used. The development of new tools increasing the efficiency of the IPC revision and facilitating the IPC application, which will be computer- and Internet-based, will be an integral part of the IPC reform. The plan of action adopted by the Committee includes conducting pilot projects aiming at the elaboration of automated systems which could be implemented for information classification purposes.

4. Whilst contemplating the IPC reform, continued efforts should be made to further revise the Classification so as to keep it in line with technical development. Revision of the IPC is especially needed for timely providing in the Classification places covering new emerging technologies. Bearing this in mind, the Committee has agreed that, during the transitional revision period, simultaneously with the reforming a limited revision of the IPC should be carried out so that the Classification could accommodate the most urgent changes necessitated by the changes in technology.

RESOURCING

5. As funding for the IPC reform is of great importance, the resources necessary for its implementation (human and financial) and the required technical assistance should be provided and a program approved by the Assembly of the IPC Union. In this regard, projects supported by international cooperation, such as reclassification of patent files or provision of training material on the Internet, should be developed.

6. In view of the above considerations, the Committee recommends that the Assembly of the IPC Union invite its members and observers to provide necessary internal resources during the transitional period aiming at the accommodation of the Classification to the electronic era which would be profitable at the end for all patent offices concerned.

[End of Annex and of document]