

# WIPO



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## **ROUNDTABLE ON INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

**Geneva, November 1 and 2, 1999**

**OPENING REMARKS BY MR. SHOZO UEMURA  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL, WIPO**

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished participants, on behalf of the Director General of WIPO Dr. Kamil Idris, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the *WIPO Roundtable on Intellectual Property and Traditional Knowledge*. The first WIPO Roundtable in this field was held in this room on July 23 and 24, 1998, and focused on intellectual property and indigenous peoples. The present Roundtable has a broader focus, to take into account both the diversity of traditional knowledge itself, as well as the diversity among the groups and individuals who are the holders of such knowledge, including indigenous and local communities in both developed and developing countries.

From the beginning of WIPO's work in this field, which began less than two years ago, our approach to the subject of traditional knowledge has been *to learn*. We have sought to learn about the needs and expectations of holders of traditional knowledge in regard to the intellectual property system. We have attempted to learn about how traditional knowledge is conserved, used, and transmitted according to customary law. We have sought to learn the views and approaches of our Member States, particularly officials from the intellectual property administrations, concerning the protection of traditional knowledge. We have also learned from the work of our sister UN organizations who are active in this field within their respective areas of competence.

In seeking to learn about traditional knowledge, we have had a single, clear objective: to identify ways that WIPO, in furtherance of its mandate as the UN specialized agency for intellectual property, may promote the protection of tradition-based creativity and innovation throughout the world.

This Roundtable comes at a pivotal time. The relationship between intellectual property and traditional knowledge is receiving increased attention in numerous policy fora and debates, ranging from food and agriculture, the environment, health, human rights, and cultural policy, to trade and economic development. For example, traditional knowledge has been proposed as a subject for discussion at the upcoming Seattle Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization.

Over the next two days you will have the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences with colleagues from all regions of the world. I take this opportunity to express my special thanks to our invited speakers for their participation, Professor Michael BLAKENEY from Australia but who currently resides in the U.K., Mr. Shri Sundaram VARMA from India, Mr. Bo Hammer JENSEN from Norway, Ms. Begoña VENERO from Peru, and Mr. David DAOAS from the Philippines.

In closing, I would like to point out that the WTO TRIPS Agreement will enter into force for developing country Members of the World Trade Organization on January 1, 2000. At that time, globally-enforceable intellectual property rights will become available to the single largest number of rightsowners having access to legal protection over their innovations and creativity since the formal intellectual property

system began. As a consequence, groups with specific needs and uses for intellectual property, including holders of traditional knowledge, will be brought face-to-face with existing or newly-established national systems for exercise and management of intellectual property rights. The relevance of intellectual property will increase both in terms of the number of users of IP systems, and the subject matter which they may seek to protect, including traditional knowledge.

It is the belief of the Director General, Dr. Idris, that the responsibility of WIPO at this moment in history is to engage constructively with legitimate, if only recently-articulated needs for protection of human creativity and innovation. Such engagement will, we are convinced, pave the way for the intellectual property system to continue to contribute effectively to economic growth and social and cultural progress in the new millenium.