

**WIPO Director General Daren Tang Remarks
World Blindness Summit
Monday, June 28, 2021**

Your Majesty,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to address the opening session of the World Blindness Summit General Assembly in Madrid organized by the World Blind Union (WBU), the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) and the Organization of Spanish Blind Persons (ONCE).

The Marrakesh Treaty entered into force five years ago. Since then it has become WIPO's fastest growing treaty, covering 105 countries worldwide, and expanding learning, education and entertainment possibilities for over 250 million people who are blind and visually impaired around the world.

For us at WIPO, the real power of the Marrakesh Treaty lies in the people it has reached and the lives it has improved, in all corners of the world.

Many of you participating in today's Summit know this better than I – or anyone else – can express. It is your lived experience and your daily lives.

The WBU estimates that 90% of children who are blind in developing or least developed countries do not go to school. One of the reasons for this is that books in accessible formats are simply not available to them.

This is a tragedy with deep and long lasting consequences. Indeed, for too long a lack of access to books and learning materials imposed a dark glass ceiling on blind and visibly impaired people.

I am heartened to see that in just a few short years, the Marrakesh Treaty has begun to reverse some of these trends – improving life chances, furthering careers and making a real difference to people around the world.

At the institutional level, the Marrakesh Treaty shows the remarkable impact that is created when partnerships are formed through governments, civil society and commercial organizations with the ultimate objective of benefitting individuals and society as a whole.

Together, we have brought the Marrakesh Treaty alive, turning its legal provisions into something that has real impact on people's lives.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the pioneering role played by the World Blind Union, ICEVI and ONCE in ensuring that the Marrakesh Treaty was adopted in 2013. It is deeply encouraging to see that your support of the treaty has only strengthened in the years since.

Governments that ratify the Marrakesh Treaty must ensure that two main principles are implemented. First, that books can be produced in accessible formats such as braille, audio or e-text, and, second, that these accessible books can then be freely exchanged across borders.

But in order for blind and other persons with print disabilities to reap the full benefits of the Marrakesh Treaty, we also need solutions to make books available in special formats.

This is where WIPO's Accessible Books Consortium comes in. The ABC is a public – private partnership, which seeks to implement the Marrakesh Treaty objectives at a practical level. We are proud to note that the WBU, ICEVI and ONCE are all partners of the Accessible Books Consortium.

The ABC Global Book Service is the second largest collection of accessible titles in the world – with a global catalogue of more than 630,000 books in accessible formats, including ONCE's collection of approximately 45,000 high-quality titles in Spanish. These titles are all freely available for cross-border exchange for the benefit of people who are print-disabled.

I hope that we can continue to work together to ensure universal membership of the Marrakesh Treaty and develop more solutions like the ABC and inclusive publishing that will help us eradicate the book famine.

If I may, I would like to close by sharing a story that captures the power of accessible books.

In 2003, a young man, Nilesh Kumar Keshri, lost his sight. Nilesh's dream was to join the Indian Civil Service, which demanded that he pass the famously challenging Civil Services Exam (CSE). Each year approximately one million applicants compete for fewer than one thousand vacancies, making the CSE one of the toughest entry tests in the world.

With limited access to the required reading materials, Nilesh's dream proved tantalizingly out of reach. Four times he entered into the CSE and each time he did not succeed.

But on his fifth attempt something changed. Nilesh was able to use DAISY books, screen reading software and a talking smartphone to prepare. Suddenly, Nilesh had the support he had been searching for.

Nilesh sat the exam once again. This time – buoyed by the support of accessible materials – he placed within the top 1% of applicants and entered the civil service. Four years on, he is now an Assistant Commissioner within the Indian Revenue Service.

As more countries embrace the Marrakesh Treaty, we hope that there will be many more inspiring stories like Nilesh's. And I know that many of you in the audience today will have your own personal testimony about what the Treaty means to you.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you all an informative and enjoyable Congress – and I would like to leave you with a few parting words from Nilesch, which capture the essence of what the Marrakesh Treaty aims to achieve:

“I now believe that nothing is impossible”.

Thank you.