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**SPECIAL UNION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PATENT CLASSIFICATION
(IPC UNION)**

COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS

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ORDER OF RECORDING OF CLASSIFICATION SYMBOLS

Document prepared by the Secretariat

1. This document describes the rules of presentation of classification symbols, various practices in this respect and contains recommendations aimed at achieving a consistent presentation of symbols on patent documents and machine-readable records.
2. Classification information in form of International Patent Classification (IPC) symbols related to a patent document is presented in three different contexts:
 - on the front page of a particular patent document;
 - in presentations of the results of searches in databases; and
 - in search reports.

Front Pages of Patent Documents

3. The order of IPC symbols on patent documents is described in paragraph 156 of the *Guide to the Eighth Edition of the IPC (Guide)*:

“XII. PRESENTATION OF CLASSIFICATION SYMBOLS AND INDEXING CODES ON PATENT DOCUMENTS

“156. The order of classification symbols and indexing codes is as follows:

“1. Classification symbols representing invention information, of which that symbol which most adequately represents the invention should be listed first.

“2. Classification symbols representing additional information.

“3. Indexing codes.”

4. WIPO Standard ST.10/C does not explicitly refer to the order of symbols; only the examples provided therein allow to draw some conclusions regarding the order of symbols.

5. Furthermore, for secondary classification symbols of Subclasses A01P and A61P respective notes in those subclasses prescribe that “the classification symbols of this subclass are not listed first when assigned to patent documents”.

6. The above rules, however, are often interpreted by patent offices in various ways and this leads to different practices of presentation of classification symbols, as follows:

(i) the symbol presented first is not necessarily the symbol which most adequately represents the invention; it could simply be the symbol that comes first according to alphanumerical order;

(ii) in respect of each of the three categories (classification symbols representing invention and additional information, indexing codes), the order of these categories might be differently chosen by the offices.

7. A review of front pages of recent publications of a variety of offices gives a rather non-uniform picture that does not allow to draw definite conclusions with respect to the practice of individual offices. Some offices present the first symbol in a way different from subsequent symbols which evidences special significance of the first symbol as, for example, is the practice of the German Patent and Trade Mark Office. The majority of other offices present a plurality of symbols not in an alphanumerical order which could be an indication that the symbol listed first has particular significance.

Presentation of Database Search Results

8. Classification information is also part of the bibliographic data contained in databases and is normally displayed together with the other bibliographic data. The more the search practice moves away from manually searching paper files, the more important becomes such a presentation of database contents. However, there are no explicit rules for the presentation of classification information in this context. Paragraph 156 of the *Guide* and WIPO Standard ST.10/C relate only to front pages of patent documents. WIPO Standard ST.8, which refers to recording of classification information in machine-readable form, provides for the use of the attribute “F” in Field 29 of the ST.8 record to identify a symbol to be presented first.

Search Reports

9. The presentation of classification information on search reports has been discussed at the twelfth session of the International Authorities (see report of the session, document PCT/MIA/12/10, and document PCT/MIA/12/5). It was recommended to the Authorities to follow the provisions of WIPO Standard ST.10/C.

10. A recent review of samples of search reports shows that the presentation of IPC symbols therein is manifold. All International Searching Authorities indicate the symbols representing invention or additional information. For all offices, samples of search reports could be found with symbols in a non-alphabetical order. However, it is not clear if the symbol presented first has special significance.

11. The order of the symbols on search reports may have special significance for the recording of classification information in the database of PCT international applications.

Open Issues Regarding the Order of Symbols

12. For searchers, the order of symbols could be relevant if the order conveys particular information such as specified in paragraph 156 of the *Guide* regarding a first classification symbol. For users of patent information, it is also interesting to know whether the use of a first classification symbol has any further consequences for office internal purposes, for example, for the internal routing of applications, i.e., identification of unit or examiner in charge of examination and/or search.

13. However, in order to benefit of such supplementary information encoded in the order, it is necessary to know the practice of the different offices. An important association of users of patent information, the Impact Working Group of the Patent Documentation Group (PDG), has discussed this issue at its last two sessions and has requested WIPO to investigate the different practices of national offices and make this information publicly available.

14. The Committee may wish therefore to consider if the current practice of offices should be investigated. For that purpose, a circular including a respective questionnaire could be issued in order to investigate the following items:

- Which offices attribute particular significance to the symbol presented first?
- If so, is this first classification symbol used for any office internal purposes?
- If so, for which purposes?
- Has the order of the subsequent symbols any significance other than the order explained in paragraph 156 of the *Guide* and in the notes of secondary classification schemes?
- If so, which significance?
- For offices acting as International Searching Authorities: does the symbol listed first on search reports have particular significance?
- For Internet-based patent information systems provided by national offices: does the on-screen display of classification information reflect the order of symbols on the front page of the corresponding patent documents?

15. In view of the high importance of database searches, the Committee could also consider if explicit recommendations for the presentation of classification information on screens, printouts, etc., are needed.

16. Another item regarding the order of classification symbols is the treatment of such order in the Master Classification Database (MCD), and in particular the question of how the “F” attributes will be treated during reclassification, e.g., if several family members have the “F” assigned to different symbols. The current version of Concept of Operations for the Reformed IPC (CONOPS) does not explain this treatment.

17. The Committee is invited:

(a) to take note of the contents of this document;

(b) to consider recommendations disclosed in paragraphs 14 to 16, above.

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