

WIPO



IPC/A/23/1

ORIGINAL: English

DATE: July 29, 2005

WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION
GENEVA

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

ASSEMBLY

**Twenty-Third (15th Ordinary) Session
Geneva, September 26 to October 5, 2005**

IPC REFORM STATUS REPORT

Document prepared by the International Bureau

1. The Assembly of the International Patent Classification (IPC) Union at its seventeenth (12th ordinary) session, held in September 1999, approved the recommendation made by the Committee of Experts of the IPC Union to launch IPC reform in order to accommodate the Classification to the use in the electronic environment (document IPC/A/17/1 and paragraph 12 of document IPC/A/17/2). The Assembly considered the IPC reform progress reports and took note of them at its nineteenth (13th ordinary) session, held in September/October 2001, twenty-first (14th ordinary) session, held in September/October 2003, and twenty-second (8th extraordinary) session, held in September/October 2004 (documents IPC/A/19/1, IPC/A/19/2, IPC/A/21/1, IPC/A/21/2, IPC/A/22/1 and IPC/A/22/3).
2. At its thirty-sixth session, held in February 2005, the Committee of Experts considered the IPC Reform Implementation Plan and instructed the International Bureau to provide a report to the next session of the Assembly in 2005, describing the results of IPC reform achieved during the IPC reform basic period (document IPC/CE/36/11, paragraph 30).

3. The IPC reform status report prepared by the International Bureau is contained in the Annex to this document.

4. The Assembly of the IPC Union is invited to take note of the IPC reform status report.

[Annex follows]

ANNEX

IPC REFORM STATUS REPORT

1. In 1999, the Committee of Experts of the IPC Union recommended to launch the reform of the IPC in order to adapt the Classification to the electronic environment, to increase its efficiency for the retrieval of patent information and to facilitate its use for small and medium-sized industrial property offices and the general public. This recommendation was later endorsed by the Assembly of the IPC Union.
2. Development of modern methods of electronic access and retrieval of information required accommodation of the patent classification to the electronic age. In order to ensure its efficient and effective use in the new conditions, substantial changes to the IPC structure and to methods of its revision and application were needed.
3. IPC reform has been carried out by the Committee of Experts and its Working Groups since 1999. Close cooperation of industrial property offices was necessary for achieving successful results of the reform. Guidance in conducting the reform was provided by the Strategic Plan for the Development of the IPC approved by the Committee in 2000. Control over the progress of the reform was realized by means of the IPC Reform Implementation Plan which was reviewed by the Committee at its each session.
4. At its thirty-sixth session, held in February 2005, the Committee of Experts considered the IPC Reform Implementation Plan and noted that out of 19 tasks on the IPC reform program, 18 tasks had been completed, with the exception of the task relating to the creation of the Master Classification Database which completion was planned for October 2005. The Committee also noted that virtually all the tasks relating to the introduction in the IPC of new structural features required by the reform had been completed as well.
5. The Committee of Experts agreed that the basic period of IPC reform, during which new principles of classifying, structural changes to the IPC and new methods of its revision and application had to be elaborated, should be considered as completed and would be marked by the publication of the eighth edition of the IPC which would represent the reformed Classification. Following this, the process of implementation in the IPC of principles and rules of the reform would be continued to the full realization of the long-term goals of the development of the IPC.
6. The Committee of Experts expressed its satisfaction with the excellent work carried out during the six-year IPC reform basic period by industrial property offices and the International Bureau, which had resulted in achieving all basic goals of IPC reform defined in 1999, at the launch of the reform. The Committee instructed the International Bureau to prepare a report to the Assembly of the IPC Union describing main results of IPC reform achieved in the course of the basic period of IPC reform (document IPC/CE/36/11, paragraphs 27 to 30).

7. New principles, rules and features of the reformed IPC are described in the IPC reform documentation prepared in the course of the reform and adopted by the Committee of Experts. These are: the completely revised Guide to the IPC, the Concept of Operations for the Reformed IPC (CONOPS), the IPC Revision Policy and Revision Procedure for the Reformed IPC, the Guidelines for Determining Subject Matter Appropriate for Obligatory and Non-Obligatory Classification, and other documents.

8. One of the most important features of the reformed IPC is its two-level structure which will better satisfy differing needs of small, medium-sized and large industrial property offices and the general public. The two-level system consists of a core and an advanced level.

9. The core level contains approximately 18,000 entries at high hierarchical levels (classes, subclasses, main groups and, in some fields, subgroups). It will be a relatively stable part of the IPC. Revision amendments to the core level will be made in three year revision cycles when necessitated by technological progress. The advanced level represents a further elaboration of the core level, i.e., it includes the core level and additional subgroups. Initially, it contains approximately 70,000 entries but its size will rapidly grow since revision amendments to the advanced level will be continuously made through an accelerated procedure under the supervision of a special subcommittee.

10. Although any industrial property office may choose which level to employ for classifying published patent documents, it is supposed that the relatively simple core level will be used for classifying and searching patent documents belonging to small and medium-sized patent collections, whereas the more complex advanced level will be used for classifying and searching patent documents belonging to large patent collections. In particular, classification at the advanced level will cover patent documents included in the PCT minimum documentation.

11. The reformed IPC incorporates the electronic layer, including various electronic data illustrating IPC entries or explaining them more in detail. This electronic data will enhance understanding and facilitate the use of the IPC for industrial property offices and the general public.

12. Classification definitions for selected subclasses of the IPC will already be available in the electronic layer of the eighth edition. They are intended to provide more detailed explanations of the contents of IPC entries than the official text of the IPC. During further development of the IPC, classification definitions will be elaborated for all of the more than 600 subclasses of the Classification. Over 3,000 structural chemical formulae will also be available for viewing in the electronic layer. Their role is to illustrate chemical areas of the IPC by providing a visual graphic representation of the subject matter of the chemical areas. The electronic layer will also include facilities for displaying main groups of the IPC in the standardized order.

13. One of the objectives of IPC reform was to provide possibilities for performing patent searches with the use of the current version of the IPC only and to eliminate the need to rely on superseded IPC editions. This objective will be achieved by reclassification (i.e. updating of IPC symbols on patent documents) of patent collections according to revision changes of the IPC.

14. Access to the worldwide collection of patent documentation will be provided through the Master Classification Database which will be created in autumn 2005. The Master Classification Database will contain the IPC data of patent documents classified only according to the current version of the IPC and patent family information. The provision of such classification data will be achieved by joint reclassification efforts of industrial property offices. In order to alleviate the workload of reclassification, documents of industrial property offices having family members in the PCT minimum documentation will be reclassified by automatic propagation of the reclassification data from the PCT minimum documentation.

15. The eighth edition of the IPC includes new features resulting from the reform process, as well as many changes resulting from the revision of the seventh edition, which were made in order to reflect in the Classification the developments in technology. Since 1999, reform and revision of the IPC were carried out in parallel.

16. Revision amendments to the seventh edition may be summarized using the data relating to major structural subdivisions of the seventh edition which were represented by eight sections, 120 classes and 620 subclasses. The revision amendments were made in all sections of the IPC. One new class and five new subclasses, related to new technologies, such as combinatorial chemistry or business methods, have been created. A detailed new classification scheme was elaborated for traditional medicine which represents the most important part of documented traditional knowledge. In total, over 1,400 new entries have been introduced in the IPC in the course of the revision of the seventh edition.

17. The publication of the IPC in paper form is now restricted to the core level, in view of its stability during the three-year revision cycles. At the beginning of July 2005, the printed version of the core level of the eighth edition was published. The publication consists of five volumes, as follows: Volume 1 – Sections A and B, Volume 2 – Sections C and D, Volume 3 – Sections E and F, Volume 4 – Sections G and H, and Volume 5 – Guide to the IPC. This publication is intended for industrial property offices wishing to use the core level of the IPC for classifying their published patent documents and for the general public. A copy of the complete set of this publication will be sent to Member States and special observers of the IPC Union free of charge.

18. Also at the beginning of July 2005, electronic files of the core and advanced levels of the eighth edition of the IPC were made available to industrial property offices. Later in July, the Internet version of the eighth edition will be published. Compared with the printed version, the Internet version will contain a complete text of the Classification and will incorporate the electronic layer including supplementary information facilitating the use of the Classification, such as classification definitions and illustrating chemical formulae.

19. In September 2005, the International Bureau will publish the updated Catchword Indexes to the eighth edition in the printed form and on the Internet. References in the Catchword Indexes will be provided both for the core level of the IPC and for the advanced level. Also in September, the Revision Concordance List between the seventh and eighth editions will be published on the Internet. It will consist of two parts relating, respectively, to the core and to the advanced levels of the IPC.

20. Significant work should be done by industrial property offices in order to accommodate their internal administrative systems to the requirements of IPC reform. This includes a new way of presentation of IPC symbols on front pages of patent documents, according to the revised WIPO Standard ST.10/C, a new way of recording classification data on machine-readable records, according to the revised WIPO Standard ST.8, the need for the periodical updating of the validity file produced by the International Bureau, in order to validate the correctness of published IPC symbols, and other technical modifications.
21. With a view to facilitating technical implementation of IPC reform at industrial property offices, at the recent sessions of the Committee of Experts special meetings of information technology (IT) experts were held in parallel with plenary sessions of the Committee. A separate meeting of IT experts on the technical implementation of IPC reform was held at the end of May 2005. A great majority of offices present at the meeting reported that preparations for the reformed IPC were progressing well and the target date of January 1, 2006, would be met.
22. In the process of the accommodation of the IPC to the electronic environment, modern information technologies were widely applied. To this end, the International Bureau carried out the Classification Automated Information System (CLAIMS) project. One of the objectives of the CLAIMS project was the elaboration of a new IPC management and information system (RIPCIS) which will be an Internet-based open system compatible with the revision procedure of the reformed IPC. The RIPCIS system is now under testing and will be deployed in autumn 2005.
23. Another main objective of the CLAIMS project was the development of computer-assisted classification tool operational in several languages and allowing automated prediction of classification of patent documents at hierarchically high classification levels (subclasses and main groups). The elaboration of this classification tool (IPCCAT) has been completed and it will be available in the English, French, German, Russian and Spanish languages. This tool is intended to provide assistance to small and medium-sized industrial property offices, in particular, in developing countries, in classification of their published patent documents.
24. Other products of the CLAIMS project, such as the System of Natural Language Access to the IPC and interactive IPC tutorials have also been delivered. Modern IPC training tools are essential for the efficient application of the reformed IPC. The tutorials will be operational in autumn 2005 when preparation of the updated IPC training material will be completed.
25. The eighth edition of the IPC will enter into force on January 1, 2006. It is believed that the completion of the basic period of IPC reform represents an important step towards achievement of strategic goals of the development of the IPC, that is, the accommodation of the IPC to the electronic environment, creation of the universal search tool for all industrial property offices and establishment of a global system of generating, processing and distributing of classification information.