

Opening Remarks

Pascal Lamy, Director-General, WTO

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen

I would like to thank my colleague Director General Margaret Chan for hosting today's event, and thank her for her warm welcome to this, the second in the series of technical symposia jointly convened by the WHO, WIPO and the WTO Secretariats on issues relating to public health and intellectual property. I pay tribute to her and to Director General Francis Gurry for the cooperative and collegial spirit that they both bring to our partnership.

We were honored to host the first in this series, last July, when the three Secretariats, with the support of partners from industry, civil society and health initiatives, joined forces to take stock of the state of play concerning access to medicines, and the full array of sources of data that are available for policymakers. The idea was not to engage in policy discussions or legal debate, but rather, it was a chance for us to look at how we could collaborate more closely and more effectively to provide a stronger, more coherent and more accessible information base for policy debate.

Let me try to set the scene for our work today by drawing several conclusions from the discussions last July.

First, each Secretariat can meet its specific mandate much more effectively if this is done in careful, systematic coordination with counterparts in the other Secretariats. For instance, for us in the WTO, health innovation and access to medicines has been at or near the top of the IP policy agenda for the last decade. It is difficult to say or do anything useful in this domain, however, solely by referring back to the TRIPS Agreement and other areas of trade law. We can only make a sustained and useful contribution if our work is informed and guided by the state of play of access to medicines on which we gladly turn to the WHO for expert advice and empirical data. Equally, the impact of IP on access to medicines can ultimately only be understood through an objective appraisal of what patents cover needed medicines, where they are in force — or not in force — and who holds the patents in question, information of which WIPO is the custodian.

The second observation that emerged from last July's inaugural symposium was that there is indeed great potential, still mostly untapped, for the use of empirical data to inform policy debate on health innovation and access to medicines. The symposium, I hope, left no participant in doubt that all of us who care deeply about health innovation and access to medicines, would benefit from improved accessibility of these raw data, but also from the careful putting together of all of the pieces of the empirical puzzle.

It follows that I warmly welcome the theme for today's symposium. Understanding what is actually going on out there — who is patenting what, where, to what effect — is central to the kind of policy discussions that take place in the WTO and elsewhere regarding TRIPS and initiatives for access to medicines.

Today's symposium is a chance for a detailed, systematic dialogue between the custodians, the managers, and the skilled users of these information systems, on the one hand, and the policy community and health access initiatives, on the other hand.

We should perhaps aspire to an information platform that is accessible for all, usable by even those who lack technical or legal expertise, and which gives real-time information about the patent coverage of essential medicines. As one who has worked with many others on the critical issues surrounding the patent system and health innovation and access to medicines, I can certainly say it is an aspiration well worth working towards.

I turn again to Margaret, our host today, and to Francis, to express once more my deep appreciation for the collegiality, seriousness of purpose, and dedication to practical cooperation that they have both shown in our work together. Your deliberations today, and the feedback that you pass to us, will be invaluable for future planning, both for the WTO Secretariat as such, and for the cooperative program

of the three Secretariats. I trust, therefore, that this will be a true symposium — an exchange of practical experience and ideas for future cooperation — leaving us with a richer, more enabling base of information to support us all in our future endeavors.

Thank you for joining us today, and all the very best for a fruitful day of discussions, and for continuing practical dialogue in the future.