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The Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Dr. Kamil Idris, hailed the 125th anniversary of the signing of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property. The so-called “Paris Convention” was signed in the French capital on 20 March, 1883 and is widely considered as the cornerstone of the international industrial property system. One of the main features of the treaty is that it establishes international standards requiring countries to apply the same level of protection to nationals of other contracting parties as they apply to their own nationals.

Dr. Idris said, “The principles enshrined in this landmark treaty are as valid today as they were a century and a quarter ago.” He added, “The fact that every subsequent treaty relating to industrial property has been inspired by the Paris Convention is testimony to the foresight of the policy-makers at that time and to the enduring relevance of the IP system.” Dr. Idris said “the Paris Convention was signed by 11 states in 1883 and had 14 member states when it entered into force a year later. Today, 172 countries from all corners of the globe are party to the treaty.” He added, “The main motivation in concluding the Paris Convention was for countries to offer their own citizens the possibility of accessing intellectual property protection systems in foreign states – 125 years later, this philosophy endures. Indeed, within a globalized economy, this principle is central to international competitiveness.”

The Paris Convention applies to industrial property in the widest sense, including patents, marks, industrial designs, utility models, trade names (designations under which an industrial or commercial activity is carried on), geographical indications (indications of source and appellations of origin) and the repression of unfair competition. The Convention introduced, for the first time, such basic rights as the right to national treatment in each of the member countries, the right of priority in any other member state, a grace period for the payment of maintenance fees as well as temporary protection in respect of goods exhibited at international exhibitions.

Specific patent-related provisions concern the independence of patents, the right of the inventor to be mentioned, and provisions on compulsory licenses. Some of the particular provisions on trademarks relate to well known, service and collective marks, the use of trade marks and to state emblems, official hallmarks and emblems of international organizations. Full details are available at: http://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/paris/ [1].

The Paris Convention was revised at Brussels in 1900, at Washington in 1911, at The Hague in 1925, at London in 1934, at Lisbon in 1958 and at Stockholm in 1967, and it was amended in 1979.

The Paris Convention: One of WIPO’s Foundations

The Paris Convention and the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, which entered into force three years later, respectively established administrative offices. These offices joined in 1893, to form an international organization known as the United International Bureaux for the Protection of Intellectual Property (best known by its French acronym BIRPI - Bureaux internationaux réunis pour la protection de la propriété intellectuelle). In 1967, in Stockholm, member states of BIRPI negotiated the Convention establishing the World Intellectual Property Organization or the “WIPO Convention”. Under the terms of this treaty, “Membership in the Organization shall be open to any State which is a member of any of the Unions” namely the Paris and Berne Unions. Full details of membership are available at http://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/convention/trtdocs_wo029.html#P76_3899 [2].

The WIPO Convention came into effect in 1970 and as such BIRPI no longer existed. Equipped with an expanded mandate, WIPO began its operations as the lead international intergovernmental organization responsible for promoting the protection of intellectual property rights and facilitating the transfer of industrial property related technology to developing countries to accelerate economic, social and cultural development. The Organization became a specialized agency of the

United Nations system of organizations in 1974.

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