

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)  
Diplomatic Conference, Marrakesh, Morocco

**United States of America Statement**

18 June 2013

*As delivered*

Thank you, Mr. President.

The United States congratulates you and all the other officers of this Diplomatic Conference on your election. We also extend our thanks to His Majesty, King Mohammed VI, and Government and people of the Kingdom of Morocco for their tremendous hospitality in hosting this Diplomatic Conference in the beautiful and extraordinary city of Marrakesh. *We also thank Director-General Gurry, Assistant Director General Clarke, and all the members of the WIPO Secretariat for all their work on the road to Marrakesh.*

In April 2012, President Obama pledged the United States' commitment to an "effective international instrument . . . that ensures that copyright is not a barrier to equal access to information, culture, and education for visually impaired persons and persons with print disabilities."

We reaffirm that commitment today.

Improving access to copyrighted works for the benefit of blind and other people with print disabilities is an issue of the highest priority for the United States. We are here because we are committed to combatting the book famine -- the lack of accessible format copies of books for the blind and other persons with

print disabilities globally. We believe that the delegations here in Marrakesh can achieve a legally binding agreement that will significantly improve access to knowledge, culture, and education for people with print disabilities in the United States and throughout the world, while at the same time maintaining the integrity of the international copyright system.

Indeed, over fifteen years ago the United States was at the forefront of the now roughly sixty countries that have exceptions for persons with print disabilities in their national laws. Recognizing a preference for – and the importance of – rights holders making their works available, we nonetheless concluded that carefully balanced exceptions were needed in this area. And we established such exceptions in 1996.

The basic structure of the agreement has already been decided. Taking aim at the core problems of the book famine, the current draft of the agreement would break new legal ground in international copyright law in two ways. First, it requires countries to provide exceptions in their national copyright law for the creation and use of accessible format copies by the blind and other people with print disabilities. Second, it facilitates the cross-border exchange of accessible format copies so that duplicative efforts can be avoided and the number of accessible works in each country meaningfully increased.

While the contours of the future system are in place, there are a number of critical and challenging issues that must be resolved by the delegations assembled here; these include both issues directly bearing on the provision of accessible format copies to persons with print disabilities and the relationship of this agreement to the existing framework of copyright treaties.

We believe this work can be completed with good will, creativity, and commitment. In all of this, we are inspired by the good will of our colleagues in this room and we remain – as we said in December – optimists: optimists because, as Helen Keller said, “[n]o pessimist ever . . . opened a new doorway for the human spirit.”

Thank you, Mr. President.

####