

Medienmitteilung – Communiqué aux médias – Comunicato per la stampa – Media release

## **The Institute of Intellectual Property financially supports the participation of indigenous peoples at a WIPO seminar in June 2015**

**Bern, 15 June 2015. The Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property (IPI) is financing the participation of indigenous peoples at a seminar of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The seminar aims to serve as a platform for the direct transfer of information and knowledge on the subjects of intellectual property, genetic resources, traditional knowledge and folklore, with participation aiming to strengthen the position of indigenous communities in this important issue for them. With its financial contribution, the IPI is continuing its long-standing commitment in this field.**

### **The IPI makes substantial contribution to the participation of indigenous peoples at WIPO seminar**

With a contribution of CHF 60,000, the IPI is making it possible for around 15 indigenous people to participate at WIPO's *Seminar on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions: The Regional and International Dimensions*. Taking place from 23 to 25 June 2015 at WIPO's headquarters in Geneva, the seminar is one of a series of events on these topics.

### **The IPI committed to information and knowledge exchange for the benefit of indigenous peoples**

Addressing key legal and technical issues at local, national and international level, the seminar provides participants with the valuable opportunity of acquiring knowledge on intellectual property and the interplay between genetic resources, traditional knowledge and folklore. It also provides for the exchange of information and will deal intensively with the political issues raised. The IPI welcomes and is promoting this form of knowledge transfer by financially supporting the participation of indigenous peoples at the seminar. Such communities should, in future, be able to more effectively represent their interests in the ongoing WIPO negotiations.

### **The IPI's commitment to indigenous peoples has a long tradition**

The financial support of the IPI reflects Switzerland's active role to date in the negotiations of WIPO'S Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC). The IPI has also made large contributions in the past to the voluntary indigenous fund of the United Nations, which has made it possible for indigenous peoples to participate in negotiations that are key to them. The IGC's mandate is to draw up solutions for the protection of genetic resources, traditional knowledge and folklore in the field of intellectual property, and Switzerland has actively participated in the IGC negotiations since they first began 15 years ago. The IPI has, in particular, held the position of vice president of the committee and, in 2008, carried out a seminar with indigenous peoples.

Definitions:

**Indigenous peoples:** Indigenous peoples are in historical continuity with the original inhabitants of a particular country or territory before it was colonised or conquered by outsiders. They do not feel that they belong to the culture of the dominant society of the country in which they live, and regularly signal their intention of maintaining and preserving their original cultural characteristics, traditions and customs as well as sociopolitical forms of organisation. An individual indigenous person feels like he belongs to an indigenous community and is accepted by such a group as a member, although as a people, they are frequently at the margins of society within the country in which they live.

**Genetic resources:** In the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the term 'genetic resources' is defined as "genetic material of actual or potential value" that is of plant, animal or microbial origin and contains functional units of heredity. This includes animals, all types of plants such as medicinal herbs, cultivated and agricultural crops as well as bacteria and other organisms or parts of them. Genetic resources and access to them are vitally important as they are, for example, the foundation for new plant varieties and animal breeds in agriculture from which new active ingredients for medicinal and cosmetic products can be obtained.

**Traditional knowledge:** There is no internationally recognised definition of this term. It is generally understood, however, as knowledge that has its roots within an indigenous community and is used by its members in their everyday life. It is created by these members and passed on and developed from generation to generation and is often closely linked with the cultural and spiritual identity of the said indigenous community. Traditional knowledge includes practices, traditions, skills and practical experience, for example, in the areas of environment, medicine, agriculture and genetic resources. Accordingly, knowledge of the specific properties of a genetic resource can be understood as being traditional knowledge that relates to genetic resources. Examples of traditional knowledge include knowledge of the healing properties of certain plants (herbal medicine), agriculture, the migration routes of wild animals and birds as well as traditional hunting and fishing techniques.

*For further information:*

Martin Girsberger, Head of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation  
Direct line +41 (0)31 377 72 11