

World Summit on Information Society, Fourth Plenary (12.00 – 1.00pm)

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It is a great privilege for me to be here today at the World Summit on Information Society to share with such a distinguished audience about a key concern that most if not all ICT businesses face when expanding overseas.

Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) is a concern that has long been the centre of controversy between creators and users. Businesses recognize and acknowledge the rights of both parties but it cannot be ignored that strong intellectual property protection contributes towards the establishment of a conducive business environment that promotes fair competition, economic growth, employment, innovation and enhanced public knowledge through the sharing of expertise and domain know-how.

IPRs are monopolies designed to benefit society as a whole. They are an incentive to innovation and commercialism, and a catalyst for investment and economic advancement. For an IT company such as the one I represent, IP is the life source of our business. If the protection laws do not allow us to reap the due and fair returns on our creations, we will look elsewhere.

The WTO's Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights-TRIPS initiative, therefore, is a positive step forward as it prescribes the very minimum standard of IPR protection that should be in place in a member's economy. It reflects the attempt to narrow the protection gaps around the world bringing them under a common international rule. This makes an environment more attractive to the business investor.

The next step following the establishment of these standards of IPR protection is the will and mechanism to enforce them. It is clear that the laws are but a paper tiger if governments do not

take steps to ensure that these are implemented and upheld. Be it a lack of political will, inefficiency, corruption, ignorance or any other possible factor, in some economies, protection of IPRs is still illusive. Perhaps efforts should then be channeled to the establishment of appropriate enforcement mechanisms as this is crucial to facilitating the globalization of IP rights.

As such, if firm IP protection laws are in place and enforced, we will be one step closer to bridging the digital and income divide of today. Information, knowledge and innovations will soon be accessible to all.