

EPO, UNEP and ICTSD join forces to look at the role of patents in the development and transfer of technologies to address climate change

Munich, 24 April 2009 – On the occasion of World Intellectual Property Day (26 April), which focuses this year on 'green innovation', the European Patent Office (EPO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) have announced their agreement to undertake a joint project to examine the role of patents in the development and transfer of environmentally sound technologies (EST), in particular in the field of energy generation.

This initiative, part of a wider effort to examine the link between patents and EST, will produce several studies and provide input into ongoing discussions on technology transfer in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Ideally, this should result in concrete recommendations for countries negotiating a post-2012 climate agreement at a December 2009 summit in Copenhagen (COP15), the follow-up to the 2007 Bali conference.

The joint project, launched this week with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the three organisations, will deliver objective data and analysis on patent trends and their impact on access to EST.

"The IP system is essential for the development and effective dissemination of the new technologies that will be needed to address climate change," said EPO President Alison Brimelow. "We need to ensure that the IP system promotes, rather than hamstrings, the transfer of environmentally-friendly technology. We are looking at how the patent system should be designed to meet the needs of innovators in the field of eco-innovation," she added. "To this effect, our efforts to ensure patent quality will be of central importance."

"There is an urgent need for evidence based analysis to inform current discussions on the role of IPRs in the transfer of EST, bearing in mind the different perspectives on these issues," said ICTSD Chief Executive Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz. "We are confident that this joint project, drawing on the work and expertise of each organisation involved, will be a valuable input towards a better understanding of these issues with a view to contributing substantially to enhanced transfer and diffusion of EST, particularly to developing countries," he added.

Hussein Abaza, Chief of the UNEP Economics and Trade Branch, added that "the relationship between intellectual property rules and trade in climate-friendly technologies is currently a hotly debated topic within both trade and climate change communities. We need to ensure the best available information is provided to policymakers so their debate is well-informed and results in policies that support the development of, and trade in, climate-friendly technologies."

The project will run in several phases and rely on input from all relevant stakeholders, in particular industry and business associations that focus on environmentally sound technologies.

The initiative follows on from discussions launched at the European Patent Forum 2008, a conference on IP and climate change organised by the European Patent Office, the European Commission, the Slovenian government and the Slovenian Intellectual Property Office in Ljubljana in May 2008. For summaries of the conference results, see <http://www.epo.org/about-us/events/archive/2008/epf2008/forum-1.html>

In the case of ICTSD, this initiative is part of its Global Platform on Climate Change, Trade and Sustainable Energy which is specifically aimed at contributing to effective international cooperation towards addressing climate change. It does so by advancing analytical capacity of stakeholders and their interaction with policy makers such that effective solutions can be built and agreed by the international community at the Copenhagen meeting of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in late 2009. see <http://ictsd.net/programmes/energy/>

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