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International Conference Concludes TKDL Can Prevent Misappropriation and Fuel Innovation

NEW DELHI – Representatives from more than 35 countries discussed at an international conference here the potential of India's Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) – a database documenting centuries-old traditional medicinal treatments – to be emulated in their countries and concluded that such a mechanism can fuel future innovation and benefit-sharing.

A press release by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) stated that there was widespread agreement about the value of TKDLs to protect against misappropriation of traditional knowledge (TK), as well as their potential in enabling further innovation, such as in the area of public health.

Delegates attending the International Conference on the Utilization of the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library as a Model for Protection of Traditional Knowledge, co-organized by WIPO and India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), from March 22-24, 2011, heard from countries which are rich in TK, such as Ecuador, Indonesia, Kenya, Peru, Republic of Korea and Thailand. Speakers agreed on the need to protect TK from misappropriation.

Closing the conference on behalf of the Director General of WIPO, Executive Director and Chief of Staff Naresh Prasad said the conference "was extremely successful, fulfilling its objective to disseminate information about the TKDL as a model for the protection of TK."

Summarizing the spirit of discussions, he added that TK should also be shared and communities should participate and benefit – TK is a source of innovation and could inspire life-saving medicines.

On the way forward, Prasad said it was now up to WIPO member states to provide feedback to the WIPO secretariat on which direction to take and whether they wish the Secretariat to enter into an institutional arrangement with the CSIR to facilitate the sharing of the TKDL model with other countries. Describing the conference as a "path-breaking event", Mr Prasad said "It is up to member states to tell us if and how to proceed and where to take things from here."

At the closing of the conference, Director of the TKDL V.K Gupta said "We are happy that TKDL has been able to assert India's right against misappropriation." He added that India is willing to share its experience with other countries, noting "we do realize the value of TKDL knowledge lies in its utilization for creating new medicines which can make health care affordable. TKDL has proved to be a successful initiative, at the same time it is possible in the future that we may be able to create solutions which go beyond TKDL. In any case, one size does not fit all."

He also pointed out that "TKDL is not the only solution against the misappropriation of TK," noting "we believe there are solutions beyond TKDL. We started TKDL to assert certain rights against biopiracy but this was not the only objective... now we want to use the TKDL to create new IP, within the existing IP system, for example in open innovation models."

The conference was opened by India's Minister of Science and Technology, Earth Sciences, and Parliamentary Affairs Pawan Kumar Bansal who said the TKDL has been successful in challenging bids to misappropriate Indian TK. He also noted that India is prepared to work with WIPO and interested countries in sharing its expertise on TKDL.

In a statement to the conference WIPO Director General Francis Gurry said the TKDL is an excellent example of a technical platform which can work alongside legislative frameworks. India's TKDL could be a good model for others and that WIPO was ready to facilitate international collaboration for countries which were interested in establishing their own TKDLs.