

JOINT GENERAL STATEMENT

35th PBC Meeting's Opening Session: Monday 22 May 2023 (*New WIPO External Offices to be discussed in Agenda Item 11*)

Thank you, Chair

1. India is making this joint statement on behalf of eight member States who have expressed interest in opening of external offices of WIPO in their countries [*Colombia, India, Iran, Oman, Republic of Korea, Romania, Saudi Arabia, and UAE*].

2. As we all are aware, this issue has been under consideration since the 51st Session of the WIPO General Assembly in 2019. At that time, it was decided to defer the decision on opening new External Offices pending an evaluation by 2021 of the existing External Offices. The Terms of Reference were to be decided by this Committee during its 31st Session in 2020. It is unfortunate that it has not been possible to finalize the TOR despite extensive discussions in this Committee during its 31st-34th Sessions.

3. External Offices, at the regional level, have been instrumental in connecting the expertise, services and tools of WIPO with the needs and priorities of the member States of the region. As the extended arms of WIPO, on the ground, they are able to develop familiarity with the local conditions, cultures and languages, which assists them to develop deep and meaningful relationships with various stakeholders, both public and private, which is important to gain the necessary insight to quickly respond to evolving changes in the policy environment and identify opportunities for effective implementation of WIPO's vision and goals. External Offices also provide cost-effective support services in relation to the PCT, Madrid and Hague systems, arbitration and mediation. The External Offices, thus, play an instrumental role in enabling the effective implementation of WIPO's developmental agenda; in fostering the development of balanced and effective innovation and creative ecosystems; and in increasing the IP knowledge and skills of the host member States as well as the entire region.

4. In view of the role that the External Offices play in promoting the goal of the WIPO to create an enabling environment for promotion and protection of intellectual property rights within the framework of creating a conducive eco-system for research and development and innovation, any further delay in opening new External Offices will not be in the interest of either WIPO or the member states of WIPO. Like other international organisations based in Geneva, who work through their regional and national offices, like WHO and ILO, WIPO should be enabled by the member States to open as many External Offices as it deems essential to realise its goals. The evaluation of the existing External Offices, which in itself is an essential task, should not be allowed to delay the decision on opening of the new External Offices.

5. Given the healthy financial situation of WIPO, there are no financial constraints on opening of new External Offices as the financial overview presented by WIPO in its proposed program of work and budget for 2024-25 mentions a surplus of about 90 million Swiss francs, predicted at the end of the biennium.

6. We, therefore, urge all member States to give serious consideration to the issue of External Offices and quickly move forward on finalizing the ToR for evaluation of the existing Offices, which we will be discussing under Agenda Item 11. We hope that all member States shall make efforts in a cooperative and constructive manner paving the way for the opening of new External Offices as early as possible, responding to the long-pending requests of the countries who are keen to harness the power of intellectual property for their development.

7. Mr. Chair, we live in a world struggling with multiple crises. If under exceptional circumstances, we are not able to reach an agreement on the ToR for evaluating the existing External Offices, we urge all Member States to decouple the two issues and to proceed with the decision on creation of the new External Offices.

I thank you.