

Introduction

I was invited by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), in cooperation with the Department of Intellectual Property, Ministry of Commerce in Thailand, to participate as a speaker in the Regional Seminar on Intellectual Property and Traditional Knowledge (TK), Genetic Resources (GR), and Traditional Cultural Expressions, held in Bangkok on December 16th and 17th 2009.

I left Fiji on the 14th, and spent a day in Brisbane to apply for a Thai visa before flying via Sydney to Bangkok on the 15th. I returned on the 18th and arrived back in Fiji on Saturday the 20th.

Objectives

The objectives of the Seminar were to:

- (a) Analyze various models for protecting TK, TCEs and GRs, and provide opportunities for an exchange of experiences on national/regional initiatives for protection of TK, GR and TCEs;
- (b) Provide information on TK databases and the role, in general, of documentation of TK and TCEs in relation to their possible protection; and
- (c) Brief the participants on the new mandate of the WIPO IGC and, based on the results of the forthcoming session of the IGC from December 7 to 11, 2009, introduce them to the documentation, issues and working methods that will underline the negotiations due to commence in 2010.

Working Sessions

The Seminar dealt with the following topics.

- Topic 1: An Introduction to Core Concepts and Objectives: What are Traditional Knowledge (TK), Genetic Resources (GRs) and Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs)? Why should they receive Legal Protection?
- Topic 2: The WIPO Intergovernmental Committee (IGC): Latest Developments and Perspectives on Future Work
- Topic 3: Establishing Policy, Legal and Practical Measures for the Protection of TK, GRs and TCEs
- Topic 4: WIPO's Work Elements and Options for the Intellectual Property Protection of TK, GRs and TCEs
- Topic 5: TK Databases and other Forms of TK and TCEs Documentation – Intellectual Property-related Objectives and Methodologies for the Establishment of Databases
- Topic 6: Overview of TK, GRs and TCEs Protection in the Region

The paper I was asked to present was based of topic 5, mainly to share the work that has been done so far with our cultural mapping exercise and its documentation.

Participants

There were forty-six participants in the seminar coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tonga and Viet Nam, and in addition, participants from the host country, Thailand, were also invited.

Presentation

I presented on the morning of the second day of the seminar, on Thursday. As has already mentioned, the paper was mainly to share the work carried out in the institute on cultural mapping and its documentation.

The text and the power point presentation paper are attached as appendix1

I have also received WIPO's "thank you" letter by email attached as appendix 2, and also attached under appendix 2 are WIPO's invitation letter together with the seminar program.

They have also advised through email that all the Bangkok meeting documents, as well as the presentations are on their website:

http://www.wipo.int/meetings/en/details.jsp?meeting_id=20005

Observation

There were three other speakers who presented there papers in the session I was slotted in, but they spoke on their ways of documenting their work on Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture.

The paper I presented sparked some interest from those present resulting in further discussions with them after the session. One thing noted was that some were not familiar with the term "cultural mapping." In the discussions, it was noted that no country had mentioned anything on cultural mapping and a few reps showed interest in the way we store our data in the data base.

From the papers presented and the discussions after each paper presented, it seems that most of the countries represented in the seminar were facing difficulties in trying to come up with ways to research and document their traditional knowledge and expression of culture.

After the seminar, and after comparing our work at the institute with other nations on the documentation of traditional knowledge and expression of culture, I feel that we are in a very good position than most of the countries represented in the seminar in terms of the work carried out in the documentation of our traditional knowledge and expressions of culture.

Recommendation

After arriving back in the country there were a few things that kept occupying my mind. The first was how a small developing country like ours has made such progress in the work on the safeguarding of ones' culture and heritage. The World Intellectual organization (WIPO) understands the work that Fiji has made on this and for this reason, it has been extending invitations for Fiji to share what it has achieved in seminars and workshops. If we are to maintain this standing then the following are recommended:

1. The work on the cultural mapping and its documentation is revised more by the IILC to see that all the training and advice are carried out well by the field officers and those in office. The information too in the data base is to be regularly checked.
2. That what the IILC comes up with in future in terms of staffing, funding and equipment, as well as other requests as work progresses, be taken seriously as they know well what is best for the safeguarding of our culture and heritage.

3. That the ministry continues to honor all invitations from international organizations on safeguarding of culture and heritage, even if it means having to pay for the trip. Workshops and seminars of these sort helps broadened our views and help us to see our standing with other countries

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the Ministry of indigenous Affairs and the PSC for the approval and support given that enabled me to attend the seminar in Bangkok.

I also thank the Director IILC and the Administrative Officer (Project) of the institute for their advice and assistance in my presentation and travel arrangements.

The experience was beneficial and challenging and will surely strengthen the work carried out in the institute.

Vinaka vakalevu

.....

Sekove. Bigitibau
SAO, IILC.