**WORLD BLIND UNION (WBU) press release 20th April 2013**

**Press Release – WIPO Negotiations Treaty for Blind people**

***A treaty for the blind or for the rights holders?***

**Geneva, 20.04.2013 - A four and a half year UN negotiation on a new World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) treaty for people who are blind or have other print disabilities is in danger of delivering either a hollow, “trophy treaty” or no treaty at all.**

WBU delegates attended the negotiations which took place between 18th and 20th April in Geneva.

WBU said that the three days of discussion at WIPO this April have continued in the same vein as the five days of negotiations in February this year. The negotiators have worked almost exclusively on wording to reaffirm copyright protections that already exist in international copyright instruments; and have devoted almost no time to insuring that the treaty will encourage the cross border sharing of desperately needed books for the blind.

Fred Schroeder, First Vice President of the World Blind Union, said:

“The purpose of this treaty is to ensure access to books for blind people and help end the “book famine” we face. WBU is alarmed that some of the negotiators have focused their efforts almost exclusively on crafting language around copyright protections that have nothing to do with the ability of authorized entities to produce books for the blind and visually impaired. The shift away from a treaty for the blind to a treaty focussed on rights holder protections has taken up precious negotiating time which should be directed at ensuring a treaty that makes it possible for materials to be shared internationally. For example the negotiators have spent considerable time talking about the concept of commercial availability when, in practice, there is no reason why an authorized entity would spend its limited resources to duplicate works in formats that already exist. Nevertheless, the introduction of concepts like commercial availability creates new complexities that detract from the treaty’s true purpose”.

There are now just two weeks of negotiations available to restore the treaty to one of creating a law to enable international sharing of materials for the blind when the two-week “Diplomatic Conference” in Marrakech, Morocco, meets in the last two weeks of June 2013.

Maryanne Diamond, Chair of the World Blind Union’s Right to Read Campaign, commented:

“WBU appreciates the efforts of many negotiators to find text that will work for blind people. When they meet in Marrakech, governments must finally seize this historic opportunity to ensure a treaty that is “fit for purpose” so that blind people can really get access to books in accessible formats.”

**Background**

**An end to the “book famine”**

Even in 2013, blind people and others living with a print disability such as those with dyslexia still have very limited access to books. Only some 7% of published books are ever made accessible (in formats such as Braille, audio and large print) in the richest countries, and less than 1% in poorer ones. This is a “book famine”.

**An international treaty for blind people**

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) makes treaties and other international laws on copyright

Back in 2009 the World Blind Union, Brazil, Ecuador and Paraguay proposed a WIPO treaty to help relieve the book famine in which fewer than 1% of books are published accessibly in developing countries, and only some 7% in the most developed.

Briefly, the new treaty would:

Allow specialist organisations to make accessible copies of books in all signatory countries

Make it legal to send accessible books across national borders

Still respect copyright law: it is not an attack on publishers!

Make more books available for blind people

**About WBU**

The World Blind Union (WBU) is the internationally recognized organization, representing the 285 million blind and partially sighted persons in 190 member countries.  We are the Voice of the Blind, speaking to governments and international bodies on issues concerning blindness and visual impairments in conjunction with our members. For further information, please visit:

[www.worldblindunion.org](http://www.worldblindunion.org)

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