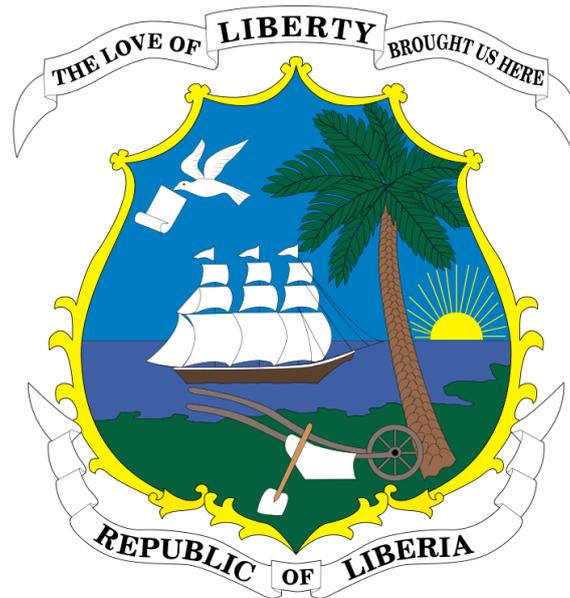

**THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY AND
INAUGURATION OF THE NEW BUILDING
AFRICAN REGIONAL INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION**



**OPENING REMARKS TO
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY CONFERENCE ON INNOVATION**

**HARARE, ZIMBABWE
8 DECEMBER 2016**

**H.E. Axel M. Addy
MINISTER
MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY**



Excellencies,

Director General, Mr. Fernando dos Santos, African Regional Intellectual Property Organization,

Guest of Honor _____,

Ministers,

Heads of Delegation,

Distinguished Delegates,

Our Partners,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

1. On behalf of the people of Liberia and H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, let me express my warm greetings and gratitude for the honor of opening this all-important IP conference on innovation.
2. It is a great pleasure for me to join the Director General in extending a warm welcome to all of you in this room today. I thank the Member States and the ARIPO office here in Zimbabwe for their support in the successful organization of this conference.



Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

3. This year, Liberia has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening Africa's Intellectual Property system and I want to thank all parties to the Swakormund Protocol for their support to the Intellectual Property System of Liberia. On October 25th, Liberia ratified the Swakormund Protocol, signaling to member states that Liberia stands ready to contribute to the Intellectual System of Africa. With the help of WIPO and ARIPO, we were also able to pass a new Intellectual Property Law creating the Intellectual Property System of Liberia.

Distinguished Colleagues

4. ARIPO as an organization, have come a long way, since it embarked on its journey on 9 December, 1976 under the Lusaka Agreement. With a mandate to develop, harmonize and promote intellectual property in the Member States Africa, we have achieved many milestones and advanced the role of Intellectual Property on our continent.
5. Our founders understood the importance of Intellectual Property in economic and technological development and laid the ground for our successes. By now, we have 19 members and signed four major protocols. The Harare Protocol, concluded in 1982, empowers the ARIPO Office to grant patents and register industrial designs as well as utility models on behalf of the contracting states. It also incorporates other international treaties of relevance, such as the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) and therefore enables applicants from the African region and elsewhere to file international applications and obtain protection of their intellectual property rights abroad.



6. The Banjul Protocol, concluded in 1993, empowers the ARIPO Office to register marks for goods and services in respect of and on behalf of the contracting states. It provides a centralised system of registration and provides a mechanism for the ARIPO system to co-exist with the national systems of the contracting states. It also reduces the administrative burden for member countries, as applicants can choose to register directly with ARIPO.
7. To protect holders of traditional knowledge, the Swakopmund Protocol, adopted in 2010, protects their ideas, know-how and folklore of Africa and ensures that it is properly utilized for the welfare of our people. The protocol addresses their challenges and grants them protection via various legal concepts, such as prior informed consent, equitable benefit sharing, patents, prevention of unfair competition and protection of distinctive signs.
8. Lastly, The Arusha Protocol, adopted last year, will, when it becomes operational, provide Member States with a regional plant variety protection system. It will help our member countries achieve their agricultural and economic aims, as it will strengthen plant breeders' rights in the region and therefore allow farmers access to a wide range of improved varieties.
9. Up until June this year, ARIPO has received 9301 patent applications, 2717 trademarks with 5004 classes, 1125 industrial design applications, and 73 utility models applications. Patent applications of our member states are now mostly filed with the ARIPO office and no longer in the member states themselves, a sign of the trust placed in the work of this organization. In 2015, ARIPO also granted 429 patents, which is an increase of 68% from last year's level when 255 patents were granted.



10. As our mandate has expanded, we now cover many more areas of Intellectual Property; we have also modernized our system. We now offer a new online filing system that has significantly improved Office processes and experience for staff and users alike. Through the automated system, we have become more reliable, quicker and more cost-effective. Through its commitment to the modernization of ICT infrastructures and closer linkages with Member States, ARIPO has positioned itself as hub for IP management systems and continues to be the driving force for IP development in the Member States.

11. ARIPO has also established a state of the art Academy that serves as a center of excellence in teaching, training, research and skills development in the field of intellectual property. The Academy trains IP Office Staff and examiners on IP, undertakes awareness raising programmes, tailor-made courses, professional courses, as well as internships and fellowships. Most importantly, it also offers a Masters Program in Intellectual Property in collaboration with the Africa University and has graduated 201 people in 7 years. As such, the ARIPO Academy provides the intellectual basis for the advancement of our work into the future.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

12. While we have come a long way. I urge us all to not rest on our laurels. Many areas still need our attention and ample work needs to be done. First, we need more member states to accede to our Protocols. Second, we need to continue to assist our existing Member states to domesticate the existing



Protocols. Third, we need to improve our capacity to compile regular statistics at the National level, such that we can provide accurate statistics to WIPO. Fourth, we need to continue to collaborate with international IP stakeholders. Fifth, we need to explore our academic connections to start research studies particularly regarding IP in Africa. Sixth, we need to embark upon a mass awareness of IP amongst our peoples in Africa and create a generation of individuals who will exploit the benefits that IPR's afford.

Distinguished Delegates and Friends of IP in Africa

13. Africa can create meaningful jobs for its youthful population if opportunities are created in a knowledge economy where innovations and creativities are protected to spur economic growth and development. IP rights establish a secure legal framework for investment and commercialization of innovation and creativity. With the right policies mix, Africa can improve its knowledge economy potential.
14. Over the years, the main IP focus in Africa has been to establish and develop basic IP infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, capacity building, and human capital. The goal now is to put these IP tools to work in support of their economic objectives in Africa. This is only possible if there is an IP system that is based on an appropriate policy mix that balances the often competing interests of producers on the one hand and consumers on the other hand.
15. Africa needs to explore opportunities that can best support the scientific and technological transformation in Africa and to deepen its understanding on IP related issues as a driver of economic and inclusive development and



poverty reduction, enhanced agricultural productivity and boost industrial competitiveness across the continent.

16. To enable our young innovators in Africa to enjoy the economic benefits of their creations, we must work alongside universities and other educational institutions across Africa to produce and learn IP related resources, provide several online learning modules that provides general introduction to IP and innovation.

Excellencies, Colleagues and Friends

17. Let me conclude now by challenging all of us in this room. Every day in Africa, pirated products that infringe on the innovations of creators around the world arrive on our shores. They deprive these creators of their legal rights to earn from their talents. We remain a dumping ground for pirated products that impact the lives of our people. When you think about foods, medicines, medical devices, movies, electronic equipment, music to name a few. Africa cannot be the dumping ground for all things rejected from elsewhere. Even our own creator and innovators are deprived of their livelihoods due to this menace. As an organization ARIPO must do more to build a campaign and legal framework that can be domesticated to reduce the penetration of this menace into our markets. Let me challenge all of us to join this and elevate this to the highest policy level with political will to tackle this menace. Our young people are on the move, they are at the cutting edge of technological innovation, it must, absolutely must translate into their economic liberalization from the shackles of poverty on our continent. We have a role to play, it is our responsibility to do so, and collectively, I know we can.



Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

18. In closing, I congratulate all of you for the many successes that we can celebrate today, 40 years after the inception of the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization. Through your work, thousands of innovators who continuously harness the spirit of creativity have been able to push further. Their work as creators is protected through your efforts. But let us also look ahead to the next 40 years and start the close collaboration that is required to achieve our objectives today.

19. I am pleased to congratulate ARIPO on its 40 years Anniversary and Inauguration of the extension of the ARIPO Headquarters Building.

20. I wish all delegations a successful conference and an enjoyable stay in Harare.

21. With these few words I now declare this conference opened. Thank you for your kind attention.