

STATEMENT BY
FREE SOFTWARE FOUNDATION EUROPE (FSFE)
AT THE
PERMANENT COMMITTEE ON COOPERATION
FOR DEVELOPMENT RELATED TO
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY
(PCIPD)

(Geneva, 14-15 April 2005)

Mr. Chairman,

on behalf of the Free Software Foundation Europe I congratulate you and your co-chair on the trust placed in you for this fourth PCIPD session. Our organisation is a globally active centre of expertise for Free Software with a European focus, and our intervention will deal with the digital development activities referred to in document number PCIPD/4/2 prepared by the bureau.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are described in the document both as tools for administration systems and as the object of technology transfer. Furthermore ICTs impact upon other areas of interest to WIPO, in particular copyright, and Free Software can contribute positively to all of these.

Free Software is defined by the freedom of unlimited use for any purpose, the freedom to study, the freedom to modify and the freedom to distribute. In this context we would like to refer to the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action adopted by all UN Member States during the December 2003 World Summit on the Information Society.

As – amongst others – paragraph 23 o) of the Plan of Action states, a variety of software models such as proprietary and Free Software should be promoted. This impacts on paragraph 12 and 34 of PCIPD/4/2, but also paragraphs 48 and 49 need to be seen in the light of this decision by the Member States.

It is crucial that WIPO programmes do not de-jure or de-facto mandate any of these activities in favour of proprietary software. All such activities should be equally and fully available with Free Software.

Mr. Chairman,

regarding technology transfer and the bridging of the digital divide, the potential of Free Software should be taken into account by the measures listed in section II of the document.

As alluded to by the “knowledge economy” reference in paragraph 14, Information and Communication Technologies can be a powerful tool to enable industrial growth. The sustainability of such growth is to a very high degree a function of the control over such ICT infrastructures.

The model of proprietary software is based on absolute and permanent control by the proprietor. On the other hand, the model of Free Software, based on the creative use of copyright, offers freedom for political and commercial activity, giving each Member State flexibility and control over their ICT infrastructure.

The region of Extremadura in Spain is a good example how a primarily agricultural economy can rapidly evolve into a digitally networked high-skill region fostering high economic development through commercial Free Software clusters.

Adding training and competency in Free Software to WIPO’s development related programmes will greatly increase their impact and open up an entire new area of knowledge based economic development.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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