

Statement of the World Blind Union to the WIPO General Assemblies 2013  
delivered by Christopher Friend 26.09.13

Having been a regular attendee at the WIPO General Assemblies and the Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights for the past six years, and as a blind person myself, it gives me great pleasure to represent the World Blind Union -WBU - to bring this short message to this meeting.

On behalf of all blind and print disabled readers around the world, WBU wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the WIPO Member States and the Secretariat for giving us the Marrakech Treaty.

Most of you attending this Assembly will know of the wonderful news from Marrakech, in June, that an historic Treaty was agreed to help end the book famine faced by visually impaired and other print disabled people.

WBU is sure that the Marrakech Treaty will significantly help in the fight to end the book famine in which only a few per cent of published works are ever available in accessible formats visually impaired people can read independently.

We would like to thank most warmly all those who have contributed to the successful conclusion of the Marrakech Treaty. It was an agreement that many said would never happen; indeed, we also sometimes feared failure. Great credit, and our heartfelt thanks, go to the Kingdom of Morocco for its excellent hosting of the Diplomatic Conference; and especially to the Member States and the Secretariat for working so hard throughout the two weeks to achieve agreement on the Treaty text; and to our many friends and supporters in the NGO community and a host of others too numerous to name.

Rest assured that the World Blind Union places great importance on the need to respect Rights Holders' interests, whilst using the Treaty to improve the lives of the people we represent. These two goals are perfectly compatible. Indeed, that is why we spent years working at WIPO to achieve the Treaty we needed. We will continue to work with authors, publishers and others within the intellectual property system, recognising that without them, the inclusive world we aspire to will continue to elude us.

No agreement or law is of use unless it is implemented, and we will be tireless in our efforts to ensure that the Marrakech Treaty delivers the benefits it promises. To this end, WBU has already started campaigning around the world for the early ratification and implementation of this Treaty. It will not enter into force until 20 Member States have ratified it, and the more that ratify, the more effective it will be in helping print disabled people to read accessible books that have so far been closed to them. WBU urges all Member States' Diplomats and Technical Advisors attending this Assembly to encourage your Capitals to ensure a speedy and effective ratification strategy in your countries.

Again, we offer our warm thanks to all of you for helping to open a new chapter in the inclusion of visually impaired and print disabled people, and we look forward to working with you to realise the life-changing opportunities the Marrakech Treaty promises.