STATEMENT OF THE WORLD BLIND UNION

**Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled**

Fifty-Sixth Series of Meetings of the WIPO Assemblies

5 October 2016

Today is one of the most important days in the history of blind people.

On behalf of the estimated 285 million blind and partially sighted people around the world, the World Blind Union (WBU) wishes to thank the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and its contracting parties for adopting a treaty that will change the lives of blind and partially sighted persons everywhere. Over the past three years, WIPO has led the effort to increase the number of countries that have ratified the Treaty, and it has led the effort to ensure the practical implementation of the Treaty, including the establishment of the Accessible Books Consortium (ABC).

The WBU also wishes to acknowledge the hard work and spirit of cooperation between and among all stakeholders, including rights holders, libraries, authorized entities and organizations representing blind and partially sighted individuals and others with print disabilities.

Since the successful conclusion of the Diplomatic Conference in Marrakesh just over three years ago, over twenty countries have ratified the Treaty, and we strongly urge all countries, especially those who are signatories, to ratify the Treaty quickly. For the Treaty to work, it is vital that major producers of accessible works—namely the United States and the European Union—ratify the Treaty immediately. Without books to share, the dream of equal access will remain an unfulfilled dream.

The Marrakesh Treaty is much more than a treaty about books; it is an historic human rights instrument. Access to published works means the potential for blind and partially sighted children and adults to live integrated, productive lives. Today, very few blind children are being educated and few blind adults have jobs.

The Marrakesh Treaty supports the promise of equality of opportunity enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Earlier this week, the UN Human Rights Council, 2016 Social Forum issued the following declaration:

 “Participants called upon all states to ratify and implement the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled as a step toward fulfilling their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other human rights instruments. Participants further urged all states to expand the availability of books and other cultural materials in accessible formats, including across borders; to avoid imposing financial or other burdens on beneficiaries; and to consult with print disabled individuals and their representative organizations regarding the implementation and monitoring of the Marrakesh Treaty.”

In closing the WBU wishes to reiterate its sincere appreciation for the efforts of all involved in making the Marrakesh Treaty a reality. We ask for your continued help in giving the Treaty life so blind people everywhere will be able to learn and work and live as others, with dignity and self-respect.