Global Forum on IP and AI, Geneva, November 9, 2026

Opening Speech: WIPO Director General Daren Tang

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellencies, Ministers,

Heads of IP Offices,

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues and friends,

Good morning, and welcome to the first Global Forum on IP and AI.

Let me start by thanking Ambassdor of Kazakhstan Kairat Torebayev for being our Chair over the next two days.

While WIPO has dealt with IP and AI issues for the past few years, this is the first time that we are convening the global community to discuss critical issues across the whole spectrum of IP rights – patents, trademarks, designs, copyrights and many others.

Over the next two days, we will **look widely across this fast-moving landscape, grapple with difficult issues, and put our heads together on issues ranging from** authorship and inventorship to AI training, human likeness, **and** the impact of AI on the administration and governance of IP.

But this morning I want to start somewhere else.

I want to start with us as human beings.

Humankind has been innovating for as long as we have existed. Fire, tools, agriculture, the wheel, cities and eventually modern science and technology all came from our ability to observe the world around us, imagine something different, and turn that imagination into reality.

And we have been creating for just as long. Some of the oldest traces our ancestors left behind are not tools for survival, but cave paintings of incredible beauty that still haunt us today and carvings of stone, bone and ivory that were objects of beauty, instruments of music and markers of ritual.

***

But in 1474, the way that we innovated itself underwent a revolutionary innovation with the birth of IP.

In that year, the Republic of Venice adopted what is widely regarded as the world's first patent statute. Venice was then one of the great commercial and technological powers of the world, and its statute spoke explicitly about attracting people of unusual ingenuity and encouraging them to invent things that would be useful to the Republic of Venice. It offered inventors protection for ten years against others reproducing their inventions without

permission. And in return, these inventions would be placed in a register that would be open for public inspection, turbocharging the spread of technical knowledge.

This was not done out of an abstract love for the concept of IP.

Venice existed in fierce competition with other cities and powers. Technology, knowledge and highly skilled people were sources of economic and strategic advantage. Venice therefore needed a way to encourage talented people to come, to invent, to disclose their inventions, and ultimately to put those inventions to productive use.

And from that we can draw an insight that remains at the heart of the IP system today.

Human ingenuity has tremendous value. But societies need institutions that enable that value to move from the mind of an inventor into community, economy and society.

IP stepped into this institutional role and became a transformative force in the history of human innovation.

Therefore, that **innovative, technological and strategic needs of society was what created the need for IP, and that is what remains at the heart of the IP system.**

That distinction matters enormously at this moment in history.

Because if technology changes profoundly, and if the way society creates, innovates and exchanges value changes with it, then we cannot assume that the institutions we have inherited – including the IP system – will always remain perfectly adapted to the world they serve.

This is where Artificial Intelligence enters the picture.

AI is often described as another technological revolution. But I am increasingly convinced that description does not quite capture what is happening. Humanity has of course invented extraordinary general-purpose technologies before.

Machines extended our physical strength. The printing press reproduced and spread knowledge exponentially. Electricity transformed our ability to produce and transport energy. Computers expanded our ability to calculate and process information. The internet transformed communication and distribution, trade, connection and commerce.

But AI is doing something different.

It is reaching into activities that we have historically associated with the human mind itself: reasoning, analysis, synthesis, and for an increasing number of people, even cognition, creation and invention.

For an organization concerned with intellectual property, that matters profoundly.

Because AI is not simply transforming another industry.

It is beginning to transform the processes from which intellectual property itself emerges – imagination, conception, and expression.

We already see AI helping scientists search chemical spaces that no human could explore manually. We see it analyzing medical images, designing new materials, writing sophisticated computer code, generating content, and tackling increasingly complex mathematical problems, seemingly providing solutions to problems that have eluded the best human minds for decades.

At the same time, a creator can now discover that his or her voice, face or style has been reproduced synthetically at extraordinary fidelity. Content of all types – music, films, videos and others – are being produced and distributed at rates which are overwhelming.

WIPO's description of this Forum deliberately captures both sides of that reality: AI is expanding the possibilities for invention and creativity while raising fundamental questions about rights, ownership and responsibility.

And this development is moving extremely quickly.

For some time now, commentators have tried to grapple with the deeper question of whether a machine truly thinks, understands, imagines, or might one day even become conscious.

Those questions matter of course.

But given that AI has consistently broken every single prediction of its speed of development, and the day is coming where AI can itself create AI autonomously, we must already begin to address the practical implications of this technology and what AI will mean for humanity.

Will it help us find treatments for diseases that have resisted generations of medical research?

Will it accelerate solutions in food, energy and climate technologies?

Will it reveal new materials, new mathematics, perhaps even new insights into the fundamental laws of nature?

I sincerely hope so.

But we also have to confront other possibilities.

What happens to work when machines can perform an ever larger share of cognitive tasks?

What happens to human creators if machines can reproduce their voices, styles and creative expressions at almost no marginal cost?

What happens to invention when AI becomes not simply an instrument used by an inventor, but an increasingly consequential participant in the inventive process?

And, ultimately, how do we preserve human agency, dignity and meaning in a world in which some of the attributes we have considered uniquely human increasingly have analogous or even equivalent machine counterparts?

I confess that when I first began preparing for today’s speech, my instinct was to make this a rather safe speech.

Balanced. Moderate. Reassuring.

But the more I thought about the scale and speed of what is happening, the less honest that seemed.

Because **this may no longer be a moment for safe conversations, "wait and see" and "business as usual".**

The decisions that governments, technology companies, creators, innovators and institutions take over just the next few years will shape the relationship between humanity and technology for generations to come.

IP is only one part of that much larger story.

But it is an important part, and for those of us gathered under this roof, **it is our part.**

So I would propose three fundamental questions for us to confront as the global IP community.

First: what should the IP system protect and incentivize in the age of AI?

The modern IP system – the patent system of Venice and then of the first copyright statutes – may have been birthed during the Renaissance and Age of Enlightenment but came into maturity during the Industrial Age – the 1880s. It therefore reflects the economic architecture of that period.

Then came computers and the digital revolution, about a hundred years later.

Software became critical. Algorithms became enormously valuable. Data became an essential economic resource. The internet transformed reproduction and distribution.

The IP system adapted. Here at WIPO, for example, the WIPO Internet Treaties of the 1990s were a very important and rapid response to the digital transformation.

But much of this adaptation has involved adding new layers onto an architecture whose basic categories were developed for an earlier industrial economy, without having to rethink that architecture.

AI is forcing us to turn our attention to the underlying architecture, and to ask ourselves fundamental questions about its continued relevance.

Who is the inventor when AI makes a material contribution to an invention?

Who is the author when human creativity and machine generation become increasingly intertwined?

On what basis, and under what conditions, should copyright-protected material be used for AI training? What are the remuneration and compensation models, for how can we say we respect copyright and yet pay nothing for it?

How should we think about software, algorithms and data as sources of enormous economic value?

And we are now confronting something even more fundamental.

What about the attributes of human identity itself?

Our voices. Our images. Our likenesses. Our biometric characteristics. Even our thoughts.

AI can replicate these in ways that earlier generations could barely have imagined. As Arthur C. Clarke said: when technology is sufficiently advanced, it is indistinguishable from magic.

Yet the legal protections surrounding them remain fragmented across IP, privacy, personality rights, unfair competition and other bodies of law.

Indeed, this afternoon the Forum will ask directly whether the IP system has a role in protecting not only **what humans make, but what makes us human**.

I don't pretend that any of these questions has an easy answer, but we are not here just to tackle easy questions.

Second: how should the IP system itself change?

Even if we conclude that the basic architecture of IP remains sound, there is another challenge.

The system of IP registration and protection – which we must remember is the starting point for IP commercialization – has to operate at the speed of the innovators and creators and the economies and societies that it serves.

Much of today's IP regime and infrastructure was built around industrial innovation cycles measured in a lifespan of years.

But digital innovation cycles operate much faster, and AI will accelerate those cycles even further.

So imagine an entrepreneur building an AI company whose AI enabled technology changes fundamentally several times during the period in which an IP right is being examined.

Imagine IP offices confronted with vastly increased volumes of AI-assisted applications, by the way, this is already a reality, or expanding bodies of machine-generated prior art.

Imagine creators trying to license millions of machine-mediated uses through transaction models designed for another era.

The question is therefore not only whether we are able to protect what is valuable in the age of AI, but also whether the machinery of IP protection is fast enough, accessible enough and adaptable enough for the AI-enabled innovators and creators it now has to serve.

If we do not get this right, we will find ourselves in a situation where innovators and creators will find that the IP system simply does not serve them anymore. They will not file and as some of them have told me – their IP strategy will just be “speed to market”.

So we need to have a frank conversation about what new processes, timelines and procedures need to be put in place for the IP system to remain relevant in a world where innovation and business cycles move not just in years, but increasingly in months and weeks.

Third: how do we make the economics work?

Perhaps this is the most practical question of all.

AI depends upon enormous quantities of knowledge, culture, information and data. That value has been created by human beings, and creators rightly want recognition and sustainable livelihoods.

At the same time, innovators and AI companies need the ability to develop and train powerful models.

Researchers need room to experiment.

Businesses need predictable and workable rules.

Consumers want access to better and more affordable products and services.

And society needs both continued human creativity **and** continued technological innovation.

These interests will sometimes conflict as they have in the past few years.

But we should resist reducing this debate to a simple contest between creators and technology, or between those who want protection and those who want access.

IP has spent centuries dealing with precisely these problems: **how to create incentives while enabling ideas to circulate. How to protect the current generation of creators while enabling the future generation of creators to emerge.**

So the question cannot simply be who has the legal power to say no.

We must also ask:

How can we create workable ways for people to say yes?

That means exploring new licensing practices, new remuneration mechanisms, better metadata and rights information, technical solutions for attribution and provenance, and new business relationships between creators, rights holders and AI developers.

That is one reason WIPO created the AI Infrastructure Interchange in March this year, providing a neutral space where creators, rights holders, technology developers and technical experts can work on practical questions including metadata, watermarking, identifiers and rights-management infrastructure.

Because law alone will not solve every problem.

Sometimes technology should be part of the solution to challenges created by technology.

And sometimes the solution will not only be found in new laws and regulations, but also new market practices, new licensing models and new technical standards.

***

This brings me to why we are here.

These questions cannot be addressed only by governments.

The complexity and breadth of the topic means that creators, innovators, professionals, regulators, academia and civil society, need to come together.

And because AI will change not just countries but the whole of humanity, this is work that needs to involve all 194 Member States.

That is the purpose of this Forum – to create a place where Member States and stakeholders can meet in a neutral, professional and inclusive platform to understand what is changing across the whole spectrum of innovative and creative experiences, beyond any single IP right, exchange experiences and approaches, and identify where further work may be needed.

I hope we will disagree over these two days.

In fact, I would worry if we did not.

But I also hope we can begin identifying where there **is** convergence.

Perhaps in a day and age where machines are becoming more like humans, and humans are becoming more like machines, there should be principles on which we can agree even before we agree on every rule.

That human creativity should continue to matter.

That human inventors and innovators should continue to be rewarded.

That knowledge should continue to circulate.

That creators and innovators should be able to participate fairly in the economic value they generate.

That new technologies should expand human possibility rather than diminish human agency.

And that countries should retain room to respond to their own circumstances while avoiding unnecessary fragmentation of a global ecosystem for supporting innovation and creativity.

Those may sound like modest points of agreement.

But in a fragmented world, they may become a very important place to start.

Five hundred years ago, societies began constructing institutions that connected human ingenuity to economic value on a systematic scale.

Those institutions helped support extraordinary waves of innovation and creativity.

We are now approaching another critical juncture in human history – another once in 500 years moment.

AI is beginning to change how ideas are created, how discoveries are made, how culture is produced, and perhaps eventually how we understand invention, innovation and creativity.

We should not fear that change.

But neither should we simply surrender to it.

Our responsibility is to shape it.

And that requires something more difficult than defending the past or predicting the future.

It requires us to decide what we want the future to be.

It will require national experimentation and international cooperation.

It will require us to be bold enough to ask whether institutions built for an earlier age are ready for the one now arriving, and to build a new one with today's human innovator and creator – the modern inheritors of that ancient human instinct of innovation and creativity – at our center.

This is the work I hope we can begin together.

Thank you.