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Library Associations Endorse New Agenda for WIPO

Washington, DC -- Four major U.S. library associations today endorsed the Geneva Declaration on the Future of the World Intellectual Property Organization. Together, the American Association of Law Libraries, the American Library Association, the Association of Research Libraries and the Special Libraries Association represent the views of over 90,000 librarians and millions of library users throughout the United States and abroad.

The Geneva Declaration calls for the development of a new agenda for the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) that recognizes the importance of intellectual property for the future of humanity while stressing the importance of balance in the laws and policies governing such intellectual property. WIPO must move beyond its original agenda of simply protecting intellectual property to develop a new agenda that promotes both international development and establishes new approaches to supporting innovation and creativity.

In recent years, our library organizations have been concerned about a number of trends that have combined to limit access to knowledge. These include, among others:

- * the lengthening of the copyright term which substantially delays works from entering the public domain;
- * the development of legal protections for technological protection devices without consideration of whether the circumvention of such a measure would be done for a lawful purpose; and,
- * the efforts to develop new protections for databases containing facts and other public domain material.

Our organizations believe that these recent efforts to expand intellectual property rights have gone too far and must be brought back into balance. The development of a new agenda will give WIPO the opportunity to take a leadership role in re-crafting the necessary balance. In doing so, we urge WIPO to affirmatively seek to balance the rights of creators with the rights of users. This may call for the rollback of recent expanded protections or the development of new user rights to counterbalance them. We also urge WIPO to deal creatively with the issues raised by digital technology to provide appropriate levels of protection while also supporting the rights of users to effectively use the new technologies.

We believe that as WIPO seeks to develop its new agenda, it should:

- * promote the development of a robust and expanding public domain, allowing new works to enter the public domain following a fair and reasonable period of exploitation by the original creator; and,
- * establish accepted limits on the rights of copyright owners that permit reasonable uses for legitimate purposes.

The development of digital technology has created a fundamental challenge to the copyright system. The creation of a new agenda is an opportunity for WIPO to move beyond a protectionist approach to craft balanced solutions to today's issues. Our organizations look forward to working with WIPO and the international library community to develop an agenda that will both promote the protection of intellectual property and, at the same time, encourage access to knowledge and international growth and development.

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The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) is a nonprofit educational organization with over 5000 members nationwide who respond to the legal information needs of legislators, judges and other public officials, corporations and small businesses, law professors and students, attorneys, and members of the general public. AALL's mission is to promote and enhance the value of law libraries, to foster law librarianship and to provide leadership and advocacy in the field of legal information and information policy. Contact: Robert L. Oakley (202-662-9160)

The American Library Association (ALA) is a nonprofit educational organization of over 64,000 librarians, library trustees, and other friends of libraries dedicated to improving library services and promoting the public interest in a free and open information society. Contact: Lynne Bradley (202-628-8410)

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) is a nonprofit organization of 123 research libraries in North America. ARL programs and services promote equitable access to and effective use of recorded knowledge in support of teaching, research, scholarship, and community service. Contact: Prue Adler (202-296-2296)

The Special Libraries Association (SLA) The Special Libraries Association (SLA) is a nonprofit global organization for innovative information professionals and their strategic partners. SLA serves more than 12,000 members in 83 countries in the information profession, including corporate, academic and government information specialists. SLA promotes and strengthens its members through learning, advocacy, and networking initiatives. Contact: Doug Newcomb (703-647-4923)