

**OPENING REMARKS  
MR. DAREN TANG  
DIRECTOR GENERAL  
WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION  
THE 60<sup>th</sup> ORDINARY SESSION OF OAPI ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL  
DECEMBER 8, 2020**

Monsieur Kodjio ADEDZE, Ministre du commerce, de l'industrie et de la consommation locale du Togo, Président en exercice du conseil d'administration de l'Organisation africaine de la propriété intellectuelle (OAPI),

Mesdames et Messieurs les administrateurs,

Monsieur Denis Bohoussou, Directeur Général de l'Organisation africaine de la propriété intellectuelle (OAPI),

Excellences Mesdames et Messieurs les ambassadeurs accrédités auprès du Gouvernement de la République du Togo,

Mesdames et Messieurs les représentants des organisations partenaires,

Honorables invités,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

C'est avec un immense plaisir que je prends pour la première fois la parole en ma qualité de directeur général de l'Organisation Mondiale de la Propriété Intellectuelle (OMPI) à l'occasion de la tenue du conseil d'administration de l'Organisation africaine de la propriété intellectuelle (OAPI). En cette circonstance, je souhaite vous exprimer tout le plaisir que j'ai à vous retrouver depuis notre précédente rencontre, l'année dernière à N'Djamena.

Permettez-moi, avant de m'exprimer en anglais, de vous témoigner ma gratitude pour tous les aimables messages que vous m'avez adressés depuis mon élection à la direction de l'OMPI.

Distinguished Delegates,

It is a great honor for me to join you today at the opening session of the OAPI Administrative council. OAPI has always been a valued partner of WIPO, and a vital part of Africa's growing innovation ecosystem. I hope to build on the already strong relationship between WIPO and OAPI, and deepen our collaboration.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on economies around the world, setting back our hard-earned progress and disrupting the lives and livelihoods of our peoples and communities. But it is also a chance for us to come together to find opportunities for growth, lay the foundations for recovery and cooperate even more strongly amongst member states, organizations and agencies across the globe.

Over the years, partnerships forged between WIPO and Regional Institutions such as OAPI have shaped the IP and innovation ecosystems of the continent. This strong partnership must now be leveraged to ensure that, more than ever, IP is connected to our youths, our entrepreneurs, our communities and ultimately our people.

In these times, the world needs more innovation, not less innovation. The world needs innovative solutions not just to the pandemic, but also other pressing issues, such as food security, access to adequate healthcare, access to knowledge and information, acquisition of appropriate technology and technological information require immediate attention as well.

How can we help a budding start-up in Mali to capitalize on its intangible assets and grow its business? How can we support future inventors like Cameroon's Arthur Zang who invented a handheld computer for health workers to collect and transmit heart readings in rural areas to cardiologists in the city?? How can we encourage talented musicians that they can be the next Angélique Kidjo (Benin) or Charlotte Dipanda?

These are just a sample of amazing innovations and creations that are happening in Africa. It is a continent on the move, and it is our work to build an IP ecosystem to support these innovators and creators. And this work cannot be done by WIPO alone. This is why we are very pleased with the recently concluded cooperation agreement between WIPO, the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO) and OAPI, fondly designated 'The W.A.O Agreement'. In this agreement, we are partnering with the key African IP institutions to bring IP to people to Africa.

Partnerships require commitment from all Parties, and the entry into force on November 14, 2020, of the Bangui Agreement, (Bamako Act) is ample evidence of the

commitment of the OAPI Member States to deepening the OAPI IP infrastructure. I applaud all of you for this important achievement, which I have no doubt will strongly benefit the IP community in the region and beyond.

Distinguished Delegates,

I come from a part of a world which has struggled with development, and has earned hard lessons in building its regional IP ecosystem. I believe strongly that the global IP ecosystem needs to serve the interests of all countries. The Development Agenda will be a strong focus of my work, and it is my conviction that IP is an important tool for developing and least developed countries in achieving sustainable development.

To do this, we aim to strengthen our cooperation in supporting Member States to navigate the rather complex and dynamic IP implications of regional policy frameworks such as the *AU Agenda 2063* – (the fifty-year African economic transformation vision); the *Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa*, (STISA 2024); and more recently, the *African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA)* and its soon to be concluded protocol on Investment, Intellectual Property and Competition. We will also intensify our engagement with the Regional Economic Communities (The RECs) and facilitate their role as the Executive Organs of the larger body of the African Union.

Distinguished Delegates,

Another one of my priorities will be to ensure balance in IP. IP is a tool that incentivizes innovation and creativity. It is a means to an end, not an end in itself. We must ensure that the benefits of IP is spread to all continents. For example, all your countries have products that are unique. Some of these have been branded well. Products like Penja Pepper (Cameroun) or Café Zياما Macenta (Guinea) have, since their registration as GIs, have been better able to capture international markets and improve the livelihoods of the communities that produce them. We look forward to partner you for in creating the next success story from the region that connects its cultural heritage with consumers from around the world.

The increasing and diverse demand for IP services, in these unprecedented times, also calls for diversification of approach. We will not deploy a one size fits all approach in supporting your work, but we will customize our approach to fit what you need, based on your unique circumstances. We will also work closely with the IP offices, as they evolve and transform themselves beyond IP registries to innovation agencies, going beyond traditional IP services to support the commercialization of innovative products and growth of innovation talents.

Young entrepreneurs, local and indigenous communities, small and medium enterprises are playing an important role in Africa's economic transformation. We intend to strengthen our collaboration with OAPI in the promotion of concrete projects that will help them capitalize on their intangible assets, compete effectively and ultimately help drive economic and social development.

Distinguished Delegates,

Permit me at this stage, to seize this opportunity to address the Council in my capacity as Secretary General of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV).

Let me start by acknowledging the entry into force of Annex X of the Bangui Agreement, Bamako Act, which allows for improvements in the efficiency of the Plant Variety Protection system.

Since OAPI joined UPOV in 2014, UPOV has made cooperation with OAPI and its Member States a priority for the success of Plant Variety Protection in the OAPI region.

This cooperation was carried out in line with the specific roadmap established by OAPI in 2015. The roadmap includes various components, including capacity building, particularly from the point of view of administrative management of applications, promotion of the system at national, regional and international levels and training of experts.

The UPOV Office, as well as members who have experience in setting up a national and regional system (such as the European Union) have actively contributed to the following:

- A PPOV project for the “*la Promotion et la Protection des Obtentions Végétales*”, for which OAPI has received financial support from the European Commission of more than 1.5M Euros, represents one of the most important projects in the field of New Varieties of Plants.
  
- The possibility offered by OAPI for applicants to use UPOV PRISMA, which is an online service for Plant Variety Protection applications. This facilitates the transfer of data for applicants, in line with the requirements of each participating service and taking into account the needs of users.
  
- A project on the establishment of a management interface for Plant Variety Protection Services, in partnership with the EU Community Plant Variety Office. This interface will make it possible to receive, process and manage data relating to applications. It will optimize work for the OAPI staff in charge and boost the level of digital services offered by OAPI.

The success of the OAPI system will be important for the development of agriculture in the region. UPOV will support in every way we can.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

In conclusion, let me reiterate that I look forward to building on the excellent foundations that exist between our Organizations. Africa is becoming a global player in innovation and creativity, and we must work closely together to support, facilitate and catalyse this development so that the innovators, the creators, the youths, the enterprises and the communities that you represent will use IP to grow, develop, enrich and prosper.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and look forward to learning of its outcome.

Merci de votre attention.