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ICOM advocates for copyright exceptions for museums at WIPO meeting

ICOM's first time attending the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)'s Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights (SCCR) was a great success.



Samia Slimani and John McAvity talking to delegates

ICOM attended the meeting of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)'s Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights (SCCR) from 16-20 December in Geneva, Switzerland in order to introduce the need for special considerations for museums in a future international treaty. ICOM was represented by John McAvity, Chair of the ICOM Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, and Samia Slimani, ICOM Secretariat Head of Legal Service.

At the meeting, the ICOM representatives focused on building relationships and understanding, introducing the need for museums to be considered in international treaties on copyright issues as they are both owners and users of these rights.

"Museums need to be at the table or they will simply not be on the radar screen," McAvity said. "In this day of rapid international transmission of data and images, copyright plays a considerable role in the abilities of museums to fulfill our mandates and in the lives of everyday citizens who have a right to access their cultural information. Museums face many hurdles to sharing information on the international stage as laws vary greatly from country to country."

In the end, WIPO voted in favour of carrying out a special study of museum issues, which was in itself a major success. The study is expected to produce recommendations that could lead to the inclusion of museums in the future international treaty on exceptions and limitations to copyright and related rights. WIPO also voted to commission an update on a previous study on Copyright Limitations and Exceptions for Libraries and Archives. A large number of national delegations, especially the Canadian delegation, supported ICOM on this issue.

Lobbying at this UN agency is a very important role for ICOM, which works closely with WIPO in a number of areas including the new Art and Culture Mediation Programme, a joint programme held in partnership with WIPO and ICOM.

ICOM would like to invite any members with a particular interest and expertise in copyright matters to serve on a special task force within the Legal Affairs Committee.