

Gurry faces major challenges as he prepares to take the reins at WIPO

We can be pretty sure that Francis Gurry is as old as he says he is. That in itself is progress for the World Intellectual Property Organisation, the UN's beleaguered IP agency of which the 57-year-old Australian will take leadership at the end of September. Unlike Kamil Idris, the man whom he succeeds, the professional past of WIPO's director-general designate is fully transparent and very well known. There will be no surprise revelations once the reins of power have been handed over.

In fact, given Gurry's background it is perhaps surprising that he managed to beat off a strong challenge from the Brazilian José Graça Aranha to take the DG position by 42 votes to 41. The two men were the last left standing following an election campaign which had begun with 15 candidates battling it out to succeed Idris. Not only was Gurry a candidate from a country in the developed world, but he has also practised IP law, written textbooks on the subject and taught IP at a number of academic institutions. In short, he can be seen as sitting very firmly in the pro-IP camp at a time when much international political sentiment, especially in the developing world, is moving the other way. No wonder the Americans and the Europeans were delighted that he emerged victorious.

Since joining WIPO back in the 1980s, Gurry has earned a reputation as a serious thinker about IP's role, but also as a highly effective administrator. Appointed deputy director general in 2003, since then he has been responsible for developing patent policy at the organisation and

also for running the PCT programme, under which well over 100,000 patent applications are filed annually. Prior to this he ran the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Centre, and played a central role in establishing its widely praised domain name dispute resolution service.

However, nothing Gurry has done up to now will prove as challenging as the job that awaits him. In the latter years of Idris's tenure, WIPO was mired in controversy. This was particularly so after it emerged that Idris had not given his proper age when applying for the post of director-general and had continued to state that he was born in 1945 until it was revealed in the Swiss press that he was actually nine years younger. There were also allegations made about the way in which Idris managed staffing and financial issues at WIPO HQ in Geneva. These were examined by external auditors Ernst & Young in 2005, with no concrete conclusions emerging. In October 2007, a group of countries, including the US and many European states, blocked approval of WIPO's budget and demanded that Idris step down. In off-the-record briefings, US officials also let it be known that withdrawal from WIPO was a possibility if things were not resolved. Idris was eventually persuaded to go early after negotiating a very generous pension package.

Gurry's task now is to restore WIPO's battered reputation and to make the organisation relevant in a world where IP politics are becoming increasingly important. Internally, he will need to ensure that all appointments are transparent

and insist that senior managers are fully accountable. If he is to succeed, Gurry will have to show steel in facing down vested interests inside the office, while at the same time developing the velvet touch of the expert diplomat in his external dealings. Should he manage to

pull it off, then WIPO has the opportunity to place itself once again at the heart of global IP debates. If he fails, then the organisation is likely to slip ever further into obscurity, relevant only as a staging post for global trademark and patent applications. ■

IP Business Congress all set for Amsterdam lift-off

The IP Business Congress, to be held in Amsterdam on 25th and 26th June looks like being one of the major IP events of 2008 and quite possibly this year's most important gathering of global IP business leaders. Organised by IAM magazine in conjunction with Ocean Tomo LLC, the Congress combines the first-ever Chief Intellectual Property Officer (CIPO) Summit and a live IP auction in which assets worth potentially many millions of euros will be up for sale.

All day on 25th June and for the morning of 26th June, the CIPO Summit will focus on understanding the roles and the responsibilities of the CIPO. It will identify the regulatory and business challenges facing today's CIPOs, and will explore the opportunities and dangers these present. To lead the debate, a world-class faculty of over 70 speakers has been assembled.

On the afternoon of 26th June, Ocean Tomo LLC will hold its second ever European IP Auction. Ocean Tomo has so far sold well over US\$70 million worth of IP at auctions in both Europe and North America. At its London event last year, an internet-related patent was sold for £2.47 million (US\$4.9 million), a world-record price. Dozens of lots encompassing a variety of technologies and industries will be offered in Amsterdam.

The IP Business Congress goes to the very heart of IP as a business asset – with high-level debate and IP monetisation in action. Already over 300 delegate places have been filled and spaces are going fast. To make sure you are at this unique gathering of global IP thought-leaders, register at the Congress's website:

www.ipbusinesscongress.com

See you in Amsterdam!



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