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POLITICS

# Intellectual property rights could harm progress

*Developing countries feel brunt of the law*

*Companies that have no legal protection will refrain from opening branches here*

By Leila Hatoum

Special to The Daily Star

Friday, October 08, 2004



BEIRUT: Intellectual property laws in Lebanon must keep pace with a rapidly growing global technology market, Lebanese and American experts said Thursday at a seminar on the Information, Communication and Technology sector at the American University for Science and Technology (AUST).

Entitled "the Impact of the Intellectual Property Rights on the Information Technology Sector," the seminar was organized by the AUST and the Lebanese Information and Technology Association, (LITA), in collaboration with the American Embassy in Lebanon.

LITA President Mona Achkar said in today's globalized world "business has changed in a way that has emphasized the value of ideas and knowledge."

She added that the world is changing rapidly as a transition to a hi-tech economy is occurring, "contributing to the economic growth and the wealth of some individuals as well as some countries."

Achkar says that "information flow has knocked down the geographic barriers, and we are all becoming part of a giant net."

According to participants, information technology also "contributes to good governance by increasing transparency, information and accountability, facilitating accurate decision-making and public participation, and enhancing efficient delivery of government services."

On the other hand "governments are urged to ensure equitable access to new

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But with technological development concentrated in the developed countries, "we are afraid the intellectual-property-rights system could negatively affect the developing countries ability to catch up with technological development," she said.

jm. Yes  
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 (View)

Legal expert Craig Blakely, founder and managing instructor of the U.S.-based Alliance Law Group, which specializes in technology-related issues and provides legal services in the telecommunications, Internet (e-commerce, and e-government), and intellectual property (patent, trademark and copyright) areas, was the key speaker at the seminar.

Blakely, who emphasized his love for Lebanon during his speech, said he came to participate in the Beirut International Marathon this Sunday, and has visited Jordan and Palestine many times as a legal adviser.

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He explained that the Internet "is going to be more important in the future than it is today, with the base systems gradually being replaced by Internet technology."

Blakely also explained the importance of the IT sector in today's economy, and the importance of copyright, trademarks and patent laws on that sector.

He explained that the first concept in terms of international development, which is copyrights, means that the expression of an idea is protected on behalf of who created it.

"Any idea expressed in a tangible form, music software, etc." said Blakely.

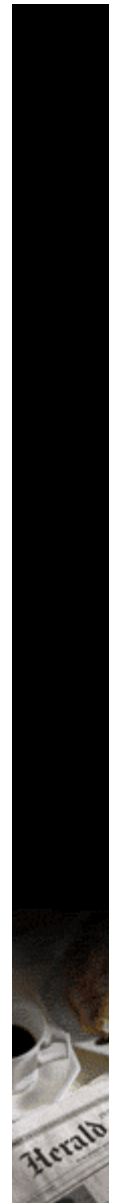
He explained that this is misunderstood since the copyright "doesn't protect the idea itself but the expression of the idea."

He said that if he wrote a book on how to build a house, he could not forbid a person from building the house in compliance with his ideas.

But "it will be a copyright breach if a person copies my book and sells it," said Blakely.

The second concept, the trade mark, according to Blakely "means a name that is uniquely associated to a product/business service."

He said that trademark "is also designed as a consumer protection so that the consumer knows what he is buying and where is belonged to."



He said if someone pirated a Microsoft program, "then it will be a copyright breach; but if this person sells the pirated software under the Microsoft name then it will be a trademark breach," said Blakely.

The third concept, which "is the patent rights and patent law," means giving the creator of an idea certain privileges and exclusivity and rights for sharing his idea with others.

As to why laws based on these concepts are in Lebanon, "the Lebanese government signed an international copyright treaty, and that the creators should get compensation for their creations," said Blakely.

Furthermore, most companies that have no legal protection for their products in the country will refrain from opening office branches in Lebanon.

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