



Intersession : Civil Society Statement  
Presentation : Plenary Session - 16 July 2003

Statement by the Working Group on  
Patents, Copyrights, Trademarks (P.C.T)

by **Richard Stallman** [rms@gnu.org](mailto:rms@gnu.org)

The benefit of computers is that it's easier to copy and manipulate information. Corporations are using two kinds of imposed monopolies to deny you this benefit.

Software patents restrict how you use your computer. They restrict developing software. A big program combines dozens or hundreds of ideas. When each idea can be patented, only IBMs and Microsofts can safely write software. Bye bye to any independent local software industry. Software patents must be rejected.

Copyrights restrict using and sharing information--exactly what your computer is for. It was fine to trade away the freedom to copy when only publishers could copy; the public lost nothing. Today peer-to-peer sharing must be legal. WSIS should not teach people that sharing is wrong.

Copyrights block access to scientific publications. Every university should be free to make an open-access mirror for any journal, so no one is excluded from access.

Then there's the economic effect. When companies have power over you, they bleed you dry. Copyrights and software patents increase the digital divide and concentrate wealth. We have too much scarcity in the world; let's not create more. TRIPS is bad enough, but software patents and the WIPO copyright treaty go beyond TRIPS, and WSIS should reject them.

Computer users need software that respects their freedom. We call it "free (libre) software", meaning freedom, not gratis. You have the freedom to run it, study it, change it, and redistribute it.

Free software means you control your computing. With non-free software, the software owners control it. They put in spy features, back doors, restrictions.

With free software, you can make the program do what you want. "You" could mean an individual programmer, a company, or a group of users with similar needs. Non-programmers can convince or pay programmers to make changes for you. With free software, you're free to make it handle your language. Free to adapt it for your disability.

Software owners deliberately make programs incompatible. With free software, users can make it follow standards.

You need free software to train master programmers. Non-free software is a secret, so nobody can learn from it. Free software gives talented young people in Africa the chance to learn how to work on real software. School should also teach students the spirit of cooperation. All schools should use free software.

Free software is necessary for sustainable development. If everyone in your country uses a program that's secret and controlled by a single company, that's not development, that's **electronic colonization**.

Working Group URL: <http://www.wsis-pct.org>

*Copyright 2003 Richard Stallman Verbatim copying and distribution of this entire text are permitted without royalties in any medium provided this notice is preserved.*