

INVENTORS AND THE WORLD

Some Challenges

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I. IFIA: THE ONLY ORGANIZATION REPRESENTING INVENTORS WORLDWIDE

Invention knows no frontiers and inventors exist in all countries.

Inventors are lucky to have a world organization such as IFIA which groups them together through their national associations; an organization which represents them and fights for their interests at the international level.

Created in 1968, the International Federation of Inventors' Associations (IFIA), has remained united during the past nearly 40 years, and the number of our members has increased continuously. Today, they come from more than 80 countries. IFIA is recognized internationally as the sole representative of inventors worldwide: it has an observer status at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in Geneva, and is a member of the Standing Advisory Committee before the European Patent Office (SACEPO), in Munich.

We must protect IFIA like the apple of one's eye, for the simple reason that inventors cannot afford that such an organization be wounded or damaged.

During my 15 years of presidency, I had to face **three major challenges**:

The first is that we should **never give an opportunity** to our enemies **to divide IFIA** by creating a second worldwide organization for inventors. I am proud to say that all such tentatives have failed until now, but the risk is still there and we must constantly be on our guard: not only vis-à-vis what others are trying to do against IFIA, but also what we ourselves are doing which might hurt the unity of our organization in a way or another. That is why when dealing with important political issues I always consulted beforehand and on a personal basis some of the leaders of our national associations and then referred the matter to the official organs of IFIA, namely the Executive Committee and/or the General Assembly.

The second challenge IFIA has to face is to **avoid**, as much as possible the **withdrawal of member associations, or the cessation of their membership**; thus the adoption by IFIA of a system of "Candidate member" for those associations which do not, or cannot, pay their annual fees during two consecutive years. But we try never to loose contact and keep in touch with them regularly. By the way I am glad to see that our friends of the Polish association have recently decided to return to IFIA.

Our third challenge is to keep bringing through the years **new members** to IFIA. IFIA's greatest challenge in this respect would be to convince an association representing the inventors of the **USA** to join us, but we haven't succeeded yet.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF INDEPENDENT INVENTORS IS NOT RECOGNIZED

IFIA represents independent inventors. This is a **very difficult task**, and that for two reasons at least:

First, because in most countries, IFIA has to struggle in order to try to change the **image of the inventor in the public eye**. In fact, inventors live in a paradox. On the one hand, they are considered as the symbol of the genius and creativity of the nation; and on the other hand, being non-conformists, they are seen as marginal by that very same society ! The truth is that still today, most people see the inventor as a dreamer, an eccentric, or sometimes even as a true crackpot !

It is the duty of IFIA, and the duty of each association, to challenge this distorted image of the inventor, namely through regular contacts with the press and the media in general.

IFIA should also try to solicitate some famous inventors from different parts of the world and ask them to lend the prestige of their name to IFIA.

Another difficulty which IFIA has to face is the fact that independent inventors are... **"independent"**! Inventors are **individualists**. Inventors are mainly interested in their invention(s). Conclusion: independent inventors have **no real lobby** to back them.

Things being what they are, the existence of independent inventors is not recognized. To the extent that the **word "inventor"** is simply ignored by the relevant international governmental organizations. Here are three examples that occurred during the past 10 years and which speak by themselves.

In **2006**, the Questionnaire of the **European Commission** on the patent system in Europe, which led to the July 2006 Hearing in Brussels, did not mention, not even once, the word "inventor", in its 9-page document !

In March **2002**, **WIPO** (the World Intellectual Property Organization) organized a World Forum on the International Patent System. 45 speakers were invited by WIPO to this three-day event. Not one of the speakers was an inventor, or a representative of inventors.

In **1995**, the European Patent Office (**EPO**) organized an important Hearing in Munich entitled "*Strategies of the European Patent Organization (EPO): Ideas and Topics.*"

In my statement during this Hearing, I said the following:

"One wonders if the word inventor really exists in EPO's vocabulary. In any case, the word inventor is not mentioned even once in its 14-page "strategic" paper (...). Obviously many seem to forget that without inventors there are no inventions, no patents, no patent offices."

IFIA, as well as inventor associations, should repeat it again and again: independent inventors are behind no less than one fourth to one third of the patents applied for by residents in the major industrialized countries. In the other countries, they even represent a greater percentage. In this respect, IFIA should undertake a new statistical survey with the help of the national patent offices in order to update the figures I obtained in 1995-1997.

To convince through those statistics government authorities of the importance and value of independent inventors, a lobby is essential. Our main allies in this lobby should be the representatives of the Small and Medium-Size enterprises (**SMEs**), in particular the **micro and small innovative enterprises** - under the European Community system 1 to 9 employees, and 10 to 49 employees, respectively.

III. THE INTERNATIONAL PATENT SYSTEM IS NOT FAVORABLE TO INVENTORS

Concerning the international patent system, IFIA faces "the challenge of challenges", our main goal being the creation at last of an affordable and simple European Community patent, and in a long run a World Patent, affordable to all.

When it comes to the **(European) Community Patent**, the **language problem** is always put forward as the greatest obstacle. To that my answer is that if airline pilots use English as their common international language, and if national driving licences can be internationally recognized, one wonders why European governments could not find a solution for the patent system language problem.

On another subject, I strongly advocate **reduced fees for independent inventors**, as well as for some other groups such as the **micro enterprises**. I have been advocating, year after year, a **50% reduction** in fees (to residents as well as to foreigners). This concerns not only filing fees, but also search fees, and if possible examination fees. What counts for the independent inventor, is what he has to pay as 'up-front' costs, that is to say the sum he must pay in advance at the very early stage of his national and international patenting.

I know some heads of patent offices who claim that if such reductions were adopted, their office would go bankrupt. Why such a reaction ? Because patent offices live from patent fees, in particular filing fees. It is up to us, IFIA and inventor associations, to convince them that they should not worry: this system of reduction of fees has been adopted since a long time in the USA, and yet the US PTO earns so much money that the US Government uses every year millions of dollars from this source of revenue in favour of other government expenses or projects. This is one of the reasons why we, in IFIA, would like very much to have the representatives of American inventors among our members, they who have been using this system for decades and know the rules.

Let's face it: things will not change in Europe, or elsewhere, until there is a drastic change in our system. By practically excluding the inventors' voice and ignoring their financial difficulties, decision makers and governments should realize that they hinder their own economy, that is the development of their country.

IV. WE COULD HAVE GOLD IN OUR HANDS

This being said, we who claim to be the representatives of inventors should be **inventive** !

For example. **We live now in the computer age** - an age, by the way, which owes a lot to inventors. **Internet** - in particular the **www** - has created a brand new environment which is very much in favor of the independent inventor. A new culture is born, free, rapid, universal, distance has been eliminated, frontiers have been abolished.

Now the question is: are we taking full advantage of that brand new world with all the possibilities it offers ?

IFIA, for its part, refused to be left behind. We created in November 1999, a unique website, today called **www.1000inventions.com** and we strongly believe that this virtual market place for inventions could offer a fantastic potential. It is a fully automated system. The Guidelines for the Submission Forms exists in 13 languages, no less. Some 1,200 inventions from 107

countries have already been published on this site. The number of monthly "hits" (visits) is over 3,000.

IFIA should give high priority to this project. It is a must ! IFIA should convince the leaders of the inventor associations that they should promote the site among their members, stressing the fact that this free of charge service can be a first step towards the commercialization of their inventions. Last but not least, IFIA should further upgrade the site by finding ways that will attract the **business community**.

You might have heard about the story of '**eBay**', the famous web site for auctions, where you can buy, or sell, anything, absolutely anything. 'eBay' also started with a **vision**. The vision of computer programmer Pierre Omidyar, an American of Iranian origin. Like Pierre Omidyar, the creator of 'eBay', IFIA should seek the assistance of a business minded person, who will be able to further develop our "1000inventions" site, so that it becomes the **top online market place for inventions in the world**. What an **extraordinary challenge** for IFIA !

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