



**KNOWLEDGE  
WITHOUT  
BOUNDARIES**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Celebrating the ‘miracle of Marrakesh’ - the day the barriers come down**

**30 September 2016: Today, EIFL joins the World Blind Union and our global partners in celebrating the entry into force of the Marrakesh Treaty for persons with print disabilities.**

From today, blind, visually impaired and print disabled people in 22 countries need no longer be denied access to books and other reading materials due to copyright restrictions - barriers that come tumbling down as the Marrakesh Treaty enters into force.

The Treaty is a major step in ending the book famine for blind and visually impaired people - the fact that only 7% of published works are made available globally in accessible formats. In the developing world, where an overwhelming majority of blind and visually impaired people live, the figure is less than 1%.

The 22 countries that have ratified the Treaty are obliged to ensure that their national copyright laws are in alignment with the Treaty’s key terms.

The changes will, in a nutshell, allow beneficiary persons or anyone acting on their behalf, to make copies in accessible formats - like Braille, digitized audio and large print - of copyrighted works without seeking permission from rightsholders, and to

share them domestically. In addition, the Treaty allows blind people's organizations, libraries and other so-called 'authorized entities' to send accessible format copies to other countries that have ratified or acceded to the Treaty. At this stage, this is 22 countries, but with encouraging signs that many more countries are poised to ratify.

This means that libraries will have an important role to play in ensuring that the Treaty achieves its aims.

### **'Same book, same day'**

"The Treaty permits the making of accessible format copies on-demand, enabling libraries to serve all their users equally - same book, same day," said Teresa Hackett, Copyright and Libraries Programme Manager of EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries), an international non-profit organization supporting access to knowledge through libraries.

Libraries will also have new global responsibilities regarding cross-border sharing of accessible format materials.

"Now, libraries with larger collections of accessible works, such as in Canada, can share these collections with blind and visually impaired people in countries with fewer resources, such as Mali," continued Hackett.

"Since adoption of the Treaty in Marrakesh, Morocco in June 2013, EIFL has worked hard with the World Blind Union and other global partners to encourage ratification of the Treaty by the 20 countries needed for it to enter into force. We were able to work with the library community in Mongolia and the Mongolian Federation for the Blind to assist the Mongolian government in ratifying the Treaty. As a result, in September 2015, Mongolia became the 10th country to ratify the Treaty."

M. Tsengel, who manages Ulaanbaatar Public Library's accessible publication service, had good cause to advocate for ratification of the Treaty:

"Publishers, who own all the rights, do not permit us to convert school textbooks although we have modern recording studios to create digital talking books. So blind children learning at school have no modern books, and rely instead on ancient Braille textbooks printed in Russia during the socialist period.

"The Marrakesh Treaty has opened the doors of learning for blind and visually impaired people in Mongolia," he said.

There are over 200 million blind and visually impaired people denied access to knowledge in the remaining 167 WIPO member states that have not yet ratified the Treaty. Vigorous advocacy campaigns are underway in many of them.

For example, EIFL is supporting ratification in Lesotho. The National University of Lesotho library has facilities for reproducing and distributing accessible books, but despite the best efforts of the Special Educational Needs Unit and library staff, there was never enough material available in accessible formats for the students.

“I studied at the university from 2005 and graduated in 2010 as a lawyer with a Bachelor of Law degree”, said Nkhasi Sefuthi, Human Rights and Advocacy Officer, Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD).

“With regard to accessing materials, it was a disaster, and I had to mainly rely on my friends to read out for me. I am very excited about the Marrakesh Treaty. Imagine being able to easily get accessible materials from other countries. It would spur other students in Lesotho to study and lead fulfilled lives,” said Nkhasi.

### **A giant step forward - but still a long way to go**

Today, blind and visually impaired people in 22 countries can celebrate. For the Treaty to realize its full potential, however, many more countries must ratify it. Then governments must change their national copyright laws in ways that fully uphold the goal of the Treaty - that is, to end the book famine.

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### **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

- The full name of the treaty is: ‘Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled’
- The Marrakesh Treaty was adopted by member states of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in Morocco on 28 June 2013. By **29 September 2016 the Treaty has been ratified or acceded to by 22 countries:** India, El Salvador, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Mali, Paraguay, Singapore, Argentina, Mexico, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, Australia, Brazil, Peru, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Israel, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Canada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Tunisia. It enters into force on 30 September 2016.
- A WIPO survey in 2006 found that fewer than 60 countries had limitations and exceptions clauses in their copyright laws that make special provision for

visually impaired persons to create, for example, Braille, large print or digitized audio versions of copyrighted texts. The cross-border sharing of accessible formats was legally uncertain. All 22 countries that have ratified the Treaty are now obliged to implement it into national law.

- According to the World Health Organization, there are some 285 million blind and visually impaired persons in the world, 90% of whom live in low income settings. Of the 285 million, 39 million are blind and 246 million have low vision.
- According to the World Blind Union, of the million or so books published each year in the world, less than 10 per cent are made available in formats accessible to visually impaired persons.

### **EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries)**

EIFL supported negotiations over five years at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and participated in the Diplomatic Conference that led to the adoption in 2013 of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled.

To fulfill the objective of the Treaty, that is, to get books into the hands of people who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled, EIFL supports ratification of the treaty in partner countries, and its implementation into national copyright law.

Find out more <http://www.eifl.net/eifl-in-action/right-read>

**About EIFL:** EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) is a not-for-profit organization that works with libraries to enable access to knowledge in developing and transition economy countries in Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe and Latin America. [www.eifl.net](http://www.eifl.net).

### **About the EIFL Copyright and Libraries Programme:**

The EIFL Copyright and Libraries Programme builds capacity of librarians in copyright and develops useful resources on copyright issues. The programme advocates for global rules to benefit libraries campaigns for national copyright law reform. [www.eifl.net/programmes/copyright-and-libraries-programme](http://www.eifl.net/programmes/copyright-and-libraries-programme).