

INTERNATIONAL INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ALLIANCE

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SPECIAL MENTION

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

While a Working Party was established for the WTO accession negotiations of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) in February 1998, the first meeting of the Working Party did not take place until October 2004. The country is not yet a member of the Berne Convention nor a signatory to the WIPO "Internet" treaties. As of 2001, there was as yet no law protecting copyright in the Lao PDR, though it appears that the country is in the process of preparing legislation for its accession to the Berne Convention.

The country's location gives rise to concerns regarding the potential migration of optical disc plants from neighboring Southeast Asian countries where illegal overproduction and export is a significant problem. The lack of an appropriate legal regime to address optical disc overproduction may become problematic should optical disc plants migrate to the country. In 1997, the U.S. and Lao governments concluded an Agreement on Trade Relations but the agreement was not signed until 2003. In late 2004, the U.S. Senate approved extending normal trade relations to Laos (the grant was part of the Miscellaneous Trade & Technical Corrections Act of 2004 signed by the President in December 2004) and brings into effect the 1997 trade agreement, which includes a chapter on intellectual property protection and enforcement. The Government of Laos should be encouraged to adopt the necessary measures to implement its obligations under the 1997 trade agreement as soon as possible.