

INTERNATIONAL INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ALLIANCE

2007 SPECIAL 301 REPORT

SPECIAL MENTION

OMAN

IIPA specially mentions Oman due to the growing threat of piracy of copyright materials through unauthorized broadcasts (or rebroadcasts) of satellite or cable (Pay TV) signals. Once a market entirely dominated by piracy, Oman turned the corner in the late 1990s, and by 2001, Oman had been removed from the Special 301 lists. Nonetheless, the Gulf region has always been susceptible to unauthorized transmission of broadcast signals, and unfortunately, in Oman, the copyright industries now increasingly suffer from the growing threat of cable piracy. Industry groups have raised this issue several times with the Ministry of Commerce over the years and have yet to see any action taken against the cable pirates, despite providing thorough intelligence. It has also come to IIPA's attention that the Omani government (particularly the military) has become involved in the unauthorized transmission of broadcasts over cable.¹ While the quality of reception appears to be very poor (causing some residents to subscribe to legal services notwithstanding the availability of the pirate hookup), they still get the benefit of Pay TV sports channels. As there are thousands of illegal hookups to our knowledge, this translates to significant losses due to lost subscriptions each year.

As the United States has ratified the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement, thereby acknowledging the Omani government's obligations to fairly protect intellectual property rights,² the U.S. government should urge the Omani government not to let the signal theft issue become a thorn in the trade relationship. As with other piracy problems in the past, the signal theft issue can easily be addressed by the Omani government if they have the will to do so.

¹ In this instance, an SMATV (Satellite Master Antenna Television) with a head end machine is re-distributed through a residential compound by coaxial cable over a distance of several miles. The residences then receive multiple channels (in this case 75 channels including free over the air and pay channels).

² IIPA does not here go into detail regarding the FTA implementation process, but notes that the Omanis have been working on implementing legislation throughout 2006.