



For Immediate Release
March 16, 2004

Contact: Maria Strong, IIPA
(202) 833-4198

THE U.S. COPYRIGHT INDUSTRIES ACKNOWLEDGE THE CONCLUSION OF THE FTA NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, AND HOPE FOR IMMEDIATE, IMPROVED COPYRIGHT ENFORCEMENT IN-COUNTRY

The International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA), comprised of six trade associations and their over 1,350 companies representing the U.S. copyright industries, acknowledged the hard work of U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick and his team of intellectual property rights negotiators for reaching final agreement yesterday on a Free Trade Agreement with the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic FTA will be integrated into the recently concluded Central American FTA with Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. IIPA President Eric H. Smith said, "By securing high levels of obligations on copyright protection and enforcement with the Dominican Republic, the United States has signaled that it seeks the widest dissemination of copyright-based enabling technologies and entertainment products among our neighbors as well as around the world."

IIPA congratulates the Dominican Republic for agreeing to a strong copyright and enforcement text that should enable them to further develop their own local copyright-based industries and better attract investment. However, IIPA emphasizes that significant improvements are needed now to address the systemic delays in criminal copyright cases in the courts of first instance and at the appellate level and the longstanding broadcast piracy problem. One of the most looming problems remains the Dominican Republic government's questionable commitment to effective and transparent copyright enforcement. While investigations and raids against the sale and distribution of infringing sound recordings and for the unauthorized broadcast transmissions of copyrighted programming were initiated in early 2003 by administrative and criminal enforcement agencies, the ensuing criminal actions remain stymied. Criminal trials in key copyright infringement cases have been postponed numerous times under an antiquated court system which permits such delays.

"IIPA looks forward to closely reviewing the final Dominican Republic FTA text when it is made public," Smith added. "While we imagine many provisions may track the CAFTA IPR text, we are hopeful that the negotiators specifically highlighted the broadcast and sound recording piracy problems and the ineffective judicial system, during their negotiations in order to address these problems once and for all."

IIPA and its member associations will be closely monitoring developments in the Dominican Republic in the coming weeks. IIPA is on-record as recommending that, if concrete commitments and progress in significantly improving prosecutorial and judicial results in pending criminal copyright infringement cases and in producing tangible results in combating broadcast piracy are not achieved by April 30, 2004, then the U.S. government should make a determination that the Dominican Republic fails to provide "adequate and effective" protection to U.S. copyright owners and action should be taken immediately to withdraw or suspend preferential trade benefits or remove eligibility status under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) trade programs.

* * *