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AGENDA ITEM 24

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INTERNATIONAL NGO:

EIFL.NET

I speak behalf of Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL), that partners with libraries in 60 developing and transition countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe.

EIFL congratulates WIPO member states and the Secretariat on entry into force of the Marrakesh Treaty. We congratulate the World Blind Union, Knowledge Ecology International, David Hammerstein and many others who worked tirelessly to achieve this historic treaty.

EIFL undertook to support early ratification in partner countries for two key reasons.

Throughout the world, libraries are home to the largest collections of accessible materials. And only blind people's organizations, libraries and other so-called 'authorized entities' can send accessible format copies to other countries.

In my own country, Nepal – a Least Developed Country - a Right to Read campaign was established with the Nepal Library and Information Consortium, the Nepal Association of the Blind and other groups. Now we are working collectively to encourage ratification.

We are happy that the government of Nepal has welcomed the entry into force of the Treaty. We hope that ratification will be given the utmost priority by the new government.

The Treaty would bring huge benefits to the lives of 40,000 school and college-age children who are blind or visually impaired in Nepal. Only 10% receive education, and those who do are often excluded from learning because of lack of audio and Braille books, made worse by the earthquakes in 2015.

We are grateful to the Accessible Books Consortium for supporting the production of textbooks for school children.

Nepal is also a multilingual nation. For English speakers, accessible books from English-speaking countries, such as Australia, Singapore and Canada could be imported. For speakers of other languages, materials could be imported from India, the first country to ratify the treaty.

EIFL is on hand to support ratification and implementation in all our other partner countries so that people with print disabilities can get access to all the books and reading materials they need, irrespective of their location. For example, we are currently working with librarians in Kyrgyzstan, Senegal, Lesotho, Lithuania, Moldova, Ghana and Uganda.

Finally Mr. Chairman, we cannot imagine a life without reading - that is essential to gaining knowledge and improving literacy. As Mr. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, said, ‘Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope’.

For blind and visually impaired people, I firmly believe that the Marrakesh Treaty is a way to achieve that hope.

Thank you.