

Ethiopia, EU, US agree on coffee trademarks

European and American coffee roasting and distribution companies have signed an agreement to use Ethiopia's coffee specialty trademarks.

Addis Ababa - The Ethiopian Intellectual Property Office (EIPO) made this announcement on Wednesday 12 September.

This week's agreements follow legal battles with large coffee distributors, such as the Starbucks chain in the US, over Ethiopia's rights to trademark its indigenous coffee, which would give the country a larger share of revenue from the industry.

Wondwossen Belete, a representative of the EIPO Director General, told Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) Wednesday that the companies which signed the agreement included some of the biggest coffee companies in Europe and the United States.

Some 24 coffee roaster and distributor companies in the US, as well as one company in Holland, have signed the agreement, he added.

The trade of coffee is Ethiopia's largest export, and generates 60% of its total export earnings, while employing about 12 million people.

The best Ethiopian coffee may be compared with the finest coffee in the world, and premium washed Arabica beans fetch some of the highest prices on the world market.

Belete said that last week, the EIPO Director General held discussions with 18 British coffee companies concerning the licensing agreement, and that two British companies have signed; while further talks would be held to reach an understanding with the remaining companies.

He said the Director General had also held discussions on the matter with 20 German coffee companies - 10 of which are expected to sign; and licensing debates are underway with a renowned Japanese coffee company.

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