

Piracy looms over Copyright Summit

WASHINGTON: Movie directors, composers, authors, legal experts, policy-makers and others are meeting here this week to discuss the "threats and opportunities" the Internet poses to copyright in the digital age.

Some 500 delegates from more than 55 countries are scheduled to attend the 2nd World Copyright Summit being held on Tuesday and Wednesday, 9 - 10 June 2009, at the Ronald Reagan Convention Center.

Web and software giants Google and Microsoft and representatives of movie, music and book rights societies are also among those attending the summit organised by the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers (Cisac), whose president is Bee Gees brother Robin Gibb.

French Culture Minister Christine Albanel, Hollywood director Milos Forman and US Senator Patrick Leahy chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, are among the nearly 100 speakers slated to address the gathering.

Looming over the summit is the threat posed to artists by digital piracy.

Organiser Cisac, listing the "key issues" for the summit, cited "How the digital media environment is providing common threats and opportunities to all creative repertoires."

Kathy Garmezy, assistant executive director for government and international affairs of the Directors Guild America, said that while counterfeit DVDs and the like remain a concern for the movie industry, the biggest danger is on the Internet.

"The counterfeiting kind of piracy is certainly a problem," Garmezy said, "but it's so much more manageable than online piracy."

Delegates to the summit will be looking to hammer out a united approach to illegal downloading, she said. "Just like the Internet is global, the battles are global and we can only win them with united action," she said.

"We have to find a way to reach common peace between those who think the Internet is free and the artist who create the works," Garmezy said.

"This is not about spoiled artists or rich studios," she added. "It's about the act of creation and the future of it. Nobody's going to stop piracy altogether but can you keep it to a point where it won't destroy you?"

Garmezy and others praised the recent passage of a bill in France to combat Internet piracy that is considered one of the toughest in the world.

"We're adamant about taking a stand to support the French," she said.

The legislation sets up a "three-strikes" system for illegal downloaders of music or film who first receive an email warning, then a letter and finally lose their Internet account for up to a year if they are caught a third time.

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the United States, however, have been notably reluctant to act as copyright "enforcers."

The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) announced in December that it planned to stop suing people who download music illegally and focus instead on getting ISPs to take action.

Six months later, however, no ISPs have publicly signed on to the programme.

Phil Crosland, an executive vice president of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, said his organization was "trying to negotiate fair payment, whether it's with Yahoo!, AOL or YouTube."

"We're finding it challenging to generate fair payment from many of these websites who are using the contents of our members," he said. "Composers of film and TV music are missing out on this migration to mobile and Web world."

On the Internet piracy front, Garnezy said "solutions have to be put in place that allow people to deal with evolving technology."

Theodore Feder, president of the Artists Rights Society, which represents visual artists such as painters, sculptors and photographers, said that promises to be an uphill battle.

"The technology will always be a little ahead of the policing and the monitoring," he said.

According to industry estimates cited by the US Congressional International Anti-Piracy Caucus, global piracy costs US firms over \$25-billion in lost sales annually.

For more information, see: www.copyrightsummit.com

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