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Geneva, Switzerland.

Global Initiative for Open Innovation launched to promote patent system transparency

The Initiative for Open Innovation (IOI), a new global facility dedicated to making the world's patent systems more transparent, inclusive and navigable was launched today at the UN sponsored Conference on Intellectual Property and Public Policy in Geneva.

The IOI was established by Cambia and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) with a \$US3 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to QUT in 2008. Professor Richard Jefferson, founder of Cambia and a Professor at QUT, will direct the initiative.

"Patents have become a lightning-rod for criticism and debate," said Professor Jefferson at the conference in Geneva. "Our inability to navigate the growing volume and complexity of worldwide patent landscapes has created a climate of fear and uncertainty that stymies policy reform and hinders innovation."

With the current fragmentation of patent information, and the cumbersome tools and high costs to analyse them, answers to many patent questions remain obscure. Where can producers legally produce and export generic versions of patented medicines? What obstacles do patents present for the rapid development and dissemination of vaccines for a flu pandemic? What are the patterns of new research into neglected diseases, and is this research likely to evolve into effective treatments? Can we provide a sound evidence base and support for proposals for patent pooling, open innovation structures and other alternative innovation models to address key challenges of medical, environmental and agricultural research?

The IOI builds on the platform of the Cambia Patent Lens (www.patentlens.net), an open access, autonomous web-based patent search facility supported by The Rockefeller Foundation and the Government of Norway. The Patent Lens is amongst the most popular global full-text patent search tools.

Over the next few years, IOI will add the full text of worldwide patents and applications in all languages, associated DNA & protein sequences and chemical structures, and will integrate business and regulatory data and scientific & technical literature into the Patent Lens. The Patent Lens will become a user-driven resource, translated to and searchable in any language. There will also be new web applications for the innovation community to build public maps of intellectual property in any field.

Global health will be amongst the first sectors to benefit from the new facility.

Together with its partners, IOI will create an open Web 2.0 platform to map worldwide patent landscapes around such challenges of malaria, tuberculosis and other neglected diseases.

Using sophisticated visualization and decision support tools, researchers, small business and policy makers can then navigate the complex maze of IP, making it simpler, faster and cheaper for scientific research to have an impact in the world. The same approach and platform can be used in any innovative field, from biofuels and green technology to food and agriculture, from information technology to nanotechnology.

“Our goal is to create a free, open, global web-based facility – a cyberinfrastructure – needed to forge an evidence-based and inclusive innovation ecosystem, said Jefferson. “When patents can help society solve problems, they should be identified, learned-from and engaged with. When they block problem solving, they can be put in context and addressed through action, invention, negotiation or policy change.”

“This initiative is very timely as the international policy community is undertaking an active process of review and examination of innovation structures and strategies in a range of key technology domains,” said Francis Gurry, Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization, the UN Agency hosting the Geneva Conference.

“We look forward to continuing cooperation with the Initiative for Open Innovation as we both seek to advance this indispensable work.” Mr Gurry added.

An International Advisory Council, co-chaired by the President of South Africa’s Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Dr Sibusiso Sibisi, and by Dr Terry Cutler, Chair of the Australian Innovation System Review, will convene in August to help shape the strategies, operations and structure of the IOI.

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About Cambia & the Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

Cambia is an international non-profit institute dedicated to social change. For almost two decades Cambia has been creating new enabling biotechnologies, paradigms and tools for sharing science for public good. Cambia (www.cambia.org) combines social entrepreneurship, molecular biology, innovation policy, patent law and informatics and is the founder of the BiOS Initiative (Biological Open Source www.bios.net) and the Patent Lens (www.patentlens.net).

Cambia and the IOI are now based at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT; www.qut.edu.au) in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. QUT, a major Australian University, is a leader in open access law, and is amongst the first Universities in the world to mandate unfettered open public access to its scholarly work.

For more information about the IOI initiative, please visit: www.openinnovation.org

Contacts:

Professor Richard Jefferson,
CEO, Cambia
r.jefferson@cambia.org
+1 510 229 0977