

Preface



Today, in the growth of world economy, technology innovations have come to play an increasingly important role. Even though our nation's economy is on the road to a gradual recovery, we still have some serious problems. For example, the working population is declining because of the falling birthrate and aging population. Also, optimal locations as production basis have been developed in various parts of the world. Under these circumstances, therefore, high value-added goods and services and higher industrial productivity through technological innovation is the key to a sustainable economic growth for Japan.

In addition to science and technology, moreover, such wider forms of intellectual property as Internet contents and brand products are regarded as having been increasing attractiveness of a nation and, as a result, world's nations are competing for their attractiveness. Therefore, in order for Japan to maintain its reputation into the future as an attractive country, we must stimulate and revitalize the creation of intellectual property, protect it, and effectively exploit it.

In 2002, our Prime Minister Koizumi placed intellectual property as Japan's national strategy in his policy speech. Since then, our nation has moved swiftly towards becoming a "Nation Built on Intellectual Property" actively promoting the wide use of policies on intellectual property. Moreover, the "New Industry Promotion Strategy" formulated last year by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) also gives precedence to intellectual property as one of its priority policy programs. In response to this environment, the JPO, as the government organ to play the central role in Japan's IP policy, will implement the following programs to enhance more strategic protection and exploitation of industrial property.

First, in an effort to achieve timely and high quality patent examination of a world-class standard, the JPO will continue to strengthen its position in terms of human resources deployment through its on-going program. Since 2004, the Patent Office has worked to increase its number of fixed-term examiners by 500 over five years. At the same time, the JPO will expand its outsourcing program for prior art search tasks to registered search organizations to include civilian corporations. These measures will allow the JPO to realize a "zero waiting period for examination." By achieving this goal, the JPO aims to help Japanese companies attain higher international competitiveness through timely granting of rights and elimination of duplicated research projects, and activation of technology development race in Japan.

Then, by working to create an environment in which intellectual property is adequately protected all over the world, we will encourage Japanese corporations to internationally develop their business. To this end, the JPO will make open its

examination results as quickly as possible and will lead world patent examination by urging other central IP offices to make use of these examination results. At the same time, the JPO will promote international cooperation. To other Asian nations, we will extend further assistance in their efforts to develop human resources. With industrialized countries in the West, we will continue to closely work together in the area of examination. In addition, we will take active anti-counterfeiting measures in collaboration with other relevant government and private organizations as well as the Western countries.

To raise the level of protection for designs and brand names that are expected to be a new source of added value merchandise, the JPO will more actively discuss a desirable design system that will allow corporations to strategically create and utilize their designs. Towards the implementation of regionally based collective mark system to be implemented in April 2006, we will also make efforts to disseminate information and prepare examination guidelines.

Also indispensable is support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Unlike larger corporations, SMEs and venture businesses lack the strategic capabilities to exploit intellectual property effectively. In an effort to reduce such disparities (also known as the "IP divide"), a comprehensive approach in coordination with other SMEs agenda is vital.

Specifically, we must work to expand services for SMEs such as the nation-wide deployment of Application Advisors, the prior art search assistant program, accelerated examination/appeal examination programs, and the fee reduction/exemption program. The JPO will also enhance regional corporations' ease of access to industrial property administration by dispatching examiners to conducting examination and appeals examination processes in regional.

To assist regional revitalization from the aspect of intellectual property, the JPO will work to encourage effective licensing of unused patents and other forms of intellectual property and, in the end, contribute to the creation of new businesses in regional. Today, under the cooperation among relevant local government bodies and private organizations and experts, "Regional IP Strategy Committees" have been established. The JPO will support their cooperation and assist them in the implementation of various projects under their "Regional IP strategy promotion programs."

We at the JPO are fully aware of the important role we are expected to play and we will do our utmost to put in place a trustworthy patent administration for users. At the same time, we will work hard to achieve higher international competitiveness of our own patent administration services. In conclusion, I ask for your understanding and continued strong support.

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