

Preface

In 2011, Japan was struck by an unprecedented disaster, the Great East Japan Earthquake. On that occasion, IP offices in as many as 48 countries/regions took relief measures such as extending the procedural term for Japanese applicants affected by the Earthquake. I would like to take this opportunity to once again express our gratitude.

The 80th Commissioner

深野弘行

Hiroyuki FUKANO



Despite the occurrence of a great earthquake, the annual number of patent applications filed in Japan for 2011 remained at the same level as that in 2010. It is particularly worth noting that the number of applications based on the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) filed by Japanese applicants in 2011 increased more than 20% from the previous year. This not only indicates that IP activities in Japan are active even after the great earthquake but also that these activities have changed qualitatively, becoming truly globalized.

Therefore, it has become much more important to improve the landscape for appropriately protecting IP and making sure it aligns with the global business-expansion activities being carried out by companies. At the Meeting of IP5 Heads of Office held in Tokyo, which was attended by representatives of Japan, the US, Europe, China, and Korea in 2011, there were discussions for the first time under the IP5 framework aimed at harmonizing patent systems. Furthermore, the number of Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) agreements has steadily increased, with Japan starting a PPH program with China in November 2011, the first time in the world. As a result, approximately 90% of overseas applications filed from Japan are able to use the PPH program.

The year 2011 marked the tenth anniversary of the Asian Trilateral, which is the cooperative framework among the IP offices of Japan, Korea and China. This cooperative framework of East Asian countries aims to create an even more user-friendly IP environment. In addition, at a time when emerging countries are viewed to be the growth engine of the world economy. Japan held the 1st ASEAN-Japan Heads of IP Offices Meeting in February 2012, strengthening cooperative ties with the ASEAN countries that have decided to forge greater economic unity by 2015.



Furthermore, in expanding business globally, it is essential to make use of not only technology but also designs and brands. Therefore it is also necessary to improve the framework for protecting designs and trademarks worldwide. With regard to designs, the JPO is proceeding with its discussions towards the accession to the Geneva Act of the Hague Agreement on the international registration of industrial designs. As for trademarks, agreement was reached last year to expand the cooperative framework of the Trademark Trilateral (which includes the trademark offices of Japan, the US and Europe) and form the Trademark 5 (TM5), which includes also the offices of Korea and China.

In the meantime, we are accelerating examinations toward achieving our goal of an 11-month waiting period for patent examinations in Japan in 2013. We were able to shorten the waiting period for patent examinations to 22.2 months as of the end of March 2012, steadily approaching our goal. Furthermore, the Patent Law and other laws were revised last year. Aimed at improving user-friendliness and broadening the base for innovation, the Japanese patent system was revised to appropriately protect joint research results, expand the subject matter of the grace period, review the appeal system, and reduce examination request fees, having put the revised laws into effect since April 2012.

This Annual Report provides an overview of the latest activities in and outside of Japan undertaken by the JPO, with a particular focus on developments in 2011. I hope that this Annual Report sets the future direction for international cooperation that needs to be achieved in the field of intellectual property, at a time when IP activities are becoming increasingly global and borderless.