

## Davies wants greater patent protection

The draft policy on intellectual property aims to bring an end to unfair practices and piracy in the South African market, Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies said on Tuesday (26 February).



Image: GCIS

"We have seen too many cases where the little bit of knowledge we have, the little bit of progressionally (sic), viable intellectual property we obtain in our country, is being exploited," he said.

"When we find that one of our products is now the subject of a patent application by a company in the developed world, that just tilts the imbalance of this issue to an unacceptable level," he said.

Davies was speaking at the Africa Intellectual Property Forum held in Midrand, Gauteng.

The three-day forum is hosted by the department and seeks to highlight the need to use intellectual property as the key to economic development and industrialisation.

Referring to a French company which had tried to trademark Rooibos, Davies said the department would fight the application to the end.

"For some company to claim to use this as a trademark abroad and get royalties as a result of that is, quite frankly, unacceptable," Davies said.

He said the department had submitted an objection to the application to the French embassy.

With a draft National Intellectual Property policy already in place, the conference would help not only South Africa, but other regions, when they reviewed their own intellectual policies and would make it possible for regions to share harmonious policies.

"So, the framework which we will be developing, is intended to set balances in our overall approach... in favour of government, in favour of industrialisation, in favour of public property, in favour of recognition of collective knowledge... and we will not then go back to what this country was a few years before democracy," he warned.

Davies said counterfeit and sub-standard products were a serious threat, and the department would continue with its campaigns to tackle the matter.

He said all collective knowledge generated in Africa should be protected.

Before Davies delivered his speech about 50 protesters dressed in red and black from the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) demanded that the department speed up its submission of the Intellectual Property draft policy.

Spokesman Andrew Mosane said intellectual property laws in South Africa had to change to increase access to healthcare.

Davies told the protesters there was no need for them to "come and shout here at a meeting like this". Instead, they were welcome to join the discussions at the conference, he said.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge

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