

UNI MEI Global Union Campaign Against Digital Theft

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Protecting creativity, innovation and jobs in the digital global economy

The creative industries are emerging as one of the fastest growing and increasingly important sectors of the world economy. They play an important role in the cultural development of countries and societies, reflecting each country's culture, by producing and disseminating content that educates, informs, and entertains. With the growth of digital distribution platforms, the demand for high quality digital content is rising and will continue to rise at a greater and greater rate as broadband penetration grows. The new digital global economy, with the Internet as its core distribution structure, represents a huge source of potential growth and employment in the creative industries—a growth that will impact on countries around the world.

UNI MEI believes that policy choices at the national and international level should be made with the intent of supporting the industries, talent and workers that are essential to the creation of a thriving market for professional digital content. Creative works, whether audiovisual or in sound recordings or other written and visual means take years to create and usually large financial investments to come to fruition. These works, “intellectual property”, as they are often called, are what makes the creative industries so valuable both culturally and economically. It is why the protection of intellectual property is the cornerstone of any effort to insure the production of creative content.

However, those works are at risk right now. The enormous growth of unauthorised file sharing, downloading and streaming of copyrighted works and recorded performances is a major threat to the global economy in terms of loss of employment and revenues. Many of those who share or download copyrighted works have persuaded themselves that creative content is, or should be, free. They appear not to understand that digital theft today destroys creative endeavour, investment and employment tomorrow. Online theft deprives creators and other rights holders from their fair share of the benefits generated by the digital economy. Even more important in the long term, as these creative industries suffer larger and larger loss of revenues they in turn are forced to reduce their investment in the production of creative content and with that vanishes work opportunities for creators, technicians and all other workers now and permanently into the future.

UNI MEI believes that the world's creative industries need adequate protection against digital theft in order to protect creativity, support existing and grow new jobs

and ensure fair revenues to all right holders and compensation to all other media and entertainment workers. We know that technology is not static; it will change in many ways – including greater penetration, faster service and inexpensive memory which will potentially increase the problem of digital piracy. We also believe that new ways to address digital theft are evolving rapidly as are ways to make creative works easily and legally available to consumers. That makes the need to address this problem—before it overwhelms all efforts to adapt to an ever-changing digital environment-- all the more pressing.

UNI MEI believes that it is critical, at this important moment in the evolution of the Internet and at a time when potential Internet policies that will exist for many years are being debated in many countries as well as in regional and international government bodies, to publicly and visibly engage in a sustained effort to affect the current debates and legislative initiatives. Our mission is no less than the protection of the employment and livelihoods of our affiliates' members as well as the work opportunities for future generations of media and entertainment talent and workers in the creative industries.

UNI MEI underlines the urgency of the need for national, regional and international authorities to adopt Internet policies that will better protect creative content against Internet theft. Proper consultation of all stakeholders is absolutely crucial for such policies to reflect the common or respective concerns of the various players, including those whose livelihoods and ability to support their families is at stake.

The fight against global digital theft can only be successful if Internet policies permit the ability:

- to find illegal content;
- to identify websites and Internet addresses that are engaged in the business of uploading and downloading copyrighted content;
- to provide meaningful sanctions and
- to use effective network management to achieve these goals.

Furthermore, efforts by authorities and industry to better inform and educate consumers are indispensable to raise the awareness of the importance to protect creative content in order to sustain creativity, employment and cultural development of our societies.

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have a major role to play in working with rights holders to tackle the illegal distribution of content over their networks. Internet policies need to recognise the responsibility of ISPs and encourage cooperation with all stakeholders.

UNI MEI believes that Internet policies should target illegal businesses that are engaged in illegal distribution of copyright protected content and polices need to ensure that their distribution platforms can be blocked. However, the introduction of technical measures by ISPs for repeat infringers at the earliest feasible stage is also a necessary tool. This could include a reduction in bandwidth, the blocking of specific website content or, as a last resort for egregious offenders who ignore repeated warnings and the implementation of other technical measures, temporary suspension of internet access. Litigation against individual consumers should be considered only after other options, including technical measures, are exhausted.