

**By Leon Susan**

The South African Companies and Intellectual Property Registration Office (CIPRO) announced on Monday 22 June 2009 that it intends making electronic access to South African patents possible via the internet shortly. The move, in co-operation with the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), is a highly anticipated one as it will extend information on the existence of SA patents to a worldwide audience. The intention behind this move appears to be to raise local inventors to an international platform for purposes of possible foreign investment.

CIPRO is currently in the process of scanning all South African patents, which will be digitised by performing Optical Character Recognition (OCR), indexing of bibliographic information and publication by WIPO. The project consists of three phases, the first of which involves digitising all patents for the period of 1988 to 2008 and may be operational as early as September 2009. The second and third phases involve the digitisation of patents granted before 1988.

It is not clear whether or not this access will be limited to patent abstracts or will include corresponding patent specifications as well. In addition, CIPRO was silent on whether or not such access would include patent status information, which is an important factor in considering questions of potential infringement. In light of the uncertainty, we recommend that you in any event consult your regular IP attorney before acting on information retrieved off this website.