

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE MARRAKESH TREATY

Persons who are blind have very limited access to printed books. Only between 1-7% of books published throughout the world are available in accessible format. In most cases, books available in accessible format to persons who are blind in one country cannot be shared with their counterparts in other countries. Much time and resources are therefore wasted obtaining permission from copyright holders and making books accessible even though books have been already made accessible by other jurisdiction. This is primarily due to access barriers and to copyright laws. The goal of the Marrakesh treaty is to remove these barriers.

There are two main ways in which the Marrakesh Treaty seeks to remove barriers to accessibility.

1. It requires those countries which ratify the Treaty to have an exception to the domestic copyright law for visually impaired and print-disabled people. This means that the law should allow blind persons and their organizations to make accessible formats of books without having to first ask for copyright permission. This is important, for example, in education as this has caused delays which have resulted in students receiving accessible books at the end of their course of study or never receiving them at all.
2. The Marrakesh Treaty allows for the import and export of books in accessible formats without the consent of the copyright holder. This eliminates the need to transcribe books which have already been made accessible by other countries. It also allows countries with large collection of accessible books to share their collection with less wealthy countries.

The Treaty recognizes the rights of copyright holders and points out that the books made in accessible format are solely to be used by persons who are visually impaired or print-disabled and requires "authorized entities" take due care when handling these books and that they discourage reproduction and distribution of unauthorized copies.

Although the Treaty will be most beneficial to visually impaired persons in less wealthy countries such as those in the Caribbean, only the Dominican Republic and Haiti from the Caribbean have signed thus far.

To see the Treaty in its entirety visit:

http://www.wipo.int/meetings/en/doc_details.jsp?doc_id=241683

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