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# THE DAILY STAR

The Middle East's Leading English Newspaper

## Arab states 'not so bad' on intellectual property

*Specialist says progress is being made*

Arab states have been given a bad rap on intellectual property protection by international observers, according to the head of an Arab law firm specializing in the field.

Talal Abu-Ghazaleh, the head of Abu-Ghazaleh Intellectual Property and Abu-Ghazaleh Legal Services firms, accused foreigners of exaggerating the scope of violations of intellectual property in the Arab World.

"We (the firm) have won every case that went to a court of law in the Arab world and they are in the hundreds," said Abu-Ghazaleh, who opened a two-day workshop Monday on intellectual property rights at the Phoenicia Inter-Continental Hotel.

"The Arab World is in fact a victim of infringement because it is used as a market for pirated products. You only need to look at the website of the US Trade Representative's office to see who are the worst offenders. Israel is on top."

In the US agency's 2002 report on intellectual property, Israel, Lebanon and Egypt are the only three Middle Eastern countries on its priority watch list for infringements. The list also includes Taiwan, the European Union and Russia.

"We are definitely moving in the right direction," said Abu-Ghazaleh. "There is a lot of unfairness when it comes to criticism of our implementation of intellectual property rights."

Even a country such as the United States cannot ensure 100 percent protection for its intellectual property market, Abu-Ghazaleh argued.

"Despite the high protection of (such rights) in the United States, there is still 15 percent

infringement," said Abu-Ghazaleh. "Patents in the Arab World are protected in accordance with international agreements. What we need to focus on now is digitalizing the system to allow merchants to contact patent offices electronically."

Nonetheless, Arab countries have to move ahead in the field to attract greater investments and encourage their own to invent and prosper at home, rather than flock to Western countries

**|| Israel, Lebanon, Egypt are only regional countries on priority watch list of infringers**

with their ideas and inventions.

"The object of intellectual property is not protection, but rather the service of humanity through protection of creativity," said Abu-Ghazaleh.

"It is the lack of a strict regime that discourages people from investing and creating. If we look at the developed world, countries with the highest level of intellectual property protection have the highest level of creation," he added.

Abu-Ghazaleh says this argument rebuts the criticism often leveled against intellectual property protection, namely that it robs the poor of cheap products.

This is a controversial issue within the World Trade Organization, where developing countries are demanding cheap access to pharmaceutical products protected by expensive patents in industrialized countries.

"You cannot have cheap pharmaceuticals in the absence of a protective regime for new medical products." — DS