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PIJIP and the Center for Social Media release *Copyright & Documentary Film in the Commonwealth: Legal Scholar Reports from Six Countries*

American University Washington College of Law's Program in Information Justice and Intellectual Property (PIJIP) and the Center for Social Media at American University (CSM) are releasing a series of papers by copyright experts entitled *Copyright & Documentary Film in the Commonwealth: Legal Scholar Reports from Six Countries*. The papers cover the extent of fair use or fair dealing exceptions to copyright applicable to documentary filmmakers in Uganda, Nigeria, South Africa, India, Canada and Australia.

The papers and their abstracts are available at www.wcl.american.edu/pijip/go/filmmakerpapers. The legal scholars who contributed to the reports include Jeroline Akubu (Uganda), Jeremy de Beer (Canada), Emily Hudson (Australia), Ayodele Kusamoto (Nigeria), Lawrence Liang (India) and Tobias Schonwetter (South Africa).

The Legal Scholar Reports are part of a broader project of PIJIP and CSM exploring how greater understanding and use of limitations and exceptions in copyright laws can promote the development of documentary filmmaking in Commonwealth countries. In this first year, the project commissioned the series of expert reports being released today and also completed an initial study and meeting on filmmaker beliefs and practices in South Africa.

To a greater or lesser extent, two favorable conditions apply in many of the commonwealth countries that are the focus of this project. First, unlike countries of the civil law tradition, they are broadly committed to the principle that copyright law should serve public, rather than private, interest. And second, their foundational legal documents recognize the principle of freedom of expression, which limitations on copyright protection exist to enable.

In the meeting on Copyright User Rights and South African Documentary Film held in March 2009 in Cape Town, PIJIP and two South African filmmaker organizations – the Documentary Filmmakers' Association and the Black Filmmakers Network – committed to a plan of action for the next year of the project. The plan of action includes a call for the development of a consensus “best practices” document explicating current rights to quote or otherwise use copyrighted content in documentary films and a legal advice network for documentary filmmakers on user rights in copyright law. The meeting followed a period of research on the actual and perceived barriers that South African Copyright law is posing to the development of the local documentary film industry, including through a survey of over 40 local filmmakers.

More information on the project can be found at www.wcl.american.edu/pijip/go/internationalfilm

The Program on Information Justice and Intellectual Property (PIJIP) at the Washington College of Law promotes public interest approaches to domestic and international intellectual property law through advocacy, events and the provision of legal and consulting services. PIJIP's activities focus on a balanced approach to intellectual property and other legal regimes that reward creators while ensuring broad public access to information and its products.

American University's Center for Social Media investigates, showcases and sets standards for socially engaged media-making. They organize conferences and convenings, publish research, create codes of best practices, and incubate media strategies. The Center is part of AU's School of Communication.