

China extends lead over U.S. in global patents filings, U.N. says

GENEVA (Reuters) – China was the biggest source of applications for international patents in the world in 2020 for the second consecutive year and extended its lead over No. 2 filer the United States, the U.N. patent agency said on Tuesday.

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), which oversees a system for countries to share recognition of patents, said China filed 68,720 applications last year while the United States filed 59,230.

The rate of increase was higher for China with a 16.1% year-on-year increase versus 3% for the United States, it added. China first knocked the United States from the top spot in 2019.

Daren Tang, WIPO director-general, said the rise in Chinese filings was part of a longer-term trend for higher applications from Asia more broadly, with South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia all submitting more applications last year.

“It’s not as if filings from the traditional parts of the world like the U.S. or Europe have decreased, it’s just that the rate, the acceleration, has become a lot stronger in Asia,” he told journalists.

The region accounted for more than half of all filings via WIPO’s system known as the Patent Cooperation Treaty versus just over a third ten years ago.

Unlike after the 2008 financial crisis when filings fell sharply, overall filings via WIPO’s system were up 4% overall in 2020 to a new record despite the COVID-19-induced slowdown, it said.

“The trend is that innovation remains resilient and the sense is that the world needs more innovation ... during a crisis,” said Tang.

The biggest single filer under this system last year was China’s Huawei Technologies Co Ltd for the fourth consecutive year and second was South Korea’s Samsung Electronics Co Ltd, WIPO said.

Singapore's Tang began his term in October and received strong support from Western countries including the United States in a highly politicized race against a Chinese candidate for the top job last year.

Reporting by Emma Farge in Geneva; Editing by Matthew Lewis

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