

BACKGROUND ON SPECIAL 301

Pursuant to Section 182 of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended by the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988 and the Uruguay Round Agreements Act (enacted in 1994) (“Special 301”), under Special 301 provisions, USTR must identify those countries that deny adequate and effective protection for IPR or deny fair and equitable market access for persons that rely on intellectual property protection. Countries that have the most onerous or egregious acts, policies, or practices and whose acts, policies, or practices have the greatest adverse impact (actual or potential) on the relevant U.S. products must be designated as “Priority Foreign Countries.”

Priority Foreign Countries are potentially subject to an investigation under the Section 301 provisions of the Trade Act of 1974. USTR may not designate a country as a Priority Foreign Country if it is entering into good faith negotiations or making significant progress in bilateral or multilateral negotiations to provide adequate and effective protection of IPR.

USTR must decide whether to identify countries within 30 days after issuance of the annual National Trade Estimate Report. In addition, USTR may identify a trading partner as a Priority Foreign Country or remove such identification whenever warranted.

USTR has created a “Priority Watch List” and “Watch List” under Special 301 provisions. Placement of a trading partner on the Priority Watch List or Watch List indicates that particular problems exist in that country with respect to IPR protection, enforcement, or market access for persons relying on intellectual property. Countries placed on the Priority Watch List are the focus of increased bilateral attention concerning the problem areas.

Additionally, under Section 306, USTR monitors a country’s compliance with bilateral intellectual property agreements that are the basis for resolving an investigation under Section 301. USTR may apply sanctions if a country fails to satisfactorily implement an agreement.

The interagency Trade Policy Staff Committee, in advising USTR on the implementation of Special 301, obtains information from and holds consultations with the private sector, U.S. embassies, the United States' trading partners, the U.S. Congress, and the National Trade Estimates report, among other sources.