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Mexico

José Alejandro Luna Fandiño



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OLIVARES

1 Patent Enforcement

1.1 Before what tribunals can a patent be enforced against an infringer? Is there a choice between tribunals and what would influence a claimant's choice?

In Mexico, the problem of selecting the competent Judge or choosing jurisdiction is minimal. Indeed, the only venue to enforce a patent is through administrative proceedings (infringement action) before the Mexican Patent Office (IMPI), which is not a Court of Law, but a federal administrative entity. IP enforcement is federal law; no state law is available. However, the decisions of this agency on patent infringement cases can be appealed by any one of the intervening parties, thus bringing the matter up before a single specialised IP Court. The decision issued by the IP Specialized Court could be appealed before 20 Federal Circuit Courts at Mexico City, however the case is turned randomly by a computer system. By territorial jurisdiction, IP matters are mainly decided at Mexico City.

1.2 Can the parties be required to undertake mediation before commencing court proceedings? Is mediation or arbitration a commonly used alternative to court proceedings?

There is a provision in the supplementary provisions to the Mexican Industrial Property Law (MIPL), establishing that prior to the issuance of the decision in the administrative proceeding at the first stage, when acting as a Judge in solving disputes, the IMPI has the prerogative to invite the parties to reach an amicable settlement. However, this option is poorly explored by the IMPI and the parties.

Mediation and arbitration is not common in patent litigation, perhaps due to the lack of culture of mediation and arbitration in Mexico, especially in administrative proceedings. We need to recall that patent litigation in Mexico (enforcement and validity) is decided under the umbrella of federal and administrative laws, and the appeal Courts reviewing the decisions by the IMPI are also Administrative Courts. In addition, parties may expect some difficulties in enforcing an arbitration judgment on the invalidation of patents as it has not been tested if the IMPI would obey a private arbitration judgment and eventually proceed to cancel a patent based on an arbitration ruling. In this regard, we consider that there is no reason for the IMPI to refuse to observe an arbitration judgment related to the cancellation of a patent, but the degree of uncertainty has probably discouraged the use of alternative dispute solutions in Mexico for patent disputes.

1.3 Who is permitted to represent parties to a patent dispute in court?

At the first stage before the IMPI, there is no legal requirement to represent individuals or companies in patent disputes, other than the formalities of the corresponding Power of Attorney, but there is no registration at the Bar or certifications required to represent a party in patent litigation at the first stage of the administrative proceedings before the IMPI, namely: infringement; and invalidity actions. However, at the further two appeal stages, the nullity trial before the Federal Court for Tax and Administrative Affairs (FCTAA) and the Amparo suit before the Circuit Courts, the lawyers representing the parties are required to be attorneys at law, qualified at a federally licensed law school.

1.4 What has to be done to commence proceedings, what court fees have to be paid and how long does it generally take for proceedings to reach trial from commencement?

Traditionally, the Mexican Courts do not address the existence of patent infringement, as in accordance with the LIP such cases must be filed and prosecuted with the IMPI. Arguments should be filed in writing and following applicable procedural rules to commence the procedure.

Government fees to commence a proceeding (patent infringement or invalidity) before the IMPI are around US\$73.

The proceeding before the IMPI usually lasts two years. This is the first stage, at least two additional stages are available.

1.5 Can a party be compelled to disclose relevant documents or materials to its adversary either before or after commencing proceedings, and if so, how?

The IMPI may obtain all the evidence deemed as necessary for the verification of facts that may constitute a violation of one or more of the rights protected by this Act or the administrative declaration procedures.

When the owner concerned or the alleged infringer has submitted sufficient evidence to reasonably have access to support its claims and has specified evidence relevant to the substantiation of its claims that is under the control of the opposing party, the IMPI may order the presentation of such evidence before commencing proceedings and, where applicable, this authority should ensure the conditions for the protection of confidential information.

1.6 What are the steps each party must take pre-trial? Is any technical evidence produced, and if so, how?

All pieces of evidence should be filed or announced with the original infringement claim or with the invalidity action before the IMPI. The applicable regulations do not contemplate a pre-trial stage, therefore, there is no evidence produced in such a stage, but its preparation may be necessary.

1.7 How are arguments and evidence presented at the trial? Can a party change its pleaded arguments before and/or at trial?

Arguments should be filed in writing and follow applicable procedural rules. All arguments and evidence must be filed along with the initial brief requesting the infringement action, with an exception being provided for supervening evidence. The general rule is no, parties cannot change their pleaded arguments, unless there are supervening or unknown facts.

1.8 How long does the trial generally last and how long is it before a judgment is made available?

The initial stage before the IMPI of a patent infringement action usually takes two years. Once the IMPI issues a decision, two further stages of appeals before Courts, lasting no less than three further years, are expected.

1.9 Are judgments made available to the public? If not as a matter of course, can third parties request copies of the judgment?

The IMPI does not make the judgments of patent infringement trials or any proceeding available to the public until they are final and beyond shadow of appeal, and some information regarding the decision remains confidential especially if the parties request it.

1.10 Are courts obliged to follow precedents from previous similar cases as a matter of binding or persuasive authority? Are decisions of any other jurisdictions of persuasive authority?

Only jurisprudence is mandatory for Courts. In fact, as the IMPI is an administrative authority, it is not part of the judiciary, thus they are not bound to follow jurisprudence. Briefly speaking, jurisprudence is construed by five rulings issued unanimously by the same Court or by the Supreme Court *en banc* but this jurisprudence is mandatory for lower Courts from the judiciary. The IMPI has stated that as it is an administrative authority, jurisprudence and judicial precedents are not compulsory for them when deciding the administrative proceedings, but only persuasive. Legally speaking they are right; however, as they are acting as Judges when deciding contentious cases, ethically and as a matter of principle they should observe binding jurisprudence, as the higher appeal Courts will do so; otherwise they would only be delaying the application of the binding jurisprudence.

1.11 Are there specialist judges or hearing officers, and if so, do they have a technical background?

The IMPI is considered the only authority to solve patent enforcement proceedings in the first instance.

In January 2009, a specialised IP Division at the Federal Administrative Courts began operating. This Division has jurisdiction to review all cases based on the IPL, the Federal Copyright Act, the Federal Law of Plant Varieties and other IP-related provisions. The creation of this Division should help improve, in general terms, the applicable criteria for IP cases, but the three Magistrates forming this tribunal have no technical background. The last appeal stage is formed by Federal Circuit Magistrates; although they are highly capable in legal issues, they do not need to have IP or technical backgrounds.

1.12 What interest must a party have to bring (i) infringement, (ii) revocation, and (iii) declaratory proceedings?

- (1) Any patentee or licensee (unless expressly forbidden from doing so) has the right to prosecute a suit against a third party infringing his or her rights. A distributor may not bring a suit for infringement.
- (2) An accused infringer may counterclaim patent invalidity under formal or technical considerations, upon receiving the infringement suit before the IMPI, but it is not possible to request an additional judicial ruling or declaration.
- (3) Cease and desist letters provide the required legal standing to initiate invalidity actions. If pertaining to a specific industrial or commercial activity (i.e. the pharma industry), to provide legal standing, this is subject to debate and the Courts are divided.
- (4) Amendments to the patent law allow anyone to request the IMPI to initiate officially the cancellation proceeding against patents.
- (5) Simple legal standing, namely the mere business or commercial activity to challenge the validity of a patent, is under test before the Courts.

1.13 If declarations are available, can they address (i) non-infringement, and/or (ii) claim coverage over a technical standard or hypothetical activity?

In Mexico, non-infringement declarations are available.

1.14 Can a party be liable for infringement as a secondary (as opposed to primary) infringer? Can a party infringe by supplying part of, but not all of, the infringing product or process?

There is no specific provision in the IP Law relating to the doctrine of contributory infringement, but there is some room to argue in favour of this doctrine; however, it has not been tested before the IMPI or the Courts. Actions may be brought against distributors of an infringing product, and provisional measures may be imposed on third parties to some extent.

1.15 Can a party be liable for infringement of a process patent by importing the product when the process is carried on outside the jurisdiction?

Yes, the infringement of a patent in Mexico includes the commercialisation and importation of a product derived from a patented process even if it is carried on outside Mexico.

1.16 Does the scope of protection of a patent claim extend to non-literal equivalents?

For many years, it has been interpreted that only literal infringement

is recognised under the current IP Law. Infringement under the doctrine of equivalents is not expressly provided in the law; a broader interpretation of the patent law to explore the doctrine of equivalents is required.

Nevertheless, recently a Circuit Court in Mexico ruled on behalf of a pharmaceutical company, considering the peripheral interpretation method as a precedent, since it is not mandatory.

The Circuit Court considered that, according to the Mexican rules and regulations, the intention of the legislator to grant the claim a fundamental role in the definition of the subject matter of the patent is very clear, since this rule allows the State to protect the industrial property to a greater extent and to prevent actions affecting such exclusivity or that constitute unfair competition and, if applicable, eradicate this practice by means of the imposition of the corresponding sanctions.

Therefore, the level of a possible infringing action shall be decreed based on the identification with the scope of protection of the claims that shall determine the existence of an eventual infringement due to identity or equivalence.

Although this ruling does not exactly implement the U.S. doctrine of equivalence, this is a positive start.

1.17 Can a defence of patent invalidity be raised, and if so, how? Are there restrictions on such a defence e.g. where there is a pending opposition? Are the issues of validity and infringement heard in the same proceedings or are they bifurcated?

Although the issues of infringement and validity are prosecuted in different filings, they are decided at the same time, especially if the invalidity action is filed as a counterclaim; specifically, filed at the same time as the response to the infringement action is filed.

1.18 Other than lack of novelty and inventive step, what are the grounds for invalidity of a patent?

According to the IP Law, patents are valid unless proven otherwise. Thus the IP Law establishes several grounds upon which a patent can be invalidated:

- (1) When it was granted in contravention of the provisions on requirements and conditions for the grant of patents or registrations of utility models and industrial designs.
- (2) When it was granted in contravention of the provisions of the law in force at the time when the patent or registration was granted. The nullity action based on this section may not be based on a challenge of the legal representation of the applicant when prosecuting and obtaining a patent or a registration.
- (3) When the application is abandoned during its prosecution.
- (4) When granted by error or serious oversight, or when it is granted to someone not entitled to obtain it.

The nullity actions mentioned under (1) and (2) may be filed at any time; the actions under (3) and (4) must be filed within five years, counted from the date on which the publication of the patent or registration in the Gazette becomes effective.

1.19 Are infringement proceedings stayed pending resolution of validity in another court or the Patent Office?

Under certain applicable procedural rules, yes; however, the general rule is to decide linked cases' invalidity and infringement simultaneously.

1.20 What other grounds of defence can be raised in addition to non-infringement or invalidity?

The basis of this defence is that the proper interpretation of the patent claim does not catch the alleged infringing product or process.

Challenging the validity of patents

Under the IP Law, patents are valid until the contrary is proven.

One of the most common defences in patent litigation in Mexico is to attack the validity of the allegedly infringed patent. As the patent exists, an administrative resolution is required to declare its annulment. This defence must be alleged when replying to the plaintiff's claim, by means of a counterclaim. The IMPI will give notification of the counterclaim to the party who filed the original complaint. Both the infringement claim and the counterclaim should be resolved simultaneously to preclude the possibility of contradictory outcomes. The grounds for invalidating a patent are mentioned in question 1.15.

Fair or experimental use

This refers to the non-profit use of the patented invention.

Roche Bolar Exception

In the case of medicines, a party shall be entitled to apply for the registration of a product relating to a substance or active ingredient covered by a patent pertaining to someone else, if the application is filed within three years before the corresponding patent expires. This provision, supported by the "Roche Bolar Exception", would allow the applicant to start performing tests and experiments, in order to be ready to enter the market as soon as the patent has expired.

1.21 Are (i) preliminary, and (ii) final injunctions available, and if so, on what basis in each case? Is there a requirement for a bond?

The Mexican Patent and Trademark Law, provides so-called provisional injunctions whereby the IMPI can take certain important measures against infringers. The requirements to get the injunctions are:

- (1) Proof of a valid right.
- (2) Presumption of the violation of the patent.
- (3) Postage of a bond to guarantee damages.

If the plaintiff chooses to ask the IMPI for a provisional injunction, a bond will be fixed to warrant possible damages to the defendant. This injunction is to be petitioned in writing and, within a term of 20 days from its execution, the plaintiff is required to file a formal written claim infringement. Failure to do so will cause the plaintiff to lose the bond in favour of the defendant. This party has the right to place a counter-bond to have the effects of the provisional injunction stopped. The defendant has the right to allege whatever he may deem pertinent with respect to the provisional injunctions within a term of 10 days from the day of the execution.

1.22 On what basis are damages or an account of profits assessed? Are punitive damages available?

In April 2018, the Mexican Supreme Court published its final written decision, which was preliminarily issued at the end of 2017, relating to the interpretation of the so-called 40% rule for calculating damages. The Court examined whether this rule is appropriate and how it should be applied to the calculation of damages derived from violations of rights protected under the Mexican Industrial Property

Law (IPL) covering patents, trademarks and designs (copyrights are governed by a different law and rules).

In summary, the 40% rule establishes that compensation derived from the violation of industrial property rights shall in no case be less than 40% of the sales of the infringing product at the price of sale to the consumers. The Supreme Court addressed the following questions: i) whether it was necessary to prove the “causal nexus” between the illicit act and the damage or harm to plaintiff; ii) if the 40% rule is to be applied automatically and as a minimum floor to calculate damages; iii) whether the administrative decision of infringement *per se* – in this case, based on unfair competition – was enough to prove the harm and damage to plaintiff; iv) if the IP law establishes a compensation for material (economic) and immaterial (moral-reputation) violations; v) whether compensation derived from acts of an unfair competition action needs to be proven by actual damages; and vi) what type of evidentiary items are appropriate to prove damages for compensation under the 40% rule, and whether this rule should be applied only as a method of quantifying compensation, or as a type of punitive damages.

Ruling:

- i) The decision expressly establishes that the validity and constitutionality of the provision establishing the 40% rule, and the rule itself, is not questioned by the Supreme Court, but the ruling establishes that the concept of damages is separate from the amount of the compensation.
- ii) The administrative declaration of infringement based on unfair competition is evidence of the illicit act, but not of the damages caused to the plaintiff.
- iii) Unfair competition, defined as an act to induce the consumer to error or deceit, does not necessarily constitute a direct economic harm to the plaintiff.
- iv) The plaintiff is required to prove on a case-by-case basis, evidence of actual harm, material and immaterial.
- v) In the specific case of unfair competition at hand, the plaintiff did not offer evidence of actual damages or harm and the infringement decision did not relieve the plaintiff from that burden.
- vi) The 40% rule is a mechanism to establish the amount of the compensation, but not the damages caused by the illicit act—in this case, unfair competition activity.
- vii) The 40% rule is a pre-established method of quantifying the compensation, once all the prongs to claim damages are met.
- viii) In general terms, the causes of infringement in the IPL do not contemplate presumption of damages.

Conclusions:

- i) This was a not a unanimous decision. It was a divided two-to-three decision, of one of the Benches of the Supreme Court. It was not an *en banc* decision by the two Benches, nor did it constitute jurisprudence; therefore, it is not binding. Notwithstanding, as a precedent, it is highly persuasive and if lower Courts issue decisions that differ in the matters of law, such decisions will have to provide strong and lawful arguments to persevere.
- ii) The decision does not question the validity of the 40% rule to quantify damages but imposes the burden to prove “causal nexus” on a case-by-case basis.
- iii) We tend to believe that civil cases claiming damages derived from clear-cut instances of trademark and patent infringement may be decided differently; however, after the decision under comment, in addition to the evidence to prove the sales of the infringing product, an accurate analysis of the evidence to prove damages should be taken into consideration on a case-by-case basis.
- iv) The 40% rule is no longer considered a punitive damage only.

The 40% rule is considered a relief for plaintiffs and a means of compensating for the long term of litigation in Mexico by circumventing the high burden to prove actual damages, lost profits, and other damages subject to compensation. This decision does not reject the formula, but accuracy in the evidence of filing civil actions claiming damages derived from the violation of IP rights will be mandatory for plaintiffs.

We also trust that free trade agreements under renegotiation by Mexico with the US and Canada (NAFTA) and the European Union (TLCUEM) will contribute to improving the IP enforcement system in Mexico, which has been a problem for many years, including the rules and venues to claim damages derived from the violation of IP rights.

1.23 How are orders of the court enforced (whether they be for an injunction, an award of damages or for any other relief)?

In the event of a second or subsequent offence, the fines previously imposed on the offender shall be doubled. A second or subsequent offence refers to every subsequent infringement of one and the same provision, committed within the two years following the date on which the ruling on the infringement was handed down.

Likewise, closures may be ordered in the decision that rules on the infringement, in addition to a fine or without a fine having been imposed. There shall be grounds for permanent closure when the establishment has been temporarily closed twice within a period of two years if, during said period, the infringement is repeated regardless of whether the location thereof has changed.

Criminal actions for patent infringement are available for re-offence cases. In accordance with the provisions of our IP Law, re-offence is found when a party infringes a patent after a final and beyond-shadow-of-appeal decision from the IMPI declaring the infringement. This re-offence is considered a felony that can be pursued *ex officio* or *ex parte* through the Federal District Attorney Office (PGR). This felony can be punished with up to six years of imprisonment and a fine.

1.24 What other form of relief can be obtained for patent infringement? Would the tribunal consider granting cross-border relief?

Other forms of relief are orders to stop the infringement activity, fines and closure of the facilities where the infringement activities take place. Costs and attorneys’ fees can be recovered in a civil claim for damages and lost profits. This takes place after the IMPI has declared the administrative infringement. The civil Courts follow a specific scheme for reasonable attorneys’ fees, regardless of whether this table reflects the actual fees charged.

Criminal sanctions in the event of recidivism are also contemplated in the IP Law.

1.25 How common is settlement of infringement proceedings prior to trial?

It is very unusual to settle cases before the decision is reached, because there are very few incentives for both parties to settle; that is because contingency derived from the infringement proceedings requires a final decision and this would be a long period of time, therefore neither plaintiff nor defendant would face the corresponding recovery/contingency of damages as an actual or imminent situation.

1.26 After what period is a claim for patent infringement time-barred?

The IMPI's current criterion is that the time limit for seeking a remedy is during the life term of the patent. Once the patent has expired, an action may not be brought for events that took place before the end of the life term (we consider that the IMPI is wrong in this consideration and it is under appeal). A defence of laches has not been tested before the Courts; therefore, legally speaking, a specific time limit exists in the IP Law to bring an infringement action during the life term of the patent.

However, there is a two-year limitation period to pursue a civil action for damages; therefore this statutory term to claim damages should be taken into consideration when looking at the timing to file infringing actions.

1.27 Is there a right of appeal from a first instance judgment, and if so, is it a right to contest all aspects of the judgment?

Appeals against the IMPI can be brought either before the specialised IP Division of the Federal Administrative Court, or before the IMPI itself through a review recourse. Decisions by either Court can be appealed in a final stage before Federal Circuit Courts.

1.28 What are the typical costs of proceedings to first instance judgment on (i) infringement, and (ii) validity? How much of such costs are recoverable from the losing party?

Government fees are minimal in the administration of patent infringements and there are no government costs in the subsequent appeal stages.

Costs and attorneys' fees may be recovered in a civil claim for damages and lost profits.

1.29 For jurisdictions within the European Union: What steps are being taken in your jurisdiction towards ratifying the Agreement on a Unified Patent Court, implementing the Unitary Patent Regulation (EU Regulation No. 1257/2012) and preparing for the unitary patent package? Will your country host a local division of the UPC, or participate in a regional division? For jurisdictions outside of the European Union: Are there any mutual recognition of judgments arrangements relating to patents, whether formal or informal, that apply in your jurisdiction?

Needless to say, Mexico is not part of the European Union but, as a clarification, there is no binding mandatory provision in the Mexican legal system that would oblige the IMPI and the Mexican Courts to recognise foreign judgments related to patents; this applies for infringement and validity rulings abroad.

However, those decisions in jurisdictions abroad would be evaluated and can be persuasive as documentary evidence.

In some cases, if the factual pattern and evidence are very similar to the case under review in Mexico, the case ruled in another jurisdiction may have relevant weight when the case is decided in Mexico.

Mexico will not host a local division of the UPC or participate in a regional division.

2 Patent Amendment

2.1 Can a patent be amended *ex parte* after grant, and if so, how?

According to Article 61 of the Industrial Property Law, the text or drawings of a granted patent may only be amended by the patent owner in the following circumstances:

- (1) to correct any obvious or form errors; and
- (2) to limit the scope of the claims.

The authorised changes shall be published in the Official Gazette.

An amendment after allowance is requested in writing to the Mexican Patent Office, briefly explaining the reasons underlying the errors that are being corrected or the limitations being introduced to the claims.

2.2 Can a patent be amended in *inter partes* revocation/invalidity proceedings?

In an invalidity action requested by a third party, which may result in a partial nullity of the patent, limiting the scope of the patent, a voluntary amendment would be allowed in an *inter partes* proceeding if both parties agree and if the general rules of the civil law should be followed; although, due to the silence of the Law, the IMPI has some difficulty in resolving petitions of limitations during litigation. We have designed a case-by-case basis strategy to overcome this situation.

2.3 Are there any constraints upon the amendments that may be made?

The amendments are restricted to correcting any obvious or form errors, and to limiting the scope of claims, on case-by-case basis; it is generally advisable to review how the patent to be limited was enforced.

3 Licensing

3.1 Are there any laws which limit the terms upon which parties may agree a patent licence?

It is possible to record a licence either onto a granted patent or in a pending application, so that the same may be opposed against third parties.

The limitation to the terms upon which parties may agree a patent licence are found in Article 66, which establishes that the term of the licence may not exceed the natural term of the patent itself and may not be recorded when a patent has already elapsed.

Article 67 establishes the chance for the owner to grant further licences unless expressly agreed to the contrary.

It is important to mention that the law indicates that the licensee may exert defensive rights over the patent, unless specifically accorded, while working by licensee inures to the benefit of the licensor.

Finally, in regard to the cancellation of the licence recordal, the Industrial Property Law establishes that the cancellation occurs when:

- (1) the same should be requested by both the licensee and the licensor jointly;
- (2) the patent lapses or is declared null; or
- (3) there is a Court order.

3.2 Can a patent be the subject of a compulsory licence, and if so, how are the terms settled and how common is this type of licence?

The law states that after three years starting from the date of grant of the patent, or four years from the filing date, whichever is later, anyone may request from the IMPI the grant of a compulsory licence when it has not been used, except if it duly justifies an exit.

The same Article also establishes that there will be no grant of a compulsory licence when the holder of the patent or a licensee has been carrying the importation of the patented product or the product obtained by the patented process. Further, Article 69 states that the working of a patent by a licensee will be deemed to be worked by its holder, provided that the licence was recorded with the IMPI. Article 71 states that the party applying for a compulsory licence shall have the technical and economical capacity to efficiently work the patented invention.

On the other hand, Article 72 establishes that before the grant of the first compulsory licence, the IMPI will provide the patentee with the opportunity to begin working the patent within a term of one year from the date of personal notification given to him. Following a hearing with the parties, the IMPI will decide on the grant of a compulsory licence, and if the IMPI decides to grant it, it will set forth its duration, conditions, field of application and amount of royalties that correspond to the holder of the patent.

We are not aware that any compulsory licence has been granted in recent years. In any event, the royalties are established by the IMPI after a hearing with the parties and they should be fair and reasonable.

4 Patent Term Extension

4.1 Can the term of a patent be extended, and if so, (i) on what grounds, and (ii) for how long?

The Mexican Regulations do not establish the possibility of patent life term extensions. However, it is important to mention that NAFTA establishes the possibility, but not an obligation, of patent life term extensions when the Health Authority delays the process to obtain a marketing authorisation for a patented product. But Mexico has not adopted the patent life term extensions in its domestic Law.

The IMPI does not allow an extension on patent terms, as said term extensions are not provided in the Patent Law *per se*; please be advised that our law firm has achieved corrections gaining more time in the expiration date of patents through legal proceedings only for pipeline patents, granted in accordance with Transitory Article 12 of the Mexican Law for the Promotion and Protection of Industrial Property Law, enacted back in June 1991.

5 Patent Prosecution and Opposition

5.1 Are all types of subject matter patentable, and if not, what types are excluded?

The following subject matter is not patentable in Mexico:

- (1) essentially biological processes for obtaining, reproducing and propagating plants and animals;
- (2) biological and genetic material as found in nature;
- (3) animal breeds;
- (4) the human body and the living matter constituting it; and
- (5) plant varieties.

On the other hand, the following subject matter is not considered as invention in Mexico:

- (1) theoretical or scientific principles;
- (2) discoveries that consist of making known or revealing something that already existed in nature, even though it was previously unknown to man;
- (3) diagrams, plans, rules and methods for carrying out mental processes, playing games or doing business, and mathematical methods;
- (4) computer programs;
- (5) methods of presenting information;
- (6) aesthetic creations and artistic or literary works;
- (7) methods of surgical, therapeutic or diagnostic treatment applicable to the human body and to animals; and
- (8) juxtaposition of known inventions or mixtures of known products, or alteration of the use, form, dimensions or materials thereof, except where in reality they are so combined or merged that they cannot function separately or where their particular qualities or functions have been so modified as to produce an industrial result or use not obvious to a person skilled in the art.

5.2 Is there a duty to the Patent Office to disclose prejudicial prior disclosures or documents? If so, what are the consequences of failure to comply with the duty?

There is no duty for the IMPI to disclose prejudicial prior art or documents.

5.3 May the grant of a patent by the Patent Office be opposed by a third party, and if so, when can this be done?

In a period of six months after the publication of the patent application, information related to patentability of an invention can be filed before the IMPI by a third party. It is worth mentioning that there is a project to amend the Patent Law to reduce the six-month period to two months, in order to speed up the procedure. If filed, the information may be considered at the Examiner's discretion and it will not suspend the application process. The person filing the information will not be considered a party and will not have access to the patent file or immediate legal standing to challenge a granted patent.

After a patent is granted, anyone can inform the IMPI of causes of invalidity. The authority may consider such information discretionally to initiate an *ex officio* cancellation proceeding.

5.4 Is there a right of appeal from a decision of the Patent Office, and if so, to whom?

Appeals against decisions of the IMPI can be brought either before a specialised IP Division of the Federal Court for Tax and Administrative Affairs, or before Federal District Judges. Decisions by either Court can be appealed in a final stage before Federal Circuit Courts.

5.5 How are disputes over entitlement to priority and ownership of the invention resolved?

Disputes over entitlement to priority and ownership of the invention are resolved by the IMPI. A final decision issued by the IMPI may be appealed (see question 5.4).

5.6 Is there a “grace period” in your jurisdiction, and if so, how long is it?

The Industrial Property Law contemplates a one-year grace period, as follows:

“**Article 18.** The disclosure of an invention shall not prevent it from continuing to be considered new where, within the 12 months prior to the filing date of the patent application or, where applicable, the recognized priority date, the inventor or his assignee has made the invention known by any means of communication, by putting it into practice or by displaying it at a national or international exhibition. When the corresponding application is filed, the evidentiary documents shall be included in the manner laid down in the Regulations under this Law.

The publication of an invention contained in a patent application or in a patent granted by a foreign office shall not be regarded as corresponding to any of the situations referred to in this Article.”

In order to benefit from the grace period, it is required to file a declaration stating the date, place and means of disclosure, together with the Mexican patent application.

5.7 What is the term of a patent?

The term of a patent is 20 years from the filing date. No extensions of term are available in Mexico.

6 Border Control Measures

6.1 Is there any mechanism for seizing or preventing the importation of infringing products, and if so, how quickly are such measures resolved?

The Industrial Property Law establishes that there are available injunctions for infringement of patent rights on a provisional and permanent basis in Mexico. The Customs Law establishes the rules for implementing the same with the Mexican Customs.

Generally speaking, in order to grant a preliminary injunction, it is necessary to comply with certain requisites, such as that the holder of the industrial property right has applied to the products, packaging or wrapping of the products protected by the patent, the marking indications, or, by some other means, have made it public knowledge that there is a protected industrial property right.

Other pertinent requisites can be found in Article 199*bis* 1, which requires that the requesting party complies with the following as well:

- (1) Prove that they hold a patent right and any of the following in addition:
 - a) The existence of an infringement to his right.
 - b) That the infringement to his right will be imminent.
 - c) The existence of the likelihood of irreparable damages suffered.
 - d) The existence of justified fear that the evidence will be destroyed, concealed or altered.
- (2) Grant sufficient bond in order to warrant the damages which would be caused to the person against whom the measures are demanded.
- (3) Provide the IMPI with the information necessary for the identification of the goods or establishments in which or where the infringement to industrial property rights is occurring.

In regard to the scope of the injunctions, the IMPI may order the alleged infringer or third parties to suspend or discontinue the acts

constituting a violation of the provisions of law and the seizure of goods such as:

- (1) Objects manufactured or used illegally.
- (2) Objects, wrappers, containers, packaging, paperwork, advertising material and similar articles that infringe any industrial property right protected by the Industrial Property Law.
- (3) Signs, labels, tags, paperwork and similar articles that infringe any of the rights protected by the Industrial Property Law.
- (4) Implements or instruments intended or used for the manufacture, preparation or production of any alleged-to-infringe relevant industrial property rights. It is important to mention that the alleged infringer is entitled to file a counter-bond to obtain the lifting of the preliminary injunctions.

In regard to the time frame, once the legal requisites are fulfilled, normally preliminary injunctions are adopted and put into practice in a rather fast fashion that may range from two to seven days, depending on the need to implement the same; i.e. seizures at customs, due to the nature of the importation process and the need for a rather quick implementation, may take 48 hours.

Permanent injunctions are declared once the administrative infringement proceeding is finally decided.

7 Antitrust Law and Inequitable Conduct

7.1 Can antitrust law be deployed to prevent relief for patent infringement being granted?

There is no precedent in Mexico of antitrust, unfair competition or business-related tort actions brought against patentees for the use of a patent. Courts generally consider that the use of a state-given right cannot constitute a violation in these areas.

7.2 What limitations are put on patent licensing due to antitrust law?

An action could theoretically be brought for activities falling outside the scope of a patent, such as non-competition agreements for products that are not covered by the claims, product-tying within that scope, or unfair competition activities such as advertising that a product is better than an alternative for the sole reason of it having a patent. Actions could also be brought before the Antitrust Commission for other forms of abuse of patent rights, such as clearly unfounded attempts to enforce a patent.

On July 20, 2016, the Mexican Antitrust Commission (known by its Spanish acronym, COFECE) announced that it will conduct a study regarding competition concerns over pharmaceutical products with lapsed patents. This is the first time such a study has been undertaken in Mexico.

The Commission will first analyse the rationale behind the fact that there are approximately 350 products listed in the National Formulary with sole suppliers, although around 63% of these products have lapsed patents.

COFECE emphasised that this analysis should not be considered in any way as a prejudgment of potential misconducts. It pointed out that this assessment aims to provide Mexican Regulatory Agencies with recommendations on how to encourage competition and correct inefficiencies.

We consider that the COFECE official communication in this regard contains several flaws and confuses concepts in order to justify the study. For example, the Commission provides data concerning out-of-pocket expenses of the private sector to explain its reasoning for

reviewing public acquisitions of medical products; however, these are separate realms governed by various factors and rules and are not necessarily related.

8 Current Developments

8.1 What have been the significant developments in relation to patents in the last year?

On March 13, 2018, amendments to certain chapters of the Industrial Property Law were published in the Mexican Official Diary. All the amendments came into force on April 27, 2018.

Among the main changes related to patents, industrial designs, and utility models, the amendments:

- define ambiguous terms in the IP Law, including with respect to the requirement for novelty for industrial designs, which currently does not define the terms “independent creation” or “significantly” as stated in the following provision: “Designs that are of *independent creation* and which differ *significantly* from known designs or combinations of known features of designs shall be considered as novel...[...].”;
- require a statement of the product to which the design will be applied;
- modify the term of protection for designs by changing it to a term of five years, with five possible renewal periods, that is, protection could last up to 25 years, instead of one 15-year term;
- provide that industrial designs granted before the entry into force of these amendments can be renewed for two five-year periods, after the expiration of the 15-year period. Renewal petition is due within the last six months of the 15-year protection term originally granted;
- provide that industrial designs under prosecution may enjoy the amendments to the law if a petition is filed between April 27, 2018 and June 11, 2018;
- provide that design and utility model applications be published after formal examination is complete. Currently, designs and utility models are only published once granted;
- provide that, for all patents, designs, and utility models, divisional applications will be published after the formal examination is complete; currently, they are not published until granted;
- provide that, once a patent, utility model or industrial design application is published, it will be open to public inspection. Under the current law, such applications can be consulted only by the applicant, the applicant’s representative or other authorised persons until they have been granted; and
- reduce the term provided for third parties to submit “prior art submissions” after publication of an application from six weeks to two months.

Overall, the amendments will be positive for the Mexican IP system, as they provide certainty and fill in several gaps in the IP Law.

8.2 Are there any significant developments expected in the next year?

The main developments expected in the near future are the obligations that Mexico is going to adopt in the renegotiation and modernisation of free trade agreements, the CPTPP with 10 countries, NAFTA with the US and Canada, and TLCUEM with the European Union. These three FTOs have IP chapters. At the time of writing, this article of the CPTPP had been ratified by the Mexican Senate, the renegotiations of the TLCUEM finished and the last round of renegotiations of NAFTA was underway.

TLCUEM has very few provisions related to patents but contemplates the possibility of something similar to the Supplementary Patent Certificates SPC to compensate for the delay in granting the approvals of Marketing Authorisations.

On March 8, 2018, 11 countries signed the free trade agreement formerly known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which has been renamed the “Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership” (CPTPP). The signing members are: Australia; Brunei; Canada; Chile; Japan; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Peru; Singapore; and Vietnam.

The key differences between the original TPP and the recently signed CPTPP are: 1) the absence of the United States as a participating member; and 2) some substantial provisions contemplated by the former TPP that are now suspended in the CPTPP, including several relating to IP and the life sciences listed below:

- (1) Patentable Subject Matter – Article 18.37.2 and 18.37.4 (Second Sentence).
- (2) Patent Term Adjustment for Unreasonable Granting Authority Delays – Article 18.46.
- (3) Patent Term Adjustment for Unreasonable Curtailment – Article 18.48.
- (4) Protection of Undisclosed Test or Other Data – Article 18.50.
- (5) Biologics – Article 18.51.*

*Source: *Intellectual Property Watch*, William E. New (<http://www.ip-watch.org/2017/11/16/tpp-texts-show-suspended-ip-provisions/>).

The following developments are also worthy of note:

- I. The TPP contemplated that Regulatory Data Protection (RDP) should be no less than three years for new formulations, new indications, or new methods of administration, and no less than five years for new chemicals. Two options for biologics were provided by the TPP, the better option being no less than eight years of RDP.
As this matter has been suspended, we consider that Mexico will continue granting five years of RDP for chemicals. Certain legal strategies will be required to achieve protection for new indications of orphan drugs and biologics.
- II. Patent Linkage is not suspended in the CPTPP.
- III. Regarding patent term adjustments due to unreasonable delays in patent prosecution and unreasonable curtailment on patent protection due to the regulatory processes, taking into consideration that this issue has been suspended, the patent term under domestic law will remain in place, i.e. the life term of a patent for a non-extendable 20 years as from the international filing date.

We expect patent law in Mexico to be further impacted by NAFTA 2.0; however, at the time of writing, the last round of negotiations was taking place in Washington, D.C. and no text was available as yet.

8.3 Are there any general practice or enforcement trends that have become apparent in your jurisdiction over the last year or so?

The recent trend in patent litigation is the debate on the amendments of granted patents post or during the invalidity proceedings; the IMPI and the Courts have issued their final position on this situation. Our opinion is that amendments to patents can be conducted as long as the patent is in force, whether the amendments would impact an invalidation action; that should be decided on a case-by-case basis, but it is not legal to refuse amendments or patents under the argument that the patent has already been challenged.



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Mr. Luna holds litigation specialisation degrees from the Universidad Panamericana, and a Master's Degree in Intellectual Property Law at the Franklin Pierce Law Centre in Concord, New Hampshire, USA.

He has proactively participated in cases against the unconstitutionality and inefficiency of certain amendments to the Federal Law of Administrative Proceedings in Mexico, which have precipitated challenges to the resolutions by the Mexican Institute of Industrial Property.

Mr. Luna is also the sponsor of a proposal to modify the litigation system of industrial property, limiting the Mexican Institute of Industrial Property to an exclusive registration authority, transferring the jurisdiction for litigation to Civil Courts in infringement cases, and to Administrative Courts for cases related to the annulment of trademark registrations or patents.

Mr. Luna is the author of several articles on patents, litigation and regulatory issues that have been published both in Mexico and abroad. Mr. Luna is a distinguished member of several associations and currently is the Vice-President of the Mexican Association for the Protection of Industrial Property. He was named in the 2007 Guide as one of the World's Leading Patent Law Practitioners. Currently, Mr. Luna is a partner in charge of the Appeals Department and co-chair of the Life Sciences group at OLIVARES, and he is a part-time professor at the National University (UNAM).



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Sergio L. Olivares, Jr. joined OLIVARES in 1987, becoming a Partner in 1994 and Chairman of the Management Committee in 2009. He leads the firm with strength and a commitment to transparency, client satisfaction, and personal service. Mr. Olivares' work at OLIVARES is extensive, and he has vast experience in the prosecution and litigation of intellectual property rights, particularly trademarks, copyrights, patents and unfair competition. He has specialised his practice in all types of intellectual property law, but works closely with the Patent group. Mr. Olivares is highly recommended by leading industry titles and rankings as a leader in IP. He has been influential in ensuring that the firm remains highly innovative as we have added new practice areas and industry groups that offer more complex types of work such as regulatory advice and administrative litigation, in addition to the establishment of the Life Science and IT industry groups. After his graduate work, Mr. Olivares trained with two prominent IP law firms in New York City, Morgan & Finnegan and Kenyon & Kenyon, before joining OLIVARES. This deep understanding of US intellectual property law allows him to offer clients clear comparative analyses of the US and Mexican legal systems and explain complex matters in a way that suits our international clients' needs.



OLIVARES began in 1969 as an intellectual property boutique. Today, the IP Practice serves many different industries, receives numerous awards for excellence in legal service, and leads the charge in protecting clients' valuable IP assets. Whether navigating complex pharmaceutical patent regulations, developing trademark protection strategies, or litigating copyright disputes, OLIVARES gets results.

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