

Spaniard sued for music file-sharing networks

May 19 2009, By CIARAN GILES , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Recording companies went to court Tuesday claiming euro13 million (\$17.5 million) from a Spaniard they accuse of profiting from computer programs he designed to allow free music downloads over the Internet.

The Promusicae association of Spanish recording firms and branches of international companies EMI Group Ltd., Sony [Music](#) Entertainment, Vivendi SA's Universal Music Group and Warner Music Group Corp. are suing Pablo Soto for what they allege is unfair competition.

Soto, 30, designed three popular file-sharing programs for Internet users to download music for free. He admits he earned a living from the programs but denies committing any offense.

Spanish courts have repeatedly ruled that free music downloading is not illegal if it is not for commercial use.

This stance has infuriated the music business, which claims it is being cheated of rightful earnings. The industry says Spain is among the worst offenders for what it says is Internet piracy.

Soto says business groups are now trying to target program designers after several failed cases against people who downloaded music for personal use.

His supporters argue that people in Spain already cover the alleged losses

made by music companies and artists by paying a special tax on CDs, portable storage devices and mobile phones.

Spain's Culture Ministry said talks are being held with all parties, but there was no immediate prospect of legislation that would end the disputes.

The case was to be heard at a court again Thursday. A spokesman for Madrid's Superior Court, which oversees the tribunal, said a ruling was expected within a month. News reports says the case could drag on for years with appeals.

The spokesman was speaking on condition anonymity in keeping with court regulations.

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