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ICANN's experiences in setting up multi-stakeholder coordination on the Internet's unique identifier system

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1. The information society is important and beneficial to all. Thirty-five years of the Internet to date have resulted in an increasingly interconnected global community, with enormous benefits to society. It is clear that this raises many, new, and complex issues.
2. These 35 years are the work of tens-of-thousands of technical, academic, business, civil society, and government individuals and organisations. It has resulted in a system of networks of networks, unknown before. With it has grown a realisation that global use of the Internet's unique identifiers requires technical policies and a coordinated approach, based on the values of this entire community of tens-of-thousands of globally dispersed individuals, organizations, and experts. Therefore a not-for profit, public-benefit organization – ICANN - has emerged as an institutional expression in recognition of this need, with the aim to coordinate the unique identifiers and to develop the related technical policies.
3. ICANN's responsibility is to coordinate, at the overall level, the global Internet's systems of unique identifiers, and in particular to ensure the stable and secure operation of the Internet's unique identifier systems. In particular, ICANN:
 - o coordinates the allocation and assignment of the three sets of unique identifiers for the Internet, which are a) domain names (forming a system referred to as "DNS"); b) Internet protocol ("IP") addresses and autonomous systems (AS) numbers; and c) protocol port and parameter numbers.
 - o coordinates the operation and evolution of the DNS root name server system.

- coordinates technical policy development reasonably and appropriately related to these technical functions.

That is: ICANN's focus is on how the Internet works, our focus is not on how the Internet is used. And that focus is not on the entire working of the Internet, but solely on the Internet's unique identifier system.

4. Our comments today are focused ICANN's structure and experience, not the substance of its work, which we are happy to discuss at the appropriate time.
5. The establishment of ICANN is to ensure a global multi-stakeholder partnership responsible for a specific area, namely the Internet's unique identifier system. It is built on the principles and terms referred to here, today, such as transparency, accountability, inclusiveness (all stakeholders and interested parties -- governments, civil society, private sector, individuals, experts, etc.). These principles and elements are reflected in ICANN's core values, bylaws, and structure, to which it is continuously held accountable.
6. ICANN, formed only in 1998, is currently in a transition towards becoming a truly international organisation in all aspects, something which requires time, effort and due diligence checks. Part of this transition is demonstrating that the functioning of the organization in terms of effectiveness, funding, participation, avoiding capture etc. is validated in practice, rather than only designed in theory. And every day new steps are made towards the goal of fully internationalization
7. One of the challenges for those who have become interested in ICANN is to understand the dynamics of its development, rather than only looking at the picture at a particular point in time. Let me explain.

If one would have looked at the handling of the DNS in the mid-nineties, one would have seen that it was a one-man operation only, under a research contract to the US Government.

If one would have looked in the years 96-97, one would have noticed that the USG, together with a number of governments worldwide and private sector players were discussing how to move this one-man operation into a globally operating, professional organisation.

If one would have looked at the organization in the year 2000, one would have seen a 3-5 man operation only with only US staff, and a Government Advisory Committee of around 30 countries.

At this very moment, ICANN has around 30 international staff, a fully international Board, its first office outside the US, and a Government Advisory Committee with close to hundred participating countries.

If one would look at ICANN towards the end of 2006, ICANN hopefully has a presence in each major geographical region of the world, international staff from each continent, is fully autonomous with full accountability to the entire global community, it will have proven that it is effective under full participation and with bottom-up process, that it would have the possibility, if appropriate, to expand its presence outside the US, and that it would have the necessary means to assist developing countries in a variety of ways. That is, the organization, with its responsibilities, reflects the wishes of the community input and need for this kind of organization with its responsibilities.

8. In summary, ICANN is a work in progress. ICANN is evolving. ICANN is transitioning from the one-man operation working under US research contracts of the early nineties to a fully autonomous, globally accountable, globally present, professional operation. This transition is expected to be completed by November 2006 in a carefully structure fashion to ensure that this transition is responding to the overarching need for Internet stability and security. This transition also allows the international community to join and assist in further developing the precise functioning of the organization.
9. As you will realize, such a transition is a big work, it is not something one can do overnight, nor something done lightly or in isolation. It requires a careful build-up to ensure that it responds to the diverse wishes of its stakeholders as we engage in the complex challenges of developing the use of the Internet's unique identifier system.
10. Therefore, the formation of the organization has not been without challenges. Some of ICANN's experiences have been good, while others have proven need for change. These experiences may be useful for the Working Group and the discussion within the WSIS in discussing the various areas of Internet Governance. An important experience is that ICANN is not, can not be, a static organization, so it learns from experience, feedback, and continues to improve the multi-stakeholder approach. Importantly for this discussion is that ICANN fully recognizes the important role of its stakeholders, namely governments, their role in public policy, as well as that of the private sector and civil society in their respective roles. Important to realize is that the views of the stakeholders are very diverse – as is also evident in the WSIS and WGIG – and that a delicate balancing act is required between the need for speed and the need for due process. Furthermore, we are all exploring new ways of working together.
11. Obviously, the multi-stakeholder approach does require compromise, it requires all to recognize the valid interests of other parties and seek to continuously improve. ICANN will probably never live up to the ideals of idealists (what organization can?) but it is evolving with input from stakeholders towards an ever improving effective, functioning, global partnership. It is a “work in progress”.

12. It is important to note that ICANN is a multi-stakeholder organisation which federates those who are interested in the domain name system. It is a regime in formation, with values behind it that have driven its success to date. It is an organisation very much set up along the values expressed in the WSIS discussion. It is an organisation for and by all of us, and therefore, we feel, you should not have to talk about it in terms of “us and them”.
 13. Additionally, it is important to note that there are many issues for which ICANN does not have responsibility, which are raised here these days. Solutions how to address these issues is what is being discussed here. From ICANN’s side we do not find interlocutors yet dealing with many issues. ICANN finds that there is a void for addressing issues that are outside of its responsibility, and is very encouraged to see that there is discussion for filling this void.
 14. We look forward to contributing to an open dialogue and understanding of the issues. We are pleased to see colleagues and experts from all regions of the world, and know that their participation will be as valuable to the WSIS as it is to ICANN. We look forward to hearing the concerns that new faces and experts from all regions contribute to the discussions on Internet governance, regardless of whether it relates to ICANN or not, and integrating those related to ICANN to the overall effort that is underway.
 15. We are looking forward to sharing our experiences (both good and bad, and how improvement is ongoing) that may be beneficial or of interest to the discussion.
 16. With regard to the WG, we would suggest, based on our experience, that transparency and full consultation are the two critical elements that will help facilitate a credible result which is technically feasible and politically acceptable to all stakeholders.
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