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## AT-LARGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### ALAC Statement on the Middle East and Adjoining Countries 2016-2019 Strategy

#### Introduction

John Laprise, member of the North American Regional At-Large Organization (NARALO) and Wafa Dahmani, ALAC Member of the African Regional At-Large Organization (AFRALO) developed an initial draft of the ALAC Statement on behalf of the ALAC.

On 05 November 2016, the first draft of the Statement was posted on the [At-Large Middle East and Adjoining Countries 2016-2019 Strategy Workspace](#).

On that same date, Alan Greenberg, Chair of the ALAC, asked ICANN Policy Staff in support of the At-Large Community to send a Call for Comments on the Statement to the At-Large Community via the [ALAC Announce Mailing List](#).

On 22 November 2016, a version incorporating the comments received was posted on the aforementioned workspace and the Chair requested that Staff open an ALAC ratification vote.

In the interest of time, the Chair requested that the Statement be transmitted to the ICANN public comment process, copying the ICANN Staff member responsible for this topic, with a note that the Statement is pending ALAC ratification.

Once ratified, this Statement will be resubmitted incorporating updated ratification information in the introduction section.

## **ALAC Statement on the Middle East and Adjoining Countries 2016-2019 Strategy**

While we support ICANN's Middle East and Adjoining Countries 2016-2019 Strategy, we feel that it does not address the existing political environment as it does not adequately account for the outsize role that national governments play in national life. Governments in the Middle East are concerned about the Internet as a matter of domestic order based on their perception of its catalytic role in the Arab Spring. Moreover, since the Arab Spring we are seeing states tightening controls across all Internet related industries and activities. There is also a sense that many if not most Middle Eastern governments prefer the multilateral forum of the ITU over multistakeholder venues such as ICANN where they can express their authority without the necessity of consulting with other sectors.

Therefore, while the strategy successfully identifies and proposes initiatives to involve all key stakeholders, it does not take the necessary preliminary step of a concerted diplomatic outreach campaign by ICANN to each and every national government in the region. Without their acceptance, the successful outcome of all of outreach strategies outlined within the report are in jeopardy and indeed are likely to fail as stakeholders may be unwilling and fearful of participating in activities which may draw official attention. The ALAC recommends that concrete steps be taken for ICANN to implement a concerted outreach campaign to each government in the region, with bilateral discussions to convince governments of ICANN's willingness to work in partnership. This should be carefully timed and coordinated to precede efforts involving other stakeholders.

Additionally, we suggest a greater emphasis on academia in the region. Cultivating credentialed local expertise is an important step towards building trust with governments which rely on them for advice on technical issues. Faculty at universities enjoy a level of trust and are frequently called upon to support policymakers' decisions.