ICANN Submission to ITU Council Working Group Internet

Contribution to the CWG-Internet Open Online Consultation

Description

The 2024 session of the ITU Council Working Group on International Internet-Related Public Policy Issues (CWG-Internet) is holding an open consultation (online and physical) on the following topic and questions: "The developmental aspects to strengthen the Internet."

Stakeholders' perspectives are sought on the following questions:

1. How relevant multilateral and multistakeholder processes, including but not limited to U.N.-based processes such as Summit of the Future, WSIS+20 and the IGF, could address aspects related to Internet development?

2. What are the challenges and opportunities, good practices and favorable policy environments to strengthen the Internet, including in areas such as:

a. fostering meaningful connectivity
b. equitable access for all
c. promoting a secure and resilient Internet
d. achieving universal access
e. the deployment of IPv6
f. using satellite communication to reach remote and underserved remote areas
g. ensuring services are affordable for people
h. promoting digital inclusion and skills
i. fostering multi-stakeholder participation
j. encouraging public and private sector investment in Internet infrastructure.

3. How can we promote international multistakeholder cooperation on public policy issues that are focused on promoting the developmental aspects of the Internet?"

Section 1

How relevant multilateral and multi-stakeholder processes, including but not limited to UN-based processes such as Summit of the Future, WSIS+20 and the IGF, could address aspects related to Internet development?

ICANN's Contribution to Section 1

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is pleased to respond to the Council Working Group (CWG) on International Internet-related Public Policy issues open online consultation on "the developmental aspects to strengthen the Internet."

ICANN is a nonprofit public benefit corporation with a global community dedicated to keeping the Internet secure, stable, and interoperable. ICANN coordinates the Internet's unique identifier systems, which enable people all over the world to connect from any digital device that is connected to the Internet.

Earlier this year, the Internet reached a significant milestone, celebrating its 50th anniversary[1] Today, an entire generation has grown up in a world where the Internet is a constant presence. The Internet's robust technical foundation ensures that future generations will continue to enjoy its many benefits. Over half a century there are important insights behind the Internet's extraordinary success.

The Internet's technical design and the multistakeholder model of Internet governance enables its continuous development.

The Internet allows anyone in the world to connect and communicate using a device of their choice, as long as they use common protocols and open standards, which remain the backbone for global connectivity and interoperability. While the underlying architecture or network layer does not change, the Internet continues to develop at the upper layers. New protocols and standards are continually being added, allowing the Internet to evolve in response to present-day conditions. The Internet's evolution depends on multistakeholder collaboration and consensus-based decision making. For example, email and security protocols, as well as web standards, are the result of the collective efforts of engineers, researchers and others who collaborated in inclusive multistakeholder environments. Decisions are made based on technical merit and reached by consensus, ensuring their implementation.

[1] In 1974 Internet Pioneers Dr Vinton Cerf and Dr Robert Kahn published a paper outlining the design of a Transmission Control Program (TCP) which allowed computers to communicate. See, IEEE Community Society, "TCP Design Published," (May 1974); https://www.comsoc.org/node/1958

Section 2

What are the challenges and opportunities, good practices and favourable policy environments to strengthen the Internet, including in areas such as:

- fostering meaningful connectivity
- equitable access for all
- promoting a secure and resilient Internet
- achieving universal access
- the deployment of IPv6
- using satellite communication to reach remote and underserved remote areas
- ensuring services are affordable for people
- promoting digital inclusion and skills
- fostering multistakeholder participation
- encouraging public and private sector investment in Internet infrastructure.

ICANN's Contribution to Section 2

Fostering Meaningful Connectivity

The Internet has grown at an exponential rate over the last two decades, with billions of people across the globe now online and millions more to join them, the majority of whom primarily speak languages other than English. ICANN and the ICANN community recognized that mere access to the Internet is insufficient and have emphasized the importance of ensuring that Internet usage is secure, reliable, and relevant to the local context.

ICANN is prioritizing multilingualism and, in particular, the implementation of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs), within the Internet landscape. IDNs are a notable development in the Internet's evolution that fosters meaningful connectivity by enabling people around the world to use domain names in local languages and scripts. Developed as technical standards by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), they play a crucial role in making the Internet more inclusive.

Collaboration within the ICANN community has led to the delegation of 151 IDN top-level domains (TLDs), including both generic and country code TLDs. These domains support 37 languages across 23 scripts, demonstrating a commitment to linguistic diversity. These new TLDs provide greater consumer choice and can represent languages, cultures, brands, geographies, special interests, and more (e.g., .ไทย, .london, and .sport).

Furthermore, ICANN has collaborated with stakeholders in the ICANN community to establish rules for 26 commonly used scripts, spanning over 350 languages. Efforts are ongoing to expand language and script support within the Domain Name System (DNS), with

ICANN currently working with communities who use the following scripts: Balinese, Javanese, Thaana, and Unified Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics.

Additionally, ICANN is actively working with communities around the world to access the Internet in their local languages and scripts. The launch of the next round of new TLDs will provide the opportunity to make the Internet more accessible for people around the world by expanding the number of domain names in native scripts and languages. This initiative has the potential to bring millions of people online and allow them to communicate in their native language with family, friends, municipalities, and more.

Billions of people read and write in Arabic, Chinese, Cyrillic, or other non-Latin scripts. Expanding TLD options in local languages and scripts will help provide them access to information in familiar characters. This enhanced local connectivity will inspire innovation and content generation, affecting their daily lives.

Promoting a Secure and Resilient Internet

ICANN helps coordinate the Internet's system of unique identifiers to ensure a stable, secure, and interoperable global Internet. ICANN promotes a secure and resilient Internet in the following areas:

- **DNS Management:** The DNS is a fundamental Internet technology. It is essential for translating human-readable domain names into the IP addresses that computers use to communicate with each other. ICANN helps coordinate the DNS to ensure it functions smoothly and securely. At the global level, the DNS has never failed.

- **Root Zone Management:** At the core of the DNS is a system of servers and data that comprise "the root". ICANN is responsible for allocating domain names in the root zone of the DNS. ICANN manages one of the 13 root zone servers. More broadly, ICANN facilitates the coordination of the overall Root Server System. These activities increase the stability of the Root Server System to ensure the availability of the root zone data for everyone in the world, which is critical for the overall stability and resiliency of the DNS, and in turn, the global Internet.

- **Technical Advisory Committees:** ICANN is the home of numerous Advisory Committees composed of world-class technical experts from across the globe. The Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC) provides advice on matters relating to the security and integrity of the Internet's naming and address allocation systems. They conduct assessments to identify systemic risks, and offer recommendations to mitigate those risks. The Root Server System Advisory Committee (RSSAC) provides advice on matters related to the operation, security, and integrity of the Root Server System.

- **Collaborative Security Efforts:** ICANN works with global stakeholders, including governments, law enforcement, industry groups, and the technical community to enhance Internet security. The Government Advisory Committee (GAC)'s Public Safety Working Group (PSWG) develops and supports methods and capabilities to mitigate unlawful activity related to the DNS. ICANN works directly with both national and industry Computer Emergency Readiness Teams (CERTs) to protect computing infrastructure. This collaborative approach helps in addressing and mitigating global security threats.

- **DNS Security Extensions (DNSSEC):** ICANN promotes the implementation of DNSSEC, a suite of specifications designed to protect the integrity of DNS data and prevent certain types of attacks.

- **Policy Development:** ICANN facilitates a multistakeholder model for Internet governance, ensuring that policies governing the Internet's technical infrastructure are created through a transparent, inclusive process that also considers security and resilience.

- **Capacity Building:** ICANN conducts training and capacity-building programs for various stakeholders, including technical communities, governments, and students to enhance their understanding and ability to contribute to Internet security.

Promoting Digital Inclusion and Skills

Despite the availability of IDNs, many people around the world are still excluded from experiencing the full benefits of this growing, multilingual Internet simply because they cannot use a valid domain name or email address in their language and script of choice. This exclusion occurs because many software applications do not accept these valid domain names and email addresses created using new multilingual TLDs. For example, a user cannot use an email address in a local language to register for an online social media application or an e-government service. Additionally, domain names with these TLDs are not automatically converted into clickable links for seamless Internet navigation, nor are they always displayed correctly in local language form for small or medium enterprises to use for marketing purposes.

Universal Acceptance (UA) of domain names and email addresses is now essential to enable users globally to experience the full social and economic benefits of the growing Internet. Specifically, UA means that all domain names and email addresses function properly across all Internet-enabled applications, devices, and systems.

Stakeholders in the multistakeholder community can play a role in promoting, encouraging and enabling Universal Acceptance:

- **Governments** are encouraged to implement procurement policies that require support for local language domain names and email addresses on government websites and applications, thereby improving citizens' access.

- **Technology companies** should update their software design guidelines to include default support for local language domain names and email addresses in websites, applications, and email systems.

- **University and educational institutions** should incorporate UA concepts into their IT curricula.

- **Civil society** should raise awareness and advocate for the practical application of local language domain names and email addresses in communities.

Fostering Multistakeholder Participation

The Internet's development is fundamentally about collaboration. Since the Internet consists of thousands of independently owned networks, technical coordination is essential for connectivity. From the beginning, engineers and researchers worked together, sharing and exchanging ideas on how to connect computers across networks. They eventually formed technical groups dedicated solely to strengthening and improving the Internet's functionality and ensuring its continuous development. Today, the Internet technical community, consisting of several organizations such as ICANN, the IETF, the Internet Architecture Board (a committee of the IETF), and the Regional Internet Registries (RIRs), share a common goal of maintaining an open, globally connected, and interoperable Internet.

The technical community plays a crucial role in the functioning of the Internet, as outlined in the WSIS Tunis Agenda and U.N. General Assembly Resolution 70/125. One of the key strengths is their community-based multistakeholder processes, which develop policies, standards, and best practices for the Internet's security, stability and resilience. The Internet's success is a culmination of collaborative processes that involve all relevant stakeholders, leading to the best ideas and increasing the likelihood of successful implementation.

The success of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance offers valuable insights and key principles to foster broader participation. The concept of multistakeholder participation existed even before the Internet was introduced and certainly before it was described as a model for Internet governance by U.N. Member States within the WSIS Tunis Agenda in 2005. The multistakeholder model of Internet governance has helped to create the stable, open, and interoperable Internet that we know today.

- **Multistakeholder Participation**
  The multistakeholder model of Internet governance is characterized by inclusive and representative participation, ensuring broad representation across different sectors

and regions. This model is particularly important for the least developed countries, as it provides a platform for them to address their unique needs and challenges.

In the context of Internet governance, for example, the multistakeholder model includes the technical community, the private sector, academia, civil society, governments, and other stakeholders. Each plays its respective role, working together to address Internet policy related issues.

- **Consensus Based Decision-Making**
  Consensus-based decision-making is a uniquely democratic multistakeholder approach that allows all stakeholders to express their views and ideas, which are given equal consideration; meaning everyone has an equal voice and a seat at the decision-making table. Reaching consensus or agreement through inclusive deliberations ensures that all vested stakeholders accept the decision as the best way forward. In the context of Internet governance, solutions identified through the multistakeholder model are much more likely to be implementable in the long run. Many of the technical solutions implemented to strengthen the security of the Internet's technical infrastructure have resulted from inclusive multistakeholder participation and consensus-based decisions.

- **Openness and Transparency**
  Openness and transparency are critical for fostering multistakeholder participation. This means that processes should be open and inclusive of all interested stakeholders. As an illustration, ICANN makes its meetings and agendas for the ICANN public meetings easily accessible on its website well before the actual meeting takes place. ICANN also announces its meetings to encourage maximum participation. Additionally, information must be transparent, clearly explaining decisions and how they were reached. In the case of public comments or consultations, information should be readily available.

Examples of the Multistakeholder Model of Internet governance in practice:

- The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN): A prominent example of the multistakeholder model in action. ICANN follows a multistakeholder model in which the ICANN community - registries, registrars, Internet Service Providers, intellectual property advocates, commercial and business interests, non-commercial and non-profit interests, representatives from more than 100 governments, and a global array of individual Internet users - play important roles in its community-based, consensus-driven, policy-making approach for issues relevant to the global coordination of the DNS. Learn more information about ICANN's multistakeholder community policy process.

- The Internet Governance Forum (IGF): The IGF is a global inclusive multistakeholder platform that brings together various stakeholders to discuss public policy issues

pertaining to the Internet. The IGF was established through the WSIS in 2005 as one of the implementations of the multistakeholder model of Internet Governance. Renewal of the IGF mandate is a consideration during the twenty year review of the World Summit of the Information Society (WSIS+20) by the U.N. General Assembly in 2025.

Section 3

“How can we promote international multistakeholder cooperation on public policy issues that are focused on promoting the development aspects of the Internet?"

ICANN’s Contribution to Section 3

The WSIS Tunis Agenda provides a crucial point of departure for international multistakeholder cooperation on public policy issues focused on promoting the developmental aspects of the Internet. The Tunis Agenda and UNGA Resolution 70/125 recognized the roles of various stakeholders in Internet governance, including the technical community, intergovernmental organizations, private sector, civil society and governments. Furthermore, it recognized that "Internet governance includes more than Internet naming and addressing. It also includes other significant public policy issues such as, inter alia, critical Internet resources, the security and safety of the Internet, and developmental aspects and issues pertaining to the use of the Internet." U.N. Member States endorsed this multistakeholder paradigm, which was among the factors that has helped advance digital transformation across the globe and played a role in the Internet’s development.

Having a clear grasp of the objectives of public policies related to the Internet is crucial to begin with. There are existing multistakeholder organizations and forums that are addressing a range of issues, including technical aspects, security and privacy, disinformation and misinformation online, and digital inclusion, among others. These organizations and forums have demonstrated flexibility and responsiveness to new opportunities and challenges that emerge on the Internet. Starting from scratch is not always necessary. Including all relevant stakeholders or interested parties allows for the sharing and exchange of best practices, approaches, and new ideas, which significantly contribute to promoting international multistakeholder cooperation. Furthermore, incorporating the key principles in promoting multistakeholder participation, as outlined in Section 2, is equally as vital.

Finally, the U.N.’s twenty year review of the implementation of WSIS (WSIS+20) should aim to strengthen the multistakeholder model and reaffirm the commitments made during WSIS 2003 and 2005, as well as during the WSIS+10 Review in 2015. The continuation of WSIS beyond 2025 and the renewal of the Internet Governance Forum mandate at WSIS+20 reflect a firm commitment by the U.N. Member States to the multistakeholder model, signaling that multistakeholder collaboration remains a vital force in the developmental aspects of the Internet.