

INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM CONCLUDES HYDERABAD MEETING

The Internet Governance Forum concluded today its third meeting, which opened in Hyderabad, India, on 3 December, bringing together representatives of government, the private sector, civil society, the Internet community, international organizations and the media. Almost 1,300 participants from more than 90 countries attended the meeting.

Five main themes were addressed: reaching the next billion; promoting cyber-security and trust; managing critical Internet resources; taking stock and the way forward; and emerging issues -- the Internet of tomorrow. In addition to plenary sessions on these themes, workshops and forums discussed specific issues.

The meeting today heard Mr. Nitin Desai, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General for Internet Governance and Chairman of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) of the IGF, who underscored the importance of connecting the issues tackled by the IGF with the uses that people make of the Net, whether it is for e-governance, e-health, commerce or media. At the closing ceremony, Mr. Desai thanked all the participants, saying the fact that they chose to come to India despite the events in Mumbai is itself a testimony to their willingness to show solidarity with the people here.

Jainder Singh, Secretary of the Indian Department of Information Technology, expressed the gratitude of his Government to the participants for coming to Hyderabad and for participating in the third Internet Governance Forum. By being here in spite of the terrorist acts in Mumbai, they have demonstrated their solidarity with the people of India in facing this menace. The Secretary said that the Internet had created avenues for pursuing developmental and economic goals far more efficiently and equitably than before, but the same potential has attracted the attention of undesirable elements in the world, making the Internet both a vehicle and a target of criminal minds.

During the day, the Forum also held two main sessions, one on "Taking Stock and the Way Forward", the other on "Innovation and the Evolution of the Internet". Several workshops and other meetings examined issues such as freedom of expression in cyberspace and Internet filtering and censorship, and a rights-based approach to Internet for all. Three "Dynamic Coalition" meetings covered Freedom of Expression and the Media, Accessibility and Disability, and Linguistic Diversity.

The meeting also heard from organizers of several national and regional Internet Governance Forums which have held meetings during the last year in Montevideo, Strasbourg, Dakar and Nairobi and that have "reported back" today.

The fourth meeting of the Forum will take place in Sharm el-Sheikh, from the 14th to the 17th of November 2009, as announced today by the Egyptian Ambassador to India, Mr. Mohamed Higazy.

Closing Statements

Mr. Nitin Desai, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General for Internet Governance and Chairman of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG), reminded participants that this forum was important because many of the issues examined here were not being discussed anywhere else. It was important to connect the issues tackled by the IGF with the uses that people make of the Net, whether for e-governance, e-health, commerce or media. At the closing ceremony, Mr. Desai thanked all the participants, saying the fact that they chose to come to India despite the events in Mumbai is itself a testimony to their willingness to show solidarity with the people here.

Art Reilly, Senior Director at Cisco Systems, representing the International Chamber of Commerce/BASIS, said that the IGF is unique; it allows candid exchanges among all the stakeholders on an equal footing. The IGF is not a series of political statements and proceedings; rather, each participant is an equally empowered contributor. Over three years, the IGF has increasingly proven its worth. At the IGF, participants are building knowledge and forging the relationships necessary to move closer to a more inclusive and people-centric information society. Business sees no benefit to the stalemates of entrenched positions and wordsmithing on very narrow issues that would occur if the IGF were focused on time-consuming negotiations of a text. All stakeholders must continue to work together to ensure that not only the connected, but those not connected, benefit from the information society.

Anita Gurumurthy, Executive Director of I.T. for Change, also said the IGF was a unique institution attempting to measure up to the realities of a transnational political community. As a UN forum, it allows people excluded from other spaces and arenas where Internet policies are being shaped to participate equally in the dialogues affecting their own lives. She said Gandhian thought provides a very useful point of departure to take stock of the role and relevance of the IGF. The Forum must ask: "How is the IGF going to help the poorest, most helpless, destitute woman and man?" If the IGF is, in fact, about the Internet and development, then it also follows that, as in all areas of development, a rights and citizenship approach be used to discuss policies for the Internet as well.

German Valdes, Communications Area Manager at the Asia-Pacific Network Information Center, said that tackling in Hyderabad the issues of enhanced cooperation, critical Internet resources, cybersecurity and cybercrime shows that the IGF is maturing as an effective forum. It is also evolving in a way that would be unthinkable in a more formal institution. The critical role of the IGF is in promoting dialogue and thereby overcoming misunderstandings.

Mohamed Higazy, Ambassador of Egypt to India, said that before the first IGF meeting, Egypt took the lead to coordinate an African stance through gathering all African partners in discussing issues of interest and developing coordinated positions. During each of the three IGF meetings, Egypt was keen to take part in the different functions of the Forum, partnering with various stakeholders. After Hyderabad, the IGF Egypt meeting in 2009 will continue to stress that both developing and developed countries are equally sharing great responsibilities through their collaborative participation in this historic IGF process. It will continue to explore and reach the best means for getting the citizens of all societies connected to the Internet, in order that communities may further develop and prosper. He announced that next year, the IGF meeting would take place in Sharm el-Sheikh, the city of peace, from the 14th to the 17th of November 2009.

Mr. Jainder Singh, Secretary, Department of Information Technology, Indian Ministry for Communications and Information Technology, said the Internet's current impact in all areas of human endeavour is still a fraction of what is possible. The Internet has suddenly created avenues for pursuing developmental and economic goals far more efficiently and equitably than was ever possible in the history of mankind. Sadly, the same potential has attracted the attention of many of the undesirable elements in societies around the world, making the Internet both a vehicle and a target of criminal minds. After summarizing the discussions held during this third IGF meeting, Mr. Singh expressed the gratitude of his Government to the participants for coming to Hyderabad and for participating in the third Internet Governance Forum. By being here in spite of the terrorist acts in Mumbai, they have demonstrated their solidarity with the people of India in facing this menace.

Session on the Internet of Tomorrow: Innovation and the Evolution of the Internet

During the morning session, participants examined emerging policy issues generated by new technologies, new uses and new actors, in order to feed into future Internet Governance Forum discussions. These included legal issues; policy directives; community understanding in driving the Internet; the vast discrepancy between high-end users of Internet bandwidth and low-end users; the impact of the global financial crisis on the development of the Internet; and the "Internet of things", which addresses ethical, privacy and security issues as central questions for the rationale for technical choices.

The moderator, Jonathan Charles, BBC foreign correspondent, said the discussion would focus on five themes: the opportunities and challenges associated with the growing popularity of social networks and user-generated content; the impact of policy frameworks on creativity and innovation from a

entrepreneurial perspective; the policy changes and frameworks needed to ensure an "Internet for all"; the impact of the global nature of the Internet on jurisdiction and legislation; and policy changes needed to ensure an environmentally sustainable Internet. Other issues might also be relevant for next year, for example, what consequences would the "credit crunch" have for the Internet, in particular regarding regulation?

S. V. Raghavan, Professor and Chairman of the Computer Science Department at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, said that one way to make access to the Internet sustainable is by making future generations understand and think about serious issues, such as legal issues, policy directives, and community understanding in driving the Internet. He also said the challenge was to harness technology for society's benefit, and to find what was required to spur innovation by every individual for the benefit of society.

Stephen Lau, CEO of EDS Electronic Data Systems (Hong Kong) Limited, and member of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group, said competition was needed to provide better choices in prices and improve access.

Ian Peter, Internet Governance Caucus co-coordinator at Ian Peter and Associates, drew attention to the vast discrepancy between high-end users of Internet bandwidth, and the low-end Internet user; this gap will grow as there is more and more use of Internet TV and Internet videos. He also underlined the need to address how we deal with climate change and environment issues, infrastructure, access, ossification of standards, and the role of governments as we go forward.

Herbert Heitmann, Head of Global Communications at SAP AG, a European software company, also raised the issue of the impact on the development of the Internet of the global financial crisis, which will become a real recession by the next IGF meeting. He also said that cyber-security was critical, more than ever before. Intellectual property rights will also become more critical than before.

Heather Creech, Director of Global Connectivity at the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), stressed the incredible potential of the "Internet of things" (which addresses ethical, privacy and security issues as central questions for the rationale for technical choices) and said that we cannot ensure that every single citizen is engaged in monitoring his or her immediate environment unless we have access right down to the last person, the last citizen.

Proposals were also made from the floor for issues to be considered at the next meeting of the Internet Governance Forum. These included enabling communities to become contributors of knowledge within the Internet; Internet liberties and freedom from predation; providing a financial system in areas without banks (micro-banking); transparency of Web sites on their use of personal data; the rights of members of social networks; social networking sites and the blurred boundaries between entertainment, information and commercial purposes.

Concluding, Stephen Lau, member of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group, said that IGF multistakeholders, whether they represent academic, civil society, government, technology or business entities, have existed in parallel universes. But a portal has opened up, and that portal is the IGF. This portal is increasingly providing channels or gateways through which these parallel universes are communicating and collaborating. Mr. Lau hoped that there will be more gateways opened up for further collaboration. Hopefully, in the foreseeable future, all these parallel universes would be integrated in the interest of our world and of humanity.

Session on Taking Stock and the Way Forward

During the afternoon main session, on "Taking Stock and the Way Forward", participants gave feedback on the Hyderabad meeting and exchanged views on the review process to assess the "desirability of the continuation of the Forum", as called for by the Tunis Agenda.

Nitin Desai, Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General for Internet Governance, said one thing that needs to be done during 2009 is a review of the IGF, so that UN Member States can take a decision on its continuation beyond its original five-year mandate, which expires in 2010. This will be discussed extensively in February in Geneva during open consultations, followed by a meeting of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group, but participants at the current IGF may want to express thoughts so that they can be taken into account at those meetings.

Georges Papadatos, of the Government of Greece and Point Person on Managing Internet Resources, said there are some weaknesses in the decision-making processes as far as transmitting what this audience wants to transmit to the next IGF. In this respect, some lessons can be learned from the regional and national IGF processes, he said. He added that more governments needed to be engaged in the IGF.

Ravi Shanker, Joint Secretary at the Indian Department of Information Technology, said 'multistakeholderism' needs to be truly reflected; while we are asking for academic, industry, media and civil society representation, in addition to government representation, making sure all benefit from the Internet is an aspect that we need to look at. There is a need to build an institutional aspect in the whole IGF process, he thought. And that is an activity that could be perhaps discussed at greater length during the course of the MAG meetings.

Jeff Brueggeman, Vice President for Public Policy at AT&T and Point Person on Access and Diversity, said that the discussion of global economic issues this year was an example of how the IGF can be flexible and respond to what is happening in real time. There were also interesting developments happening with the national groups and the regional IGFs that were helping carry the IGF discussions forward throughout the year, and were also expanding the dialogue to include more participants, helping to broaden the policy discussion that is happening in IGF.

Katitza Rodríguez, Electronic Privacy Information Center & DiploFoundation Associate (Peru) and Point Person on Security/Privacy & Openness, proposed that information privacy and protection be considered as an independent topic in the main session at the 2009 IGF in Egypt. Other topics she suggested were privacy and social networks, with specific focus on minors.

Alun Michael, Co-operative Member of the British Parliament, said he had greater confidence in the IGF process after the Hyderabad meeting, particularly because of the almost spontaneous development of people getting together in multistakeholder national and regional IGFs. That indicated that the IGF is moving beyond an event to become an on-going process. He suggested that more parliamentarians needed to be engaged in the process.

Comments from the floor addressed issues such as enhancing efforts to integrate gender concerns in the work of the IGF and ensure wider citizen e-participation in the meetings. It was also said that the IGF is better today than ever.

The Internet Governance Forum

The Internet Governance Forum is an outcome of the Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, which took place in 2005. In the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, Governments asked the United Nations Secretary-General to convene a new forum for policy dialogue to discuss issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the Internet's sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development.



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