Address by Internet Society President and CEO Lynn St Amour to the opening of the IGF in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

12 November 2007

Lynn St Amour addresses the opening of the IGF in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 12 November 2007

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for the Internet Governance Forum this week.

I would like to thank our host organizations, the government of Brazil, the United Nations, and the other organizations that have collaborated to bring about this IGF.

I would like to share with you the perspective I bring to the IGF as president and CEO of the Internet Society, and, today, the message I would like to focus on is best captured by the somewhat over exposed phrase “Think Globally and Act Locally”.

The Internet Society is an independent international nonprofit organization with more than 26,000 members in 180 countries and over 80 chapters spread across the world. We are proud to have been established by two of the fathers of the Internet, Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn; and in fact Vint was the first Executive Director of the Internet Society.

The Internet Society has promoted the open development and growth of the Internet since 1992 and we are the organizational home for the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF).

The Internet Society works globally and locally, and for over 15 years, our activities - particularly in developing countries - have helped expand the reach of the Internet and worked to strengthen the local environment and increase local capacities of all kinds.

A healthy and robust Internet requires local conditions that support an environment characterized by choice, connectivity, and active communities; an environment in which skills development, capacity building, and local content development are priorities; an environment in which businesses are attracted by enabling public policy environments and predictable investment climates.

These characteristics are not particular to the Internet or to Internet deployment. They are fundamental to a nation's economic and social development.

For the Internet to be a powerful instrument that increases productivity, generates economic growth, job creation and employability, and improves the quality of life for all, it needs conditions in which it can flourish.

This is no trivial matter and it is not easy, yet these conditions are essential to bringing the next billion people online, and the billion after that . . . the billion after that . . . and the billion after that . . . the billion after that. And by the time we reach the current population, there will be several billion more to come online.

The Internet Governance Forum presents all stakeholders with a unique opportunity to catalyze local change, not only as a forum for dialogue but as a medium that will
encourage fundamental change at the local level to empower communities, build capacity and skills, enable the Internet's expansion, and contribute to economic and social development.

The results of the IGF must be to contribute to and support the deployment of the Internet and fundamentally this must be done at the local level. Let us leverage the IGF to bring forth the tools, skills, and knowledge to empower all stakeholders, including governments, to affect this change.

To succeed, we must preserve and promote the spirit and intent of the IGF. We must preserve and promote its multi-stakeholderism, its dynamic, open, and collaborative nature, and its encouragement of open and frank exchanges of views, free from the pressure of negotiations.

Supporting and contributing to the evolution of the Internet as an open, decentralized platform for innovation, creativity, and economic opportunity is the best way for the Internet to help improve the lives of people everywhere.

We have seen that, throughout its history, the Internet has always been defined by the energy and ideas of those who use it. As new communities come online, we are excited by the creativity and innovation they bring, and we are constantly reminded of the duty we all share in supporting their emergence.

The Internet Society encourages all stakeholders to re-invigorate their commitment to assisting new communities to come on-line and to the identification of local solutions to the challenges we all face in ensuring the Internet is for everyone as we still have a very, very long way to go.

Thank you.