CITEL PCC.1/Internet Society Workshop: "The Internet Access Ecosystem and Network Neutrality"

Lynn St.Amour, Concluding remarks, 10 May 2010, Ushuaia, Argentina

I'd like to say thank you again to the Executive Secretary, CITEL – Clovis Baptista, the Alternate Chairman of PCC-1 - Héctor Carril, the government of Argentina and the staff of CITEL for their partnership in holding this workshop.

And, thank you again for this chance to address you. Please join me in thanking all the panelists and those who helped make this workshop a success.

As we admire the Internet and the technology that now connects over a billion and a half individuals around the world, it would be easy to forget that the Internet as we know it was not a given. Over the past 40 years, during a time when there were many other networks and networking standards already in place or under development, the Internet grew from a relatively small research project into a global vehicle for business and social interaction, and it is important that we all understand why and how this came about in order to secure it's future success – for the benefit of all of us.

Over the course of the day, we've heard much about the Internet Model and Internet Ecosystem, and their supporting principles – and from virtually all presenters. These principles have profound implications not only for the way we view the Internet's history, but more importantly for its continuing development, expansion, and evolution.

The Internet Model allows underlying technologies to continue to evolve – and to benefit from – the input of end users, network engineers, and businesses around the world. The success of the Internet has always been a result of its openness, transparency, and de-centralized nature.

These principles or beliefs do not in any way diminish the genuine concerns that people hold about various aspects of the Internet and it's uses. But, as we seek solutions to current problems, we must take every care to avoid future limitations on the Internet's development. These principles are not merely an explanation of past success, but a proven formula for approaching the challenges of the present, and future.

To illustrate all this a little more concretely, let us step just a little way back in time and imagine ourselves in the mid-1990s.

At that time, e-commerce was nascent and not uniformly embraced. Consumer broadband was just beginning to penetrate markets. "Convergence" of voice and data networks was a buzzword, seemingly far from realization.

So, in the mid-90s, which of the following economically and socially impactful Internet application and service developments would you have predicted?

• That you could walk into an Internet café on the other side of the world and use a computer to call home, reliably and cheaply?
• That one of the most successful companies in the world was based on a search engine and that most of its public services were completely free?
• That private individuals in developed and developing countries alike would be able to establish their own micro-boutiques, selling goods to a global market?

Even to the extent such things were predicted, their scope, impact and importance were merely postulations at the time. How, then, did Skype, Google, e-Bay, and many others, come about?

At this point in the day, it should come as no surprise, that the Internet Society believes unequivocally that it was the Internet's unique development and management model – the Internet Model.

The Internet is a platform on which individuals, organizations, and consumers themselves actually build the infrastructure and develop and deploy services that are globally accessible. Seriously, what could possibly be better than that? We, as individuals, as organizations, and as consumers build the infrastructure and develop and deploy services that we find useful and interesting, and that, if we choose, can be globally accessible.

In enabling an unprecedented scale of human communications, the Internet has revolutionized how we express ourselves and how we collaborate, which has, in turn spurred its remarkable growth in applications and services.

Its utility as a tool for human development is, however, only determined by the degree to which people have unfettered, affordable access to the network and its services, and the degree to which the services and applications are trusted, reliable, and stable, and the user's identity sacrosanct.

All Internet users have a stake in the Internet's development, by virtue of its open technical architecture, the open processes by which it is developed, and the distributed responsibilities and roles. The extent to which users exercise their stake is a matter of their own choice.

The phenomenal success of the Internet may have been surprising to many, but it was not an accident. It was directly the result of a visionary approach and deliberate design decisions.

Nor is the Internet's success complete or it's future secure. We should not think of it as something that has been developed, but rather something that continues to develop. The conditions that have taken it this far remain vital to its progress in the future. We cannot take this for granted.

To divorce the future development of the Internet from the processes which developed it is to lose the Internet itself.

It is with this understanding that we must approach the challenges we all face on today's Internet.

For example, we heard many interesting perspectives on the challenge of managing networks in a context of proliferating, high-bandwidth consuming applications. We also saw quite clearly that many believe that the term "network neutrality" is problematic, and
that it can distract from the more important principle of open internetworking and end-user choice. We also found a lot of common ground in the panelist's positions on these points. And, this clearly represents progress from the last 6 – 9 months.

The story of human progress is, in so many ways, the story of communication technologies. From the development of writing to the invention of printing, from the telegraph to the telephone, from radio to modern broadcast media, to the most powerful communication medium we have ever known: the Internet. All great leaps forward in communication technology go hand in hand with social advancement, cultural development, and economic expansion.

We must preserve the fundamental principles of Internet development to ensure that the Internet continues to evolve in a way that allows future users across the world to build on - as they see fit - and benefit from this open, global, interoperable platform of connected networks.

The Internet Society believes it is our shared responsibility to preserve the principle of open internetworking that has made and continues to make all this possible, and we look forward to working with all of you.

Again, thank you, and thank you again to CITEL for partnering with us on this workshop and I hope it has been thought-provoking and helpful.