It is a pleasure to be here in Durban and to join you for the inaugural Africa DNS Forum, which I am pleased to say is the first of what we expect will become an annual event. The Internet Society, through our many years of work in the region, and now particularly through our African Regional Bureau, led so ably by Dawit Bekele and his team, and through our many dedicated chapters here, recognizes the importance of building a platform for the DNS community across Africa. We believe this Forum can make a significant impact on advancing the domain name infrastructure and industry here, which is critical to the Internet and its growth.

As a cause-driven organization, the Internet Society works to keep the Internet open, thriving, and benefitting people across the world. We have five regional bureaus covering the globe that work closely with our more than 90 Chapters to advocate for access to an open global Internet and to build local collaboration and engagement in supporting this mission.

One important area for Africa, and hence for our African Regional Bureau and chapters is ensuring strong, robust ccTLDs across all of Africa. This is important as the ccTLDs are a very important part of the Internet’s ecosystem. They are a natural place to help build strong local communities, to drive innovation, and to encourage the development of local content. Local content in particular is very important and long under-appreciated for the very positive impact it has on the Internet’s utility, value, and contribution to social, cultural and economic development. A robust and thriving Internet in Africa requires reliable, resilient and sustainable ccTLDs. Some straight-forward ways to accomplish this includes increasing the use of online automated solutions, as well as the adoption of new technologies such as DNSSEC.

For many years, we’ve been collaborating with AfTLD and ICANN to support African ccTLDs in various ways. Yet, despite these efforts and those of many others, the growth and sustainability of African ccTLDs and the adoption of new technologies remains low, quite low actually, as compared to other regions of the world.

This is exactly why we all came together to develop a multi-year ccTLD and DNSSEC development program for Africa. This program encompasses many initiatives all working together to complement each other, including commissioning a ccTLD assessment study for Africa that will enable the development of a focused and needs-based approach for support to individual ccTLDs. The study will also provide information that will be used to establish a ccTLD Observatory that will be maintained in collaboration with AfTLD and ICANN.
It should come as no surprise that the Internet Society believes strongly in a multi-stakeholder approach for all areas related to the Internet’s development and governance. As such, this program seeks to promote multi-stakeholder best practices with respect to ccTLD management and community engagement. This and capacity building will form large components of the program to help ensure that the requisite technical capacity exists and that global best practices continue to be shared.

Equally, it is important to recognize those that have made significant contributions to the development and growth of the Internet – as they serve as leaders and inspire others to emulate their achievements. In this regard, the Internet Society is in discussions with AfTLD and ICANN to constitute a DNS Award that will recognize those ccTLDs that have made significant progress and achievements in providing service to their community at large.

We are excited about these initiatives and are humbled by the support that we have received from AfTLD and its members on this program since it was presented at the AfTLD meeting in Livingstone, Zambia last year.

This DNS Forum is an important component of this comprehensive program. We hope that by convening registries, registrars, DNS experts, government representatives, civil society, and policy makers, this event will identify the roadblocks that are holding the industry back and also provide a catalyst for action.

The Internet Society was pleased to take the lead on organizing and bringing this event to fruition. We are very proud to collaborate with great partners, and to have AfTLD and ICANN as our co-hosts. And, a special thank you to ZADNA as our local host. I’d like to thank AfTLD and ICANN for their engagement and support. Specifically, Dr. Paulos Nyirenda, Pierre Dandjinou, Vika Mpisane, Cedric Lumadi and Barrack Otieno for their commitment in making this Forum possible. We also need to recognize the efforts of AfriNIC in virtually all that happens in Internet matters here in Africa – they are always with us, and the Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) are one of the best and true multi-stakeholder models in the Internet ecosystem.

In addition, I’d like to recognize the sponsors who believe in our mission here and the long-term impact of accelerating the growth of the African domain name industry. We could not have held this Forum without their considerable support.

Special thanks to:

AFILIAS

UNIFORUM

AFNIC

AFRICA.COM

PIR, who in full transparency, is a supporting organization of the Internet Society and whose surplus funds many of our activities.

In the last few years, Africa has defied all expectations by scoring major economic and social gains – bringing great hope to the continent, possibly more than any other region in the world. This progress has also been evident in the advancement of Internet connectivity, which is
growing at a very fast pace. Submarine cables have increased the continent’s international connectivity hundreds of times over and the last mile access problem that has been a major bottleneck is being resolved with wireless solutions and increased terrestrial fiber infrastructure investments by both public and private sectors.

However, there are still many unsolved issues – for example, the limited amount of traffic interchange in the continent. I am especially proud that the Internet Society is associated with the African Union on the AXIS project to help establish Internet Exchange points in 30 African countries.

The AXIS project is extremely important to the continued health of the Internet ecosystem in Africa. Building the technical infrastructure and training the people to sustain it are fundamental to extending the Internet here. Partnering with the African Union on the AXIS project is central to the Internet Society’s core mission. It’s been nearly a year since we were selected by the African Union to support AXIS, and there has been great progress.

Thus far, we have successfully conducted 13 Best Practice workshops and 7 Technical Aspects Training workshops, for a total of 20 Workshops in 14 African countries. All this would not have been possible without the support from AfriNIC, AfNOG, the European Internet Exchange Points Association (Euro-IX) and their members, and many other organizations and exchange point experts. We are currently seeing a lot of progress in setting up IXPs in Gambia, Namibia, and Cote D’Ivoire. Other countries continue to develop the framework and structures to establish and run sustainable exchange points. The project has also given us a new perspective about the region and an opportunity to understand more deeply the different challenges, to develop new relationships with Governments and stakeholders, and, most importantly, working with our chapters to strengthen our relationships with our existing contacts, networks, and partners in the region. Relationships and partnerships are, and always have been, critical to ensuring the Internet is all it can be.

An important point to underscore is the mutual dependence between an exchange point and a ccTLD. The presence of a ccTLD at a local Internet exchange point not only enhances its resilience and reliability, but also enhances the end-user experience, and service continuity for domain name resolutions during International connectivity outages. Equally, Internet exchange points increase their value proposition by having a DNS Service provider participating at their facility. This presence attracts more networks to interconnect at the local IXP and benefit from the resilience that they offer. The domain name Registrars in countries with full-online ccTLD registry services connected to a local exchange point have a significant advantage over those not similarly connected.

We have a great opportunity today. Only a few ccTLDs in Africa have automated registry systems or have implemented IPv6 or DNSSEC. The deployment of DNSSEC at all ccTLDs is critical for the stability and trustworthiness of the Internet. And, unless we have strong and sustainable ccTLDs, it is not possible to deploy DNSSEC. We need to break this cycle and strengthen the DNS industry and the sustainability of ccTLDs in Africa.

It is therefore our hope that through these two complementary programs: the AXIS project and the ccTLD and DNSSEC program, we can all make a significant contribution towards these objectives.

We have an exciting forum ahead of us and on this note, we would like to extend a challenge to everyone here today, that by the end of the event, you will have identified at least one initiative
that you would like to implement upon return to your country as your contribution towards enhancing the state of the Domain Name Industry, and hence the Internet in Africa.

We hope that our time together will open doors to greater understanding of these challenges, provide opportunities to learn new ideas and share best practices, and build and enhance business relationships that you can carry forward to extend the very positive momentum for the expansion of the Internet in Africa and therefore benefit and enrich people across the world.

Thank you! It is truly lovely to be back on this wonderful continent.