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

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

Secretary General Clovis Baptista, Alternate Chairman PCC-1 Héctor Carril, CITEL staff, Argentine Government staff, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. It is a great pleasure to be part of this event, which has brought together such a wonderful range of speakers and participants.

And, it’s an honour to join with CITEL to discuss such important issues affecting the Internet’s development. With the spectrum of technological and economic development issues reflected in its membership – the CITEL community’s voices, experiences, and perspectives will enrich the development of the Internet for the benefit of all.

Given the range of organizations here, please allow me to say a few words about the organization I represent.

The Internet Society (ISOC) is an independent, international, non-profit, mission-based organization, established in 1992 by two of the fathers of the Internet – Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn.

We are dedicated to the stability, continuity, and advancement of the Internet – not for its own sake, but rather for the benefits the Internet can bring to all people. We are active at the intersections of technology, policy and education, and work to advance critical developments for the Internet and end-users worldwide.

We have long been active in regional development and capacity building activities that have helped many developing countries come online. Of equal importance, we promote national and international policies that support the expansion and evolution of the Internet throughout the world.

We do all these things by partnering with a broad range of stakeholders – civil society, private sector, governments, and international organizations. And, in this respect we are very happy to have a partnership with CITEL.

The Internet Society is also the organizational home for the groups responsible for Internet standards, including the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) and the Internet Architecture Board (IAB). And, for full transparency, we founded the Public Interest Registry (PIR) which runs the .ORG top-level domain. They are a separate but related company and their surplus supports ISOC’s activities.

The Internet Society is truly global. We have more than 100 organizational members, and over 30,000 individual members. Many of those individual members form Chapters, through which they help inform and translate our global mission into local actions.

We now have more than 90 Chapters around the world and our Chapter network in this region is quite strong, with 17 active Chapters in eight of the OAS countries.
The Internet Society has offices in Geneva, Switzerland, and Washington, DC; staff in more than a dozen countries, and regional bureaus serving Europe, Africa, Asia, North America, and of course our Latin American and Caribbean Bureau, which is led by Sebastian Bellagamba.

Finally, just a few words to introduce today’s workshop.

The Internet is like no other medium. It facilitates community building and networking; it bridges divides and creates unparalleled experience sharing. It stimulates economic activity. It allows communities of interest to proliferate around issues ranging from the very local to the truly global – the same application that helps you stay in touch with your neighbourhood activities can also help you build a business with a global reach.

The Internet’s effect on the lives it has reached so far has been profound. It is a platform for innovation; a springboard for other technologies; a meeting place; and an incredibly powerful tool for analysis, knowledge sharing, and creativity.

But, we all know and have experienced these benefits. The point I really want to stress, is that these benefits do not come from the Internet alone. They come from the model of development that has been – and remains – absolutely essential to the Internet’s invention and expansion. And, will help us reach the remaining billions not yet connected.

As we will hear on the first panel, the principles of Internet development are inseparably embedded in the architecture of the Internet, in the development of Internet technologies, and in the coordination and management of the Internet’s many operational and administrative functions.

Before the Internet, the computer networks that existed were essentially islands, cut off from each other and limited in their scope. But the early pioneers of the Internet understood the potential of interconnecting networks and information systems. And they understood that tapping that potential required a new way of thinking; a new way of working.

And so, the Internet grew from a vision of collaboration and cooperation. The problems of interconnection were solved by people working together towards a common goal.

At the heart of the Internet and it’s development are open standards, developed through open processes, where all those with an interest can participate. And, anybody who wants to apply those standards can do so without having to seek permission, be a member, or pay a fee. And, the IETF continues to work in this spirit and manner today.

Decisions were developed by open, documented, processes of consensus, and operational responsibilities for the Internet were distributed, giving rise to organizations such as the Regional Internet Registries (RIR’s), ccTLD’s, and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

The early pioneers of the Internet were creating new technologies. But just as importantly, they were creating a new way of working. A new means of development.

We call this the Internet Model of development, and it has produced one of the most extraordinary periods of technological development, innovation, and creativity in human
history. Within this model thrives a diverse Ecosystem of stakeholders, with different roles, different expectations, different interests, but united by a common need for a global, trustable, accessible Internet. As in any ecosystem, every component is vitally interlinked to the health and sustainability of the whole.

In this regard, CITEL deserves special mention. As an intergovernmental organization, CITEL has shown great leadership in its willingness to engage with multiple stakeholders.

At the Internet Society we are grateful for CITEL’s commitment to including diverse voices and being genuinely open and receptive to inputs. The results of this commitment are gatherings like today’s, which I am sure will be productive and valuable for all of us.

So on that note, we have a busy agenda, and many interesting speakers to follow. Thank you so much, and enjoy the workshop.