AfPIF 2013
Opening remarks by Sofie Maddens
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Monsieur Abdelkader Amara, Ministre de l’Industrie, du commerce et des nouvelles technologies, Mr. Boubker Badr, Directeur de l’economie numérique au Ministère de l’Industrie, du commerce et des nouvelles technologies, Mr. Nii Quaynor, Chers participants...

C’est avec plaisir que je suis devant vous aujourd’hui à l’occasion de cette conférence importante. Avant tout, je voudrais remercier nos hôtes Marocains, et surtout le Ministère de l’Industrie, du commerce et des nouvelles technologies qui nous a honoré par son patronage et son appui précieux. Merci pour votre appui et pour tout le travail de votre équipe.

We are also grateful for all 16 sponsors this year who have helped make this event possible. And the year-over-year growth in sponsorship further reinforces the importance of this forum and the work we hope to accomplish. Liquid Telecom has been our partner for AfPIF for two years now, and we thank them for their support as a Platinum Sponsor. Special thanks to AFRNIC for their collaboration over the years, not just as a Gold Sponsor here, but also for our partnership in the region.

It’s a pleasure to be here today in Casablanca and to welcome you to the African Peering and Interconnection Forum. The Internet Society started AfPIF four years ago to provide a venue for discussions on African Internet infrastructure challenges. This annual event brings together key stakeholders, including Internet service and content providers, IXP operators, government network managers, regulators, and policymakers to share their experiences and to advance peering and interconnection arrangements.

Let me say that given the interest in the event and the importance of the matters addressed, we have moved the event around the continent. I am proud to say that interest in the event and numbers of participants have been growing steadily: the first Forum was held in Nairobi, Kenya in 2010 brought together 60 attendees from 20 countries, and addressed key Interconnection opportunities and challenges in Africa. AfPIF 2 in Accra, Ghana in 2011 grew as the word spread about the benefits of the Forum and the training and networking opportunities that the meeting provided. More than 80 attendees from 25 countries attended. AfPIF 3 in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2012 was a new chapter in many ways. Over 200 participants from 32 countries participated, and 14 sponsors signed up too. Policy makers and regulators attending the Johannesburg event last year expressed their interest to see policy discussions included at future events. Thus our theme for this year’s Forum – AfPIF-4 – is “Policy Implementation and the Regional Content Factor”, and participation is again excellent. We would like to see more participation from Francophone Central and West Africa at future events.
So to all those who have made this such a great event – the sponsors, the team working on this AfPIF, those speakers and participants that have been with us this year and indeed over the years – let me thank you. We truly hope that this year’s event is of value to you and look forward to working with you in the years to come!

I wanted to take this moment as well to give you some of the background on the Internet Society, and in particular on our work and team here.

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. We truly do believe that a reliable and sustainable Internet infrastructure not only dramatically enriches a country’s Internet ecosystem, but also helps drive social and economic development.

Through the work of our Regional Bureaus, and here in Africa in particular, through the work of our African Regional Bureau that is led by Dawit Bekele and his team, together with our dedicated chapters and partners across the continent, we recognize the importance of creating and keeping in place an enabling environment for the growth and expansion of the Internet and work toward strengthening and defending the open development and evolution of the Internet, including open Internet standards, technology and infrastructure development, deployment and innovation.

Let me also take a minute to touch on another key issue – as concerns interconnection and traffic exchange and indeed as concerns maintaining an open and sustainable Internet. Building communities is important, as is hearing from stakeholders and having a bottom-up approach that involves stakeholders. That is key and fundamental to Internet Governance, where we have seen the development of an open, participatory multi-stakeholder model and policy approach. This has been key to the development of the Internet, and we believe it is as important as ever to the future development of the Internet so that we can achieve our ultimate goal, which is an open global Internet for all of the world’s people.

Here in Africa, we have seen a change in landscape in recent years: new undersea cable landings, new domestic and foreign investments, and increased dialogue between government, industry, and other stakeholders on the development of access-enabling public policies, among many others. Connectivity is on the rise and today 167 million of the 1 billion people living in Africa have access to the Internet. Available bandwidth in Africa increased 20x from 2008 to 2012. We see very positive trends – however there are still significant challenges to achieve sustainable, efficient, and cost-effective networking on the continent. And, many of these challenges specifically relate to the interconnection and peering topics of this and past AfPIF events.
The lack of network interconnections between many countries in Africa, especially landlocked countries, means that data traffic destined to neighboring countries is often shipped overseas, just to return back to Africa.

Since 2009 there have been ongoing initiatives aimed at harmonizing strategies, policies, and regulatory frameworks towards integrated regional Internet infrastructure. Various organizations including the regional economic communities, ministries, and regulatory authorities through their regional associations have been at the forefront of these efforts and implementation. The outcomes are visible especially in establishing multistakeholder partnerships for infrastructure development. However, the level of policy transposition and implementation varies from one region another.

As a result, there are notable Internet infrastructure growth disparities between countries in the same region. Further, despite increasing international access due to submarine cable capacity, intra-African Internet bandwidth is low in relative and absolute terms. Currently more than 60% of African countries lack Internet exchange points that promote both national and cross-border interconnection.

Although on a domestic level, network operators in many countries have yet to establish Internet exchange points, or maximize the use of IXP infrastructures already in place we must recognize that local traffic exchange and more intra-African traffic exchange is facilitated by Internet exchange points, better cross-border connectivity, more intra-country networks, and cheaper back-haul and transit costs. Africa is seeing growth in “African” content, but delivery of that content is held back by lack of interconnection. From Nollywood content production in Nigeria, on-line Arabic content production in Cairo to E-Government services, Africa is producing its own content and enhancing the relevance for its users. Innovative applications are being created across the continent. Data-centers are no longer considered a risk, but a necessity.

We at the Internet Society commissioned a study that demonstrated the far-reaching benefits of establishing IXPs in emerging markets. It quantified how IXPs enabled Kenya and Nigeria to save millions (USD) in telecommunications costs and raise additional revenues, while simultaneously speeding local data exchange and encouraging the development of locally hosted content and services. And this data puts into clear context the commonly accepted but seldom quantified proposition that IXPs are essential for any country aspiring to tap into the global Internet economy. We hope that this study will help inform the dialogue among government, business, and technology leaders still struggling with cost and bandwidth issues to show them the benefits IXPs can yield.

The Magrheb region has a distinct advantage where most countries share a common language. This has led to the emergence of a budding Arabic Music and movie industry originating from Egypt with strong following from across the entire region and the Middle East. We see these as emerging opportunities to promote cross-border interconnection where regional content can be shared at lower costs.
North Africa has the highest Internet penetration rates compared to the rest of the rest of Africa. However, there are fewer Internet Exchange Points compared to the rest of the region with only Egypt and Tunisia having these critical infrastructures in place. We take note of the ongoing discussions in Morocco towards the establishment of a national Internet exchange point and we would like to assure you of our continued support towards this important objective.

It is our hope that holding this AfPIF event here will stir interest in the region to grow the number of Internet Exchange Points and cross-border interconnection.

To achieve these goals, we need to address a wide range of challenges to Internet development in the region – not just physical infrastructure, but also human and governance infrastructure. In a study commissioned by the Internet Society titled “Lifting Barriers to Internet Development in Africa,” we identified a number of policy factors that can be attributed to Internet growth based on studies of various countries in the region.

For more than 20 years, the Internet Society has been working with countries and Internet community partners to facilitate core network development, interconnection, and Internet traffic exchange, as well as assisting with human infrastructure development by training individuals who can build and maintain the Internet infrastructure in their region.

At the Internet Society, our vision is to have 80% local and 20% international Internet traffic in Africa by the year 2020. While this goal may seem ambitious and almost unrealistic, we believe that this can be championed through partnership and collaboration with all the stakeholders. And, we see growing interest and support.

We are committed to making an impact in Africa and helping to empower communities to get more and more people connected. The AfPIF event is just one example of our leadership, and we have many other programs led by our Regional Bureau. The Interconnection and Traffic Exchange (ITE) Program includes a broad range of initiatives including technical assistance, capacity building and other projects and initiatives to foster a robust, efficient, and cost-effective interconnection and traffic exchange landscape in developing regions of the world.

Another very recent example of the Internet Society’s commitment to this region is the Domain Name System Forum that we hosted a few months ago in Durban, South Africa. We co-organized this event with some of our regional partners to establish a platform for the DNS community across Africa and advance the domain name industry and domain name registrations. This event was so successful in fostering cross-border collaboration between registries, registrars, registrants, DNS experts, Government representatives, and policy makers that we plan to make it an annual event.

We have a great opportunity here today. I hope that our time together will open
doors to greater progress and provide opportunities to share best practices, and
build and enhance business relationships to extend the very positive momentum for
the expansion of the Internet in Africa.

It is our hope that over the next two days, we can use this meeting as an opportunity
to also discuss the policy issues, cross-border interconnection and regional content.
Local content is essential to local industry and jobs, and ultimately boosts the
resiliency of the economy. The topics we will be discussing here are critical to
creating an environment that supports the ongoing development of the Internet.

One final note, as we approach the five-year anniversary of the AfPIF event, we want
to measure the outcomes and impact of this event. To this end, we would like to
hear of your experiences at AfPIF and whether it has been a benefit to you and your
organization.

We plan to collect this information through a series of video documentaries, articles,
and blogs starting from this event until the next AfPIF event. This is another
important way to help us know the progress we have made towards the target of
80% local and 20% International Internet traffic by 2020. We look forward to hearing
your experiences and talking with you over the next several days.

Thank you!