



February 2006

The Internet Society's contribution on the formation of the Internet Governance Forum

The Internet Society was pleased that the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) ensured the continued success of the Internet through its commitment to build on the governance mechanisms and organizations that have so clearly enabled the Internet's incredibly successful growth. This broad recognition of the achievements, the effectiveness, and of course the legitimacy of these organizations, was a clear endorsement of their continued vital role in the further development of the Internet.

The Internet Society was also encouraged that the Internet Governance debate moved beyond the details of technical administration and on to broader issues that require increased coordination by all stakeholders. The Internet Society believes that future discussions on Internet Governance should also focus on those issues that will help bring the Internet to the billions of people not yet connected. This is supported by the WSIS reaffirmation of the importance of ICT and capacity building to a nation's economic development and future welfare, and the United Nations Secretary General's exhortation that the follow-on from the Summit "generate new momentum towards developing the economies and societies of poor countries, and transforming the lives of poor people."

The World Summit on the Information Society concluded in November 2005, with a call, inter alia, for the creation of an Internet Governance Forum or IGF. The Internet Society believes that the Internet Governance Forum can play a role in addressing key Internet governance issues through its function as a "forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue" (Tunis Agenda paragraph 72) while respecting the parameters of "no oversight function" and a "non-binding process" (paragraph 77).

In the interest of increasing the likelihood of the Forum's success, the Internet Society suggests that the following should be taken into account by stakeholders during its formation. These key points are discussed in more detail below.

The IGF should:

- Ensure inclusiveness: Maximize participation in the Internet Governance Forum by all interested stakeholders, particularly for those from developing nations.
- Use the technology the IGF is “studying”: Facilitate participation through innovative and aggressive use of electronic communications
- Facilitate knowledge of and participation in existing structures and organizations: Suggest better ways for the stakeholders, particularly those from developing nations, to learn about, and contribute to, the key decisions being made in existing Internet governance organizations
- Focus on capacity building and access needs: Identify priorities/needed programs for building capacity, especially in developing nations
- Focus on the fundamentals: Explore a limited set of Internet governance-related case-studies that are cross-cutting and central to capacity building and ICT deployment
- Build on existing forums and organizations: Leverage existing knowledge and expertise while promoting the sharing of experience and best practices
- Minimize costs of participation: Limit Forum-related organizational structures and the need for meetings, while maximizing the use of Internet-based collaboration and communication tools.

The Internet Society believes that the emphasis in the IGF should be in two areas: 1) sharing and disseminating existing information, best practices and expertise across a limited set of issues in a “case study approach”, and 2) encouraging a greater understanding across stakeholders of the roles and responsibilities and means of participation in those organizations that are responsible for the current governance mechanisms.

The Internet Society recommends that the Internet Governance Forum begins the case-study approach with a limited set of issues (one or two) that are “cross-cutting” and “do not fall within the scope of any existing body” (paragraph 72 b), and also build on the WSIS achievements and contribute to reaching the Millennium Development Goals. The Forum should draw heavily on existing bodies of work, and institutional and individual expertise – highlighting the work already being done to address the issues – and then focus on concrete proposals of how governments, the UN, the World Bank, the private sector, and the key Internet governance organizations, etc., can work together to ensure that the best available expertise and resources are brought to bear.

These case-studies should include areas such as interconnection arrangements and connectivity (paragraph 50), ICT education and training (paragraph 51), spam (paragraph 41), and multilingualism (internationalizing the Internet) (paragraph 53), all of which were core to the WSIS discussions and require further development. The Internet Society notes that it will be important that the Forum focus on “workable” issue areas, and not on those subject to clearly entrenched views that would make discussion unproductive.

Clearly, the more focused the Forum the greater its chances of enabling a fuller understanding of the issues in question, and of making a difference in the number of people who can access and benefit from the Internet.

A recurring concern in the debate over Internet governance has been that key stakeholder groups feel that they have insufficient input into the decision-making processes that are affecting the development and management of the Internet. Since these processes involve dozens of bodies, including ICANN, the RIRs, ISOC, industry consortia, standardization organizations and intergovernmental bodies (e.g. the ITU, WTO, OECD) it is hard to track all the different fora. On the other hand, the distributed nature of Internet governance has been one of reasons the Internet has been able to evolve so rapidly and expand so quickly and successfully.

Many of the key organizations involved in Internet governance (including ICANN, the W3C, and ISOC, etc.) have made clear throughout WSIS that they are eager to find ways to involve more people in the decisions they make and in particular they are eager to ensure that Civil Society has a full and active role in the Governance processes. Promoting a greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities of these organizations, and the mechanisms for participation, will be a particularly useful focus for the Forum. It follows that success will depend upon the fullest participation by all stakeholders and interested parties.

With regard to the functioning of the Forum, it will be essential that the time, personnel and financial constraints all stakeholders are subject to are taken into account. An operating principle of the Forum should be to maximize efficiency and cost-effectiveness through limiting organizational structures and the need for meetings, while encouraging the use of Internet-based collaboration and communication tools.

With regard to the WSIS commitment to multi-stakeholder processes, the Internet Society believes that the broad recognition of the achievements of the organizations responsible for the administration and management of the Internet is a clear endorsement of their continued and vital role in its further development. While the representational model for the Forum has yet to be decided, the Internet Society believes that the Internet community should be recognized as a “principal stakeholder” in the Internet Governance Forum given its recognition in the Tunis Agenda (paragraph 36).

Finally, the Internet Society looks forward to playing a central role in the Forum, as Chair, co-convenor or a similar capacity, as is expected by many in the Internet community and as supported by numerous governments at the Tunis Summit.

The Internet Society was founded 15 years ago by Internet pioneers and is dedicated to ensuring the open development, evolution and use of the Internet for the benefit of people throughout the world. The Internet Society envisions a future in which access to the Internet will facilitate measurable improvements to the quality of life around the globe, and believes that with the appropriate focus the Internet Governance Forum can contribute to that vision.