
Toward Collaborative Internet Development

The Internet Society's Views on the 2014 ITU
Plenipotentiary Conference

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In a few short weeks, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), will host its quadrennial Plenipotentiary Conference in Busan, Republic of Korea. This is an important treaty-level event where ITU Member States will map out plans for the ITU's activities and strategic plan for the coming four years. As a Sector Member of the ITU, the Internet Society has developed this paper to share our perspectives and to contribute to a positive outcome at the conference in Busan. In preparation for the Plenipotentiary Conference, we have been working closely with our members and partners in the Internet community, including with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. This collaboration has been important in the run up to the Conference and will continue in Busan.

The Internet Society, like the ITU, believes that global communications create opportunity for growth, creative expression and innovation that should be available to all the world's people. To that end, we are committed to collaborating with partner organizations in every region of the world, each within its area of responsibility and expertise, in order to increase access to the Internet to further spur economic and social development. Based on its current remit, the ITU has an important role in the Internet ecosystem; promoting core infrastructure development and cross-border connectivity, allocating spectrum to enable the deployment of new technologies and services, and providing technical assistance and capacity building in developing



countries. We believe that the current ITU mandate is sufficient to carry out the critical tasks outlined above both today and into the future.

The Growing Promise of the Internet

As shown in the Internet Society's recent Global Internet Report, the last ten years have seen almost unimaginable growth and development: in that period, fixed broadband access overtook dial-up, mobile broadband access then overtook fixed, video became the largest source of traffic, and the number of users in developing countries overtook those in developed countries. Overall, the number of Internet users has grown from under 1 billion ten years ago to an expected three billion by early 2015¹. Beyond the data, we know that access to connectivity transforms the lives of individuals worldwide. Whether we look at opportunities for education, trade or healthcare, there is no sector of global society that is untouched by the power this global network of networks.

One trend is clear: this is an exceedingly complex and dynamic environment where new users are coming online everyday with new ideas and new expectations for how the technology should grow and evolve. Within this complex environment, an ecosystem has emerged in which a diverse set of organizations and communities need to work together and, through this collaboration, ensure that the Internet operates smoothly for the individuals and organizations that depend on it every day.

The organizations and processes that shape the Internet have proven to be resilient and adaptable in large part because they are based on an understanding that the Internet is constantly evolving and a realization that the best solutions to new issues stem from willing collaboration between engaged and informed stakeholders. At its heart, the Internet is a decentralized system that allows policies to be defined by those who require them for their operations, and ensures that issues can be resolved at a level closest to their origin.

In short, this enormously successful ecosystem is tailored to the requirements of the Internet itself, and draws its strength from the involvement of a broad range of actors working through open, transparent, and collaborative processes to innovate and build the network of networks that is the cornerstone of the global economy.

As organizations like the Internet Society and the ITU carry out their respective roles within this broader ecosystem, we should be mindful that openness, agility, respect for roles and responsibilities and expertise, and collaborative partnerships are the building blocks of the global information economy. The challenges are great – connecting the unconnected, creating an environment of trust, ensuring global interconnection and interoperability, allowing the Internet to continue to evolve – and no single organization can achieve these goals alone. We must leverage our areas of expertise, be humble in our approach, avoid duplication, and find ways to collaborate and work together to create a truly global information society.

¹ Internet Society, Global Internet Report, Figure 1.2; <http://www.internetsociety.org/doc/global-internet-report>

For the Internet Society, our work over the past twenty years has been guided by seven core values:

- 1 The quality of life** for people in all parts of the world is enhanced by their ability to enjoy the benefits of an open and global Internet.
- 2 Well-informed individuals** and public and private policy makers are the essential foundation of an open and global Internet society.
- 3 The genius of the Internet** is that its decentralized architecture maximizes individual users' power to choose (or create) and use the hardware, software, and services that best meet their needs, and if the Internet is to continue to be a platform for innovation and creativity, its open, decentralized nature must be preserved.
- 4 Enduring and sustainable progress** toward our vision is best achieved by a combination of global initiatives and activities at a local level that engage people in their home regions.
- 5 Technical standards and Internet operating procedures** should be developed and asserted through open and transparent processes, with minimal barriers to participation or access to information.
- 6 The social, political, and economic benefits** of the Internet are substantially diminished by restrictive governmental or private controls on computer hardware or software, telecommunications infrastructure, or Internet content.
- 7 Rewarding and productive** use of the Internet depends on the ability to trust critical services.

Looking Forward: Building upon existing strengths

As we look across the vast opportunities and challenges of the global information society, the Internet Society believes that the ITU has relevant work to do to that is well defined within its mandate. The ITU should continue to promote the development of the underlying global infrastructure that enables connectivity to the global Internet. The growth of the Internet relies upon ubiquitous connectivity, access to spectrum, and globally interoperable telecommunications standards. And the ITU's development work helps to ensure that we don't leave countries behind and that we are creating opportunities for the next generation. The ITU can accomplish its mission and purpose by fulfilling its core mandate within the framework of a stable Constitution and Convention.

From the work of the Maitland Commission in 1984 that identified telecommunications as the "Missing Link" in our countries' quest for social and economic development, to the recent 2014 World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) that addressed issues involving, "broadband for sustainable development," the ITU has helped to spur a global dialogue on technology and economic development. The convening role of the ITU, in partnership with UNESCO, helped to form the UN Broadband Commission. The Commission rightly recognized that broadband networks and services offer transformative solutions, in the Commission's words, "to address the key challenges of our time, including eradicating poverty and malnutrition...". This work is buttressed by decades of critical ITU work in the Radiocommunication Sector to efficiently allocate the spectrum needed to support new technologies. And, collaborative international telecommunications standards development continues to form the core of the global network that we all depend upon.

The history of the ITU shows that its Members have acted collectively to advance the core purposes of the Union while maintaining a stable Constitution and Convention, particularly with respect to the founding

principles of the Union in Article 1 of the ITU Constitution. Importantly, the current ITU Constitution and Convention has stood the test of time and we believe that there is no need to amend it or change the scope of the ITU's mandate - it is sufficient to carry out the critical tasks outlined above both today and into the future. It is clear that the ITU has made, and will continue to make, a useful contribution to the infrastructure that supports the global Internet and should successfully do so within the existing mandate of the Union.

Looking Forward: Enabling Connectivity

We are mindful that, despite the progress that has been made in the communications sector, whole communities remain disconnected from the value of the global Internet. Removing barriers to connectivity is one of the most critical digital divide issues of our time.

For example, cross border connectivity remains a serious challenge in many parts of the world. In too many countries, taking fibre across a border is still an enormous task. All too often, bureaucratic roadblocks, insufficient cross-border agreements, and lack of regional cooperation lead to delays that slow down or even deter investment. One only needs to hear the stories of multi-year delays for cross-border connections to be established across the span of a single river – delays caused not by technology but by policy and regulatory obstacles that halt progress – to know that we can, and should, do better.

The Internet breaks down all kinds of barriers – we just need to create the enabling environment for it to do so. We believe this is a critical area where the sustained focus of the ITU can have a significant impact. The Internet Society was pleased that the 2014 ITU World Telecommunications Development Conference committed to focusing on these issues for the coming period and we stand ready to join that work.

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Looking Forward: Strengthening Collaboration

As the ITU embarks on a new era at the Plenipotentiary Conference, this is an important opportunity for Members to reassess and refine the Strategic Plan based on the core competencies of the Union. We suggest that certain core principles and approaches should guide the implementation of the ITU Strategic Plan and its accompanying resolutions and decisions: inclusiveness, transparency, and collaboration. These principles will enable the ITU to partner effectively in pursuit of a truly shared vision.

- > **Inclusive engagement:** Bringing experts together from a broad range of communities can help produce policies that are robust, sustainable, and that enjoy the support of a wide range of stakeholders. We urge the ITU to incorporate this approach into its strategic vision and activities going forward.
- > **Transparency:** Understanding how decisions are reached can be as important as the outcome. By allowing greater access to input documents and meetings, the ITU can provide greater transparency in its work. Further, outputs should be made accessible to the public in an open and timely fashion.
- > **Collaboration:** In an era of limited resources and increased technical complexity, all organizations in this field should adopt a collaborative approach to their activities while at the same time also respecting

each other's roles and responsibilities. In some cases, an organization may take the lead; in others, that same organization can play a crucial supporting role. By teaming with other organizations—in government, in the private sector, and in the non-profit sector—the ITU will be contributing more towards progressing connectivity for all than it could do alone.

Looking Forward: Respecting Roles and Responsibilities

The incredible benefits that the Internet has provided over the last quarter century are vast. This success has been supported by a robust, successful ecosystem of organizations and processes that are suited to meet the unique needs of a dynamic, global, and growing Internet. The ITU can contribute to this complex ecosystem by promoting the development of the underlying infrastructure, by strengthening the environment for cross-border connectivity, by allocating spectrum for the next generation of wireless technologies, by facilitating the development of high-quality telecommunications standards in an open and collaborative manner, and by offering technical assistance and capacity building in developing countries.

To achieve this mission, however, this is the time to think differently. There is too much work to be done and we cannot afford to stymie growth by returning to top-down policy and regulatory models of the past that are inappropriate for and inadequate to meet the promise of tomorrow's Internet. It has been the Internet Society's experience that, in order to enable development and access to communications, it is essential to build upon the strengths and contributions of partners. The ITU's core mandate to help facilitate global telecommunications is vital and it should carry out its roles and responsibilities as a valued partner *within* the broader ecosystem and be willing to collaborate as others fulfill their tasks.

Furthermore, policies and approaches that are sustainable and effective must be inclusive of the vital expertise and focus of different stakeholders and organizations. Enhancing cooperation means that we need to double our efforts to work together as stakeholders in the multistakeholder ecosystem. We look forward to a positive and constructive dialogue in Busan as ITU members map out a strategy for the ITU that is forward looking, agile and based on a spirit of collaboration and partnership.

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