IETF

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Remarks (as prepared)

Hello, I am Russ Housley and I serve as chair of the Internet Engineering Task Force, or IETF.

The IETF is a large, open, and global community of network designers, operators, vendors, and researchers concerned with the evolution of the Internet's architecture, and the smooth operation of the Internet. Participation is open to any interested individual.

In short, the mission of the IETF is to make the Internet work better. The IETF does this by producing timely, relevant protocol standards and other informational documents that influence the way people design, use, and manage the global Internet.

I am delighted to participate in this discussion today because global standards fuel innovation, enable improved products and services, enhance public safety, and expand markets.

Global standards are, in fact, fundamental to social wellbeing—their value and necessity are coming into keener focus in this age of globalization. The role of global standards is often hidden in everyday life; however, these standards could not be more important.

The organizations represented on this panel demonstrate a number of different models for developing useful standards. This diversity is healthy. Yet, this diversity means that we cannot all be familiar with the way each organization works. This it also means consciously fostering cooperation among standards organizations is especially important.

So I'd like to take a moment to describe the IETF and how it works.

IETF standards are based on technical merit and rough consensus, and their success is judged on the extent that the voluntarily standards are adopted by the market. Participation is open to any interested individual, processes are transparent, and standards are finished when the participants reach rough consensus. Every draft as well as the final IETF standard is freely available to everyone..

All of these aspects have contributed to the Internet's success.

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The basic principles followed by the IETF are, of course, used by other organizations to set global standards. The leaders from three global standards development organizations – the IEEE, the IETF, and the W3C – have affirmed the recently announced OpenStand principles.

In summary, these principle encompass:

Due process. Decisions are made with equity and fairness among participants.

Broad consensus. Processes allow for all views to be considered and addressed, such that agreement can be found across a range of interests.

Transparency: Advance public notice of proposed standards development activities is provided, easily accessible records of decisions and the materials used in reaching those decisions are provided, and public comment periods are provided before final standards approval and adoption.

Balance: Standards activities are not exclusively dominated by any particular person, company or interest group.

Openness:.Processes are open to all interested and informed parties.

To illustrate this approach in action, and to show why global standards are so important, I'd like share a story about just one of the Internet standards developed in the IETF: Internationalized Domain Names.

Domain names, which form the basis of email and website addresses, are used by billions of people around the world everyday. Everyone in the room has probably used domain names many times today already.

However, until 2010, in practice most domain names were limited to the 128 ASCII characters. By enabling Internet applications and empowering users to employ the characters used by their native languages, the IDNA standard makes the Internet more accessible for billions more people around the world. So this is a real improvement for both the Internet itself, the users, and the organizations that rely on the Internet for their services and products.

Because domain names are key to so many aspects of the Internet, and touch upon different industries, and affect users themselves—open participation in the IETF standards setting process could not have been more important in developing IDNA. We needed to get the best possible technical input, and there was a broad range of perspectives.

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It was also important that the standard be technically robust and globally implementable. The result had to take into account that IDNA capability was not likely to be built into every Internet application.

An interesting aspect of the IDNA standard setting process is that the IETF actually revisited and improved the original standard based on feedback from the Internet community. The IDNA standard first published in 2003 was subsequently updated in 2008.

At a detail level, this means that the standards in 2003 were available from the IETF website for anyone to review, and participation in the IETF IDNA working group was open to anyone with a good idea for how to improve the standard.

We view these as an vital aspects of the IETF process: The result was that the standard published in 2008 was a better technically, and more likely to be implemented and used. Today, International domain names are broadly available and there use is growing. This is an extremely positive development for the Internet and all of its users.

However, it is especially important to note, as this session highlights, that we live in a complex world that requires coordination among standards organization. This cooperation in necessary in order to improve efficiency in standards work, reduce the risk of market confusion, and improve interoperability.

For example, this device [referencing a mobile phone] makes use of ITU-T CODECs; ITU-R defined spectrum; IEEE WiFi standards, IETF TCP/IP, Email & HTTP; W3C HTML & XML; and GSMA's 3G, just to name a few. And billions of people rely upon them every day.

So, cooperation among standards organizations is essential. While some significant cooperation already exists, the global standards community needs to foster greater collaboration among our organizations for industry and consumers to realize the greatest potential of technology. By respecting boundaries and collaborating where there is an overlap, we have the opportunity to improve the lives of billions of people.

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