

Comments on the Programme, Agenda and Format of the 2008 IGF Meeting in Hyderabad

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

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APC broadly supports the programme, agenda and format for the Third Internet Governance Forum meeting in Hyderabad in December 2008 and commends the IGF chairperson and secretariat as well as the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) for their hard and considered work.

APC would like to raise a few points, some with a view to Hyderabad, and some with a view to learning from this year's experience.

Agenda

APC is pleased that the issue of access to the internet is firmly on the agenda both in the overall theme of "Internet for all" as well as in the main session "Reaching the Next Billion". This represents a good compromise outcome of the debate over 'universalisation of the internet' and 'reaching the next billion' which preoccupied the IGF in the open consultations in May 2008.

The return of "Managing Critical Internet Resources" to the main agenda after its trial run last year is also an important sign of maturity within the IGF as a forum for policy dialogue. The recent exchange of letters between ICANN and the US government over the management of the root zone file and the issue of the publication of Whois data is a good reminder of the need for creating spaces where the issue of critical internet resources can be discussed in a calm and rational manner.

We are also pleased to see that the agenda item "Promoting Cyber-Security and Trust" is addressing both the issue of security and the issues of privacy and openness in the same main session. This is an important step forward with respect to making the policy dialogue on security real and hopefully the debate on the topic will highlight what is at stake.

However, APC is concerned that the rights agenda has progressively diminished both in visibility and focus, against an increasing emphasis on 'security' and 'trust' in the IGF agenda for 2008.

The title - "Promoting Cyber-Security and Trust" - plays on the negativity and fear of the internet that is increasingly becoming the predominant discourse, rather than promoting positive discussion about how to expand the opportunities that the internet offers for realising our fundamental rights and

freedoms as enshrined in international law. We support the Internet Bill of Rights Dynamic Coalition's suggestion to change the title of the main theme, "*Promoting Cyber-security and Trust*" to, "*Balancing Security and Trust with Openness and Rights*".

We recognise that development of the draft agenda is well underway, but feel that it would still be possible to adapt the agenda without undue impact on the workshop merger process that is in process, by reorienting the thread on 'Fostering security, privacy and openness' to include a stronger rights orientation.

Programme

APC is happy with the attempt to merge workshops into main sessions as a valuable contribution to building the IGF community through bottom-up participation in the main forums of the IGF. We recognise that the process this year was a little chaotic, and not in the right order – that it was not a good idea to propose mergers after workshop proposals had been submitted and before themes were finally agreed. But this is something we can all learn from and get right in 2009. We are very pleased that the IGF is willing to be innovative about participation in this manner.

We support the current structure of the programme and are glad to see the inclusion of debates in the main sessions, as this was a point of contention in the open consultations in May. We feel that debates will provide a way to explore the complexity of the issues and require a particular discipline on the part of the speakers to get to the heart of the matter. This will reduce the amount of self-promotion, fragmented perspectives and circumlocution present in the large panel discussion format that was experienced in the main sessions last year.

Format

In light of our views on the issue of rights mentioned above, we suggest the thread, "Fostering security, privacy and openness", under the main session on "Promoting Cyber-Security and Trust" be expanded to include a greater rights orientation.

Review and Assessment

We note that paragraph 76 of the Tunis Agenda on the Information Society requires the UN Secretary General to 'examine the desirability of the Forum, in consultation with Forum participants, within five years of its creation'. We would like to support the view that the review of the IGF should begin at the Third IGF meeting in Hyderabad. Review processes can be time-consuming so it is important to begin timeously.

The secretariat could use the IGF open consultations in September 2008 to gather some input as to the process as well use the sessions at the IGF to get feedback. Consideration should be given to using a mix of methodologies such as interviews and surveys as well as internal and external assessment. The MAG should do an assessment. IGF participants should be asked to respond to a survey. A random selection of interviews could be done with dynamic coalitions, developing country representatives, representatives from each stakeholder group and moderators. The secretariat should also assess its own work.

Regional IGFs

APC notes that there are likely to be a number of regional IGF meetings in Latin America and Africa during the next few months and it is not clear how they may input into the programme in Hyderabad.

MAG Rotation

We would like clarity with respect to MAG rotation. Is this to take place every year? If so, we suggest that steps be taken to time-line the process now rather than waiting until next year.

Theme for IGF 2009

APC would like to suggest that "Rights and the Internet" be considered as the over-arching theme for the Fourth IGF meeting in Cairo in 2009.