



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

29 August 2008

ISOC is pleased to note the decision to focus on the overall theme for Hyderabad Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as “Internet for all.” ISOC hopes the MAG will keep the ultimate meeting agenda and sessions clearly focused on this important overall theme. ISOC’s comments should be read in support of this need.

ISOC supports the concept of Main Session Workshops as an innovation for Hyderabad. We believe this type of session will allow presentations to be more detailed, and thus better support the cross-cutting theme of capacity building. By urging those who proposed workshops to work together with the MAG to organize the main session workshops, we believe a diversity of views will also be represented.

ISOC believes great care needs to be taken in organizing the Main Session Debates. The concept of open debate has a cultural bias; it is more natural and easier for some cultures to engage in debate as a form of interaction than for others. Care must be taken not to bias anyone's comfort or ability to participate. With that goal in mind, ISOC would like to present the following suggestions:

- Moderators must be sensitive to both the content and tone of the debate, and be quick to deal with inappropriate types of exchange
- Those wishing to raise topics for debate and questions on the topics should be encouraged to register those in advance of the session on the IGF web site. This material can serve as a guide for the debates. The MAG should draw on these to put together a set of subject areas for discussion in advance of the meeting itself, at least to start the debate sessions.
- Give special consideration to requests by the rapporteurs of independent (i.e., non-main session) workshop to report into the main session debates the results of their workshops.
- Care must be taken to ensure that the debates address their subjects broadly, and not get bogged down on one aspect of the topic.
- Similarly, the moderator must ensure that the debates are not dominated by any one point of view or any one stakeholder group.
- MAG members should take on the responsibility of preparing the debate moderators, and be available to provide advice if needed during the sessions.

ISOC supports several decisions set out in the paper, in particular:

- to schedule independent workshops in parallel to the main sessions;
- maximizing the opportunity of open dialogue and the exchange of ideas;
- trying to create feedback loops between the different types of sessions; etc.

In a multi-stakeholder environment such as that of the IGF, one of the critical tools for participation is of course interpretation into a variety of languages, ideally the six official languages of the United Nations. While we fully understand the cost implications and thus the impossibility of having the IGF Secretariat providing interpretation for all sessions, we appreciate the decision to schedule the main session workshops and debate in facilities where full six-language interpretation can be provided. In addition, we would encourage workshop organizers to consider possible ways to encourage and enable participation by non-English speakers.

We also support the plan to make efforts to improve the facilities for remote participation in the IGF. We believe that this can add significant value to the event, and make it increasingly a focal point for global discussion of Internet governance issues. We would urge that in planning for remote participation, the MAG should also consider whether it could be possible for speakers to participate directly in the main sessions, either as speakers or participants in the debates.

The proposed time allocation is appropriate and will facilitate the objectives of the Hyderabad meeting. We believe care should be taken in scheduling independent workshops on themes related to the main-session workshops. The following suggestions are offered as an obviously incomplete list of areas requiring attention:

- Where possible, independent workshops on a theme (e.g., Promoting Cyber-Security and Trust) should be scheduled before the main session workshops and debates on the same topic, with the goal of enhancing the level of discussion in the main sessions.
- Where not possible to do so (primarily on the Access theme of Reaching the Next Billion), independent workshops on that theme should not be scheduled at the same time as the main sessions on the same theme, to avoid overlap for participants wanting to attend both.

The two final main session topics (Taking stock/way forward and Emerging issues) are obviously the least well developed in the paper. ISOC hopes that these can be fleshed out during the September Advisory Group meeting, so participants will have a chance to prepare for them. Taking advantage of the IGF being held in Hyderabad, the “Way Forward” session could, for example, seek to include entrepreneurs’ views of emerging issues in Internet governance. This would be appropriate given the large numbers of entrepreneurs leveraging Internet to improve lives in India in businesses, communities, etc. Hearing their direct experiences of challenges created by governance issues would be of great value.

As a final comment on the agenda, ISOC believes that the IGF meeting agenda should not be allowed to drift too far from its mandate, which is governance. Of course there are many useful discussions that could be held on more general themes of the Internet and development. But we believe that IGF should concentrate on the goal of improving global understanding of Internet governance and the benefits of the unique Internet model that has developed for the purpose.

Finally, ISOC would like to express gratitude to the Indian government in advance of the meeting. From the information provided to date, it is clear that India has learned much from the first two sessions of the IGF, and has arranged to hold the third IGF in an excellent facility, and to include several innovations, taking into account lessons learned from the Athens and Rio meetings. We look forward to participating actively in the third IGF, and to the success of the meeting.

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