

Taking Stock of the Sharm El Sheikh Meeting and Suggestions for the Vilnius Meeting and Beyond

by Masanobu Katoh

Senior Vice President, Fujitsu Laboratories Ltd.

Chairman, Sub-Committee on International Affairs,

Committee on Information and Telecommunication Policy, Nippon Keidanren

Representing Nippon Keidanren, I attended the 4th IGF meeting which was held during November 15th and 18th, 2009 in Egypt. Nippon Keidanren¹, Japan's largest comprehensive economic organization, is composed of approximately 1,300 leading Japanese companies. Nippon Keidanren has been endorsing the objectives of the IGF since its first meeting, and has continued to submit opinions. On the last day of the Egypt meeting, I expressed Nippon Keidanren's view: (1) IGF process is very useful; and (2) IGF should be extended beyond its original mandate of 5 years. In addition to this official view, I would like to add my personal comments on the 4th IGF meeting and coming 5th meeting in 2010, as a participant from industry.

The 4th IGF meeting can be best characterized by the fact that most speakers, representing stakeholder countries and organizations, explicitly appraised contributions made by the IGF so far, and advocated continuation of the forum.

1. What IGF Has Achieved

The IGF started its history as the first international gathering of multi-stakeholders set up by the United Nations on Internet governance issues. Its non-binding nature has successfully provided a platform for open discussions on Internet related issues by multi-stakeholders around the world, while avoiding adoption of declarations or decision-making that reflect national interests. For instance, the IGF has supported transparent and neutral space for discussions by multi-stakeholders on an issue carried over from the WSIS, Critical Internet Resources. The IGF has been playing a significant role in maintaining a private-sector-led management of the Critical Internet Resources. ICANN's signature of the Affirmation of Commitments last fall is a welcome move in this area.

2. Growing Issues of IGF

At the 4th IGF meeting, parallel to the main sessions, more than 90 workshops and

¹ Nippon Keidanren: <http://www.keidanren.or.jp/index.html>

seminars were held and 9 meetings were concurrently convened at one time. In terms of content, the meetings were enriched to the extent that experts on Internet related issues gathered and exchanged their opinions on these topics, extending the scope of discussion beyond the IGF's original issues, such as Internet management.

To cite a case, the Global Information Infrastructure Commission (GIIC)², a private initiative that addresses the development of information infrastructure and the World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA)³ co-hosted a workshop titled "Ensuring Continued Investment and Digital Growth In A Climate of Global Economic Challenges". Given the unprecedented economic-crisis of the moment, slowed IT investment, especially in developing countries is a serious concern, as it can widen the digital divide. In the workshop, participants shared and discussed whether IT investment and effective usage can help to save the world from the current crisis. The opinions exchanged were diverse, and some of the opinions are introduced below.

- In a cloud computing era, sensor technologies and new applications will be essential parts in pursuit of "Human Centric Networked Society".
- As there is no one-size-fits-all business model, both public and private sectors in developed countries must convert their approaches to the developing countries for development of IT infrastructure.

It was an ambitious attempt of the 4th IGF meeting to establish Social Networks as a new issue, and it surely functioned to broaden the horizon of participants. Because of this success, I would like to suggest the secretariat refer to the reports from the many workshops held in the 4th IGF meeting when selecting the new issues for the 5th IGF meeting in Vilnius.

3. Emerging Issue

It was noticeable that many workshops and seminars covered emerging issues surrounding Internet, and among them, I would like to refer to the workshop titled "The Privacy & Security Implications of Cloud Computing," where many experts were participating.

People feel vaguely insecure about privacy protection and security in a cloud computing era, but it is not certain whether ample studies have been undertaken in this area. From an individual user's perspective, it is not a major concern where information comes from, or how the result was obtained. But, if that user unwittingly infringes rights or causes damage to

² GIIC: <http://www.giic.org/>

³ WITSA: <http://www.witsa.org/v2/>

others by using a cloud computing environment, that will be quite another story. Likewise, there will likely be major controversy if the user's privacy is violated while the user is unaware.

We should start discussions on this area before some serious incidents occur with deployment of the so-called "public cloud" - an environment which various organizations can utilize in an open manner. Legal studies should be devoted especially to consumer-to-consumer liability issues. There is a role for the IGF in highlighting the necessity of Internet related legal study, as this topic demonstrates.

4. The Future of the IGF

One of the major issues for the 4th IGF meeting was whether the IGF should continue to exist beyond its 5 year mandate. At the taking stock session on the last day of the forum, most speakers advocated a continuation of IGF.

The IGF has achieved unprecedented results as a unique platform for discussions by multi-stakeholders. Its mandate should be extended beyond its original mandate because new issues to be discussed at the IGF are arising on a daily basis. Taking just the cloud computing as an example, ensuring access of developing countries becomes all the more important, even as the privacy, security, and intellectual property issues must be examined.

The future role of the IGF is to continuously provide a discussion arena in which multi-stakeholders with a diversity of perspectives work together on issues evolving at the Internet's speed, highlighting the possibly contributive roles to the world of Internet technologies, as well as the various issues arising with deployment of the Internet in the world.