

**CONSULTATIONS ON THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM
GENEVA, 16-17 FEBRUARY 2006**

SECOND INTERVENTION BY THE GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Mr Chairman

Australia generally concurs with what appears to be the emerging consensus on the structure and operation of the IGF, namely that it be open and multistakeholder, focus on an event of 3 days and that its secretariat be guided in its preparations by some form of multistakeholder committee. In terms of the format for the meeting, we think there is sufficient experience on this question not to make it too problematic.

Our initial views on some of the finer details of the forum are set out in our response to the questionnaire which is with the secretariat. To a large extent these views stand, though we are of course listening carefully to the ideas coming forward here and will be reviewing our position accordingly.

In this intervention, however, in response to your request this morning that we engage in an interactive dialogue, we would like to give our reaction to some concerns and proposals that have been made yesterday and today.

Concerns have been expressed that the issues that are being put forward as priorities for discussion in the IGF are not ‘cross-cutting’ enough or are too readily being consigned to silos. I’m not quite sure we would agree that spam, security and cybercrime, for example, are not cross-cutting. To us they seem to raise implications in a range of areas and to warrant responses from a range of areas and institutions. But I don’t really want to ponder the meaning of cross-cutting. I would observe that many issues lend themselves to be tackled in a cross-cutting manner and we consider what is important. In addition, while there is a general statement that there are many cross-cutting issues, paragraph 72 also identifies particular functions and themes for the IGF, which may not always easily be reconciled with the idea of focussing on cross-cutting issues.

Concerns have been also expressed that to call for IGF discussion to be non-duplicative will unnecessarily limit discussion. I do not think the point here is really to rule particular issues out-of-bounds. To try to do would not sit

well with the IGF's mandate, for example, to 'facilitate discourse between bodies' and 'to interface with appropriate intergovernmental organisations'. Rather the point here – and the reason the words were included in the Tunis Agenda – is to recognise there are some established expert bodies where certain issues can be discussed and the substantive work of these bodies need not be duplicated and to do so would be a waste of IGF resources.

Another point made was that divisive issues should not be quarantined and, conversely, there is little value in discussing issues on which there is agreement. The reference in particular was to the development of public policy principles for Internet governance and the process of 'enhanced cooperation'. Our view is that a parallel but separate process has been established to progress these matters and that is the best process to use. To duplicate that debate in the IGF will give stakeholders an excuse not to constructively engage in that other process. Moreover, as we saw in WSIS, it will see the sidelining of issues that, yes, everyone agrees are problems, but no one rarely goes further to deal with. Surely Internet users will appreciate some solid action in areas where there is an agreed problem, where progress is more likely, the benefit more certain, and there is not a parallel process.

Several speakers have also emphasised we should take a flexible approach to the IGF, to see how it goes and be prepared to adapt it as appropriate. We would endorse this view. As Singapore has said, it makes sense to start small and to get bigger later as the IGF is proven.

Turning now to some more procedural issues.

There have been proposals that the IGF should not be an event or meeting but rather be an ongoing online policy discussion process or cycle that culminates with each annual IGF meeting. Various models have been proposed in comments and contributions. We fully support the use of ICTs to maximise preparation for and participation in the IGF. We also understand the attractions of such proposed online policy discussion processes but we think the proposition needs to be considered carefully. A key concern is the actual human resources such processes would require on an ongoing basis if all stakeholders are to participate in them in a meaningful way. We are concerned such processes may not receive the substantive commitment they would require. It would also need to be clear what exactly these processes would produce. The issue of language also arises. We

tend to see a focussed annual meeting as a more resource efficient and effective means of proceeding. As such we do not see such online processes being mandated from above as an integral part of the IGF, but rather being encouraged as bottom-up initiatives.

On the composition of any advisory group, we consider that if there is such a group there should be only one and that it should be multistakeholder, that is, there should not be separate groups for separate constituencies. There is a tension between having a smaller manageable group and a larger one which provides for a diversity of views. (This is something on which the Chair may be interested in expressing his views.) On reflection, a slightly larger group than what we proposed in our contribution may be better. Key stakeholders should be included, including from the Internet community. This may mean the Secretary-General should select the members in the first instance. We stand by our view, however, that this group's members should have the expertise, seniority and networks needed to fulfil their functions. This should be true too of any government representatives. They should have these qualities, not simply be there to reflect political considerations. We agree that the development focus of WSIS suggests this too should be taken into account in composing the group, but that does not necessarily mean weighted representation from developing country governments. It could mean people with expertise in the developmental area, from both the developing and developed world. We think it very important that the group operate transparently and consult widely.

On the question of the duration of IGF meetings, Brazil made some good points, particularly that if a larger number of issues are discussed, there will no be much substantive discussion and – being one of those who have to fly a long way – that is not something we prefer. Our solution to this is, as we've said here and in our submission, to focus on a key theme or issue and treat it in depth. We would see these meetings being based on substantive inputs prepared (and possibly published) in advance by relevant experts, experienced practitioners and interested stakeholders. Here we support the comments of Switzerland and others made this morning. Further, we consider substantive discussion is the way to attract the high profile stakeholders, which in turn will make the IGF a success. A successful forum may also make it easier to attract funding.

On the issue of whether forum meetings should rotate geographically. Australia sees both advantages and disadvantages with this proposal. The

positives include facilitating access to meetings, particularly in developed countries, and sharing costs; the negatives potentially include logistical difficulties, distance from missions with subject experience and additional costs for the secretariat. I'm sure these debates are well rehearsed in the UN. This is an issue we are flexible on, but, on balance, assuming the first IGF will take place in Athens, we tend towards the view that IGF meetings in a single geographically convenient location, but, as I said, we do not see this as a key issue. We do, however, think it is important that the secretariat not rotate for cost and continuity reasons and that it remain in a single geographically convenient location.

The issue of further consultation has been raised. For its part Australia welcomes consultation on key issues. If there is to be further consultation before advice is provided to the Secretary General, we would find it helpful if some outline of the state of thinking were published to which we could respond. We would support this consultation being undertaken online.

In conclusion, Australia would like to reiterate its view that the IGF can be a very valuable mechanism for the ongoing innovation, development and expansion of the Internet, particularly with regard to the concerns of developing countries. (And here we welcome the contributions from developing country stakeholders as to their particular priorities) We need to ensure the IGF is organised and operates in a way that addresses this. This includes the commitment of all stakeholders, including government, private sector, civil society and the technical and academic communities.

Thank you.