



Internet Governance Project

Theme Proposals For the Internet Governance Forum

1. Internet Content Filtering and Free Expression

a. The proposed theme

Are the Internet filtering and censorship practices of states compatible with Article XIX of the UN declaration on human rights? Is it possible to develop a protocol to guide private Internet service providers and hosting companies toward ethical interactions with the governments of countries that heavily regulate and censor content? How can countries with different notions of legal and illegal content reconcile these differences in a way that maximizes the freedom and value of the Internet and makes it possible for internet service providers to operate in a more secure and stable legal environment?

b. Why it is important

Access to information and free communication is at the heart of the Internet's value. Conflicts over content controls have created a number of tensions, e.g., between multinational internet companies such as Google, Yahoo, Cisco Systems, Microsoft and various national governments. Content regulation, filtering and censorship are issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing international body, but cut across many of them; e.g., UNESCO, ICANN, ITU and WIPO.

c. How it is in conformity with the Tunis Agenda

Paragraph 42 of the Tunis Agenda reaffirms the UN's "commitment to the freedom to seek, receive, impart and use information, in particular, for the creation, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge." Paragraph 46 encourages "governments to reaffirm the right of individuals to access information according to the Geneva Declaration of Principles and other mutually agreed relevant international instruments, and to coordinate internationally as appropriate." Paragraph 60 expresses the recognition that "there are many cross-cutting international public policy issues that require attention and are not adequately addressed by the current mechanisms."

d. How it fits within the mandate of the IGF as detailed in para 72;

Paragraph 72(a) empowers the Forum to "discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet." 72(b) mandates it to "facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public

policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body."

e. Who the main actors in the field are, who could be encouraged to participate in the thematic session

There are no "main actors" in this area but a wide variety of actors, e.g., individual dissidents, national and multinational internet service providers, national governments, civil society advocacy groups, professional associations in the news media, content rating standards proponents, and international organizations.

f. Why this issue should be addressed in the first annual meeting of the Forum rather than in subsequent ones

Freedom of expression is fundamental to the Internet. To discuss Internet governance without raising this vital question would deprive the IGF of all credibility as well as a successful outcome to its work. Such a decision would moreover raise an outcry among freedom of expression organisations and would tarnish this forum's image from its very first meeting.

2. Enhanced cooperation for coordination and management of critical Internet resources.

a. The proposed theme

What globally-applicable public policy principles can be developed to guide the coordination and management of critical Internet resources?

b. Why it is important

Important issues regarding coordination and management of critical Internet resources were raised during WSIS but left unresolved. Stakeholders still do not agree on the nature and scope of "political oversight" of ICANN, the appropriate roles of governments, market forces, business, and civil society in managing these resources, or the unilateral role of the U.S. government. Until these issues are resolved, Internet policy and institutions will be unstable.

c. How it is in conformity with the Tunis Agenda

We find support for this topic in paragraphs 37, 70, and 71 of the Tunis Agenda. Paragraph 70 specifically calls for the "development of globally-applicable principles on public policy issues associated with the coordination and management of critical Internet resources." It also asks that all "relevant international organizations" be involved and that "the organizations responsible for essential tasks associated with the Internet [should] contribute to creating an environment that facilitates this development of public policy principles." Paragraph 71 requires that this process "involve all stakeholders" and asks that it "proceed as quickly as possible."

d. How it fits within the mandate of the IGF as detailed in para 72;

The Tunis Agenda specifically notes, in 72(f), that the Forum should discuss "issues relating to critical Internet resources." 72(a) mandates the Forum to "Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance..."

e. Who the main actors in the field are, who could be encouraged to participate in the thematic session

ICANN Board members, GNSO Council representatives
Governments of Brazil, India, China
U.S. Commerce Department & U.S. State Department
European Union
CNNIC
Internet Systems Consortium
Regional Internet Registries (ARIN, APNIC, LACNIC, AFRINIC, RIPE)
VeriSign
Civil society; e.g., Internet Governance Project, ALAC,
International Telecommunication Union - T
WIPO
MINC
APDIP
ISOC/IETF

f. Last but not least, why should this issue should be addressed in the first annual meeting of the Forum rather than in subsequent ones.

Paragraph 71 of the Tunis Agenda requires that the process of "enhanced cooperation" should "proceed as quickly as possible."

3. Policy issues for affordable Internet access

a. The proposed theme

What are the proper roles and responsibilities of the global institutions, national and local governments, the private sector and civil society in expanding and extending the availability and affordability of the internet? What are the most effective ways to enhance the capacities of the governments, specifically from developing countries, to better play their role?

b. A brief description of why it is important

As the Internet's potentials are continuously being realized, so does the development demand placed over the global network, which necessarily impacts the roles and responsibilities pertaining to the Internet governance, and explains why the development issues are recurrent and important in the debates around it. In many cases, the issues may stem from a lack of effective information, knowledge, know-how and clear understanding of the challenges brought about by the Internet protocols and the subsequent technology innovations. In any event, those primary issues need to be addressed before the international community could effectively tackle the broader development goals that rely heavily on the access, with the Governments' significant participation, particularly from the developing countries.

c. How it is in conformity with the Tunis Agenda

This topic is relevant considering the paragraphs 49, 50, 54, 69, 90 esp. a), b) and f), 100, and 101-b).

Broadly, the implementation section of the Tunis Agenda reaffirms in its paragraph 90, the Summit's commitment to provide "equitable access to information and knowledge for all," and to improve "connectivity and universal, ubiquitous, equitable, non-discriminatory and affordable access to, and use of ICTs" by 2015. Among the enabling factors are mentioned relevant e-strategies and public policy frameworks.

Paragraph 69 specifically acknowledges the "need for enhanced cooperation in the future, to enable governments, on an equal footing, to carry out their roles and responsibilities, in international public policy issues pertaining to the Internet."

The paragraph 49 commits to "foster and provide guidance on development areas in the broader Internet governance arrangements, and to include, amongst other issues, international interconnection costs, capacity-building and technology / know-how transfer."

Paragraph 50 calls for "the development of strategies for increasing affordable global connectivity, thereby facilitating improved and equitable access for all."

The paragraph 54 recognises that an enabling environment is crucial, for "value is added at the edges of the network in both developed and developing countries when the international and domestic policy environment encourages investment and innovation."

d. How it fits within the mandate of the IGF as detailed in para 72;

The IGF mandate calls for discussion of: a) "[...] public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, [...] and development of the Internet." And further, the IGF has the mandate to: e) Advise all stakeholder in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability, and affordability of the Internet in the developing world."

Therefore, the IGF is entitled to initiate discussions that make policy-makers in developing countries and the international community aware of the factors that actually promote or hinder the development, availability and affordability of the Internet in the concerned countries. There is a need to encourage and support policy-makers in developing countries to design and establish an enabling policy environment for technical and business best practices to develop and benefit the users in terms of better and greater access.

e. Who are the main actors in the field and who could be encouraged to participate in the thematic session

Governments (particularly from the developing countries)

Inter-governmental and sub-regional organizations (e.g. ECOWAS, SADEC, ASEAN, etc.)

International Organizations: UN, ITU, UNESCO, WTO, World Bank

Regional Organizations (e.g. African Union, EU)

Civil society and consumers organizations

Incumbent Telecommunication Operators

Internet & Telecommunication private operators

Global Internet bandwidth providers

Regional Internet Registries (ARIN, APNIC, LACNIC, AFRINIC, RIPE)

f. Why should this issue be addressed in the first annual meeting of the Forum rather than in subsequent ones?

It is necessary that all stakeholders, especially the Governments with the greater decision-making power, have a clear understanding of the issues and their responsibilities in this regard, prior to any attempt to effectively tackle the Internet public policy issues that are relevant to affordable access and expansion at the edges of the network.