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PRESS CONFERENCE ON SECOND MEETING OF THE
INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM IN RIO DE JANEIRO (12-15 NOVEMBER 2007)

Speaking just ahead of the Internet Governance Forum meeting taking place in Rio de Janeiro from 12 to 15 November, Markus Kummer, Executive Coordinator of the Secretariat supporting the Forum, told journalists in Geneva that the UN-organized event would bring together a large number of participants who would highlight a number of important issues related to the Internet, including those of child protection and child pornography on the Internet.

With more than 1,500 participants registered to attend the meeting ten days before it was set to begin, Mr. Kummer assessed the expected high turnout as a demonstration to the "richness and wealth" of the meeting itself, which would attract representatives of government, the private sector, civil society and the Internet community, to address a wide range of issues concerning the Internet.

The meeting, to be chaired by the Brazilian Minister of Science and Technology, Sergio Rezende, will be devoted to five main themes - Critical Internet Resources, Access, Diversity, Openness, and Security – to be focussed on at main sessions and some 70 parallel sessions, Mr. Kummer explained. Among the parallel sessions on the agenda were those dealing with "Best Practices" and on the "Dynamic Coalitions", which first emerged at the inaugural IGF meeting in Athens last year. Additionally, events referred to as "Open Forums" would be held at which several organizations will present their work in the area of Internet governance. Included among these "Open Forums" were those organized by the ITU [International Telecommunications Union], ICANN [Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers], OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] the Council of Europe, and UNESCO.

While in general the themes being highlighted at these parallel meetings were fairly diverse, the issue of security was clearly the single most significant issue within these sessions, Mr. Kummer explained. Of the 70 parallel events taking place, 19 alone were devoted to security, among which several would focus exclusively on the important issues of protection of children and the fight against child pornography.

Emphasizing that the IGF was neither a decision-making body nor an inter-governmental meeting, but rather a forum where all stakeholders participated as equals, Mr. Kummer said: "The IGF was more than a talking shop, it is a gathering of interested people who care about the Internet and who can give direction... and prepare the decisions that will be taken into consideration by other organizations that do have the decision-making power."

One of the added values of the IGF, Mr. Kummer explained, was that it was a neutral meeting place where people got together to discuss issues of importance to the Internet. There have been several positive examples of cooperation between international organizations, such as UNESCO and the ITU, and private sector institutions such as ICANN.

Mr. Kummer added that all the main sessions of the IGF would be webcast while the parallel events would be audiocast and accessible via the official IGF website – www.intgovforum.org. In the spirit of the meeting itself, opportunities would be provided for

remote participants to send in their comments via email or webchats, some of which would be made available in the main meetings hall.

In response to a question on diversity, Mr. Kummer, while pointing out that among the “dynamic coalitions” was one on the issue of multilingualism, said that through internationalized domain names [IDNs], Internet domain names, or URLs, had been available in scripts other than English. It was more a question of enhancing other languages being used on the Internet and giving people the tool to develop in their own languages. “The IGF has the opportunity to signal and to give voice to those who have another language other than English as their mother tongue, to how important it is to have their language on the Internet”.

Concerning Critical Internet Resources, he explained that there would be an interesting panel discussion in Rio bringing together Vint Cerf, one of the “Fathers of the Internet”, and Leslie Cowley, the Chairperson of the UK-based Nominet, among others, who would be able to provide a clear picture to the participants of how the Internet worked. “If at the end of the day people understood better how the Internet worked and what the potential problems areas are, then all the better.”

Turning again to the issue of language diversity on the Internet, Mr. Kummer recalled that the Internet had been developed by American scientists who never imagined this tool would develop into such a global resource. “If they designed the Internet now with the vision in mind that one billion people would use it, they would have used different basic architecture. The question now is to combine that [knowledge] with the basic architecture.”

Responding to another question, he explained that the IGF Rio meeting was not a place where a breakthrough would be reached but rather it provided an opportunity for the engineering community to explain what they were doing, to hear what the difficulties were and to listen to concerns. “The IGF is about exchanging information, exchanging opinions and exchanging best practices.”

“A lot of the issues we are dealing with have to be dealt with at the national level. The problem is that the Internet does not recognize borders so there is a need for international cooperation”, Mr. Kummer said in response to a question.

Highlighting the importance of multi-stakeholder cooperation, he cited the example of a UK-run watchdog programme on child pornography on the Internet which resulted in the establishment of a self-regulation mechanism where consumers could alert the watchdog of any illicit content they noticed on the Internet. In close cooperation with the Internet industry, the watchdog in turn alerted Internet service providers and police and removed the content from the Internet. As a result, the UK had succeeded in reducing to zero locally originated child pornography.

Responding to another question, he said: At the IGF, “we don’t need to negotiate treaties. But you have to put your house in order. Governments alone cannot do the job, the industry alone cannot do the job, and civil society alone cannot do the job. They all have to work together in order to find successful solutions”.

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