

PRESS CONFERENCE ON INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM

With preparations well underway for the second phase of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), to take place in Rio de Janeiro in November this year, the United Nations' top official on Internet governance and the head of the IGF Secretariat reported on the progress made in drafting a programme for the November gathering and identified some of the key successes of the first-ever IGF held in Athens last year.

Speaking to the press at the Palais des Nations, Nitin Desai, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Internet governance, said some 200 representatives from civil society, the private sector and the Internet community were gathered in Geneva for consultations to plan the next IGF which will be held in Rio de Janeiro from 12 to 15 November 2007. "By and large the first Internet Governance Forum in Athens last year had good results", explained Mr. Desai. "The idea for today's meeting was for participants to discuss what the Rio meeting should focus on".

Markus Kummer, the Executive Coordinator for the Geneva-based IGF Secretariat, recalled that following the inaugural Forum meeting in Athens from 30 October to 2 November 2006 a stocktaking session was held in February in Geneva this year where the participants discussed the progress made in Athens and spotlighted areas to build on. The general message conveyed at that meeting was that the Athens Forum had worked well and participants were satisfied on how that meeting went. The general thrust of the stocktaking session was that the organizers should build on the success of Athens and maintain the broad structure and the four main themes - - access, diversity, security and openness. There was also a sense that the next meeting in Rio should not merely be a repetition of the Athens meeting but should rather be an "Athens plus".

The IGF mandate was very broad and had the potential to discuss virtually any subject related to the Internet, Internet governance and the use and abuse of the Internet, Mr. Kummer explained. Many of the differences voiced following Athens concerned the expected outcomes of that gathering. While governments, in particular, were accustomed to diplomatic processes resulting in negotiated documents, the meeting in Athens simply provided a forum for discussion. Although the Forum itself had no decision-making power its mandate did allow it to make recommendations "if appropriate".

"Most of those close to this process viewed the merits of that meeting as a means of bringing people together who would not normally meet to discuss issues related to the Internet thus leading to a better understanding of how the Internet worked", stated Mr. Kummer.

There was a draft programme outline for the IGF meeting in Rio de Janeiro, which was available on the official Forum website - www.intgovforum.org. That programme, Mr. Kummer explained, proposes a continued discussion on the four broad themes addressed in Athens and placed Internet governance in a development context with capacity-building as a cross-cutting priority. Additionally, there was a proposal to posit the IGF as a platform for all Internet governance-related organizations to present their activities and to engage in a dialogue with all stakeholders. Sharing of best practices was also an added feature of the Forum.

Responding to a question, Mr. Kummer said there were some stakeholders of the view that the IGF should be more focussed on the resources of the Internet adding that there was an agenda item at the Athens meeting dealing with internationalised domain names (IDNs), which was a critical Internet resource. There were proposals to include agenda items dealing with emerging and topical issues under which this question of Internet resources could be raised. Mr. Desai added that there

was an understanding that many wanted to see this issue discussed more openly, although underscored that the Rio agenda had not been finalized yet.

In response to a question on the next steps for the IGF after Rio, Mr. Desai said the Forum itself was an evolving process, adding: "We are experimenting with a multi-stakeholder open-ended process without a fixed membership". He added that the next IGF meetings have been scheduled to take place in India in 2008 and in Egypt in 2009. Mr. Kummer noted that, as per its mandate, the IGF would be subjected to a review process within five years of its inception. This review process would ultimately result in a recommendation by the Secretary-General who would determine the future of the Forum.

Responding to a general question on the IGF process Mr. Kummer said, "there is a different attitude from stakeholders compared to what we had a year ago...the Athens meeting made them feel comfortable with the format". He recalled that at this morning's consultation the speakers from Germany, on behalf of the EU, and the United States, emphasized the importance of the multi-stakeholder format and the importance attached to a private sector-driven process. "What we have achieved is a better quality of dialogue", he added.

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