

INET AFRICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE

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“The IGF: A Multistakeholder Process”

Statement by Markus Kummer,
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Mr Chairman,
Distinguished delegates, dear colleagues and friends,

You will recall that the concept of the IGF emerged between the two phases of WSIS. The intention was to fill “a vacuum within the context of existing structures” and to address “issues that are cross-cutting and multidimensional and that either affect more than one institution, are not dealt with by any institution or are not addressed in a coordinated manner”¹. The second phase of WSIS in Tunis requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations to convene the IGF with the mandate to deal with the broad range of issues, as defined by the Tunis Agenda in the section relating to Internet governance, from paragraph 22 to 82.

The IGF is not a traditional United Nations process. Its purpose is to bring people together from all stakeholder groups. They are to meet as equals, neither to make decisions nor to negotiate, but to discuss, exchange information and share good practices. While the IGF may not have the power to make decisions, it informs and inspires those who do. The forum develops a common understanding of how we can maximize the opportunities the Internet offers, how we can use it for the benefit of all nations and peoples and how we can address the risks and challenges.

Through dialogue, the IGF seeks to develop a common understanding of these issues and raise awareness of the development dimension of Internet governance. In general, the IGF is seen as a successful experiment in international cooperation and its new approach to multi-stakeholder cooperation has spread to other organizations and forums. Last year also saw the spread of the IGF model at the national and regional level, from Latin America to East and West Africa, as well as Europe. This event here today fits in well into this emerging trend.

While it is recognized that there is a need to discuss Internet governance issues globally, the IGF has recognized that there is also a need for acting locally. There is a general understanding that there are no ‘one size fits all solution’. All countries have to find their own solutions, corresponding to their own situation. Through the sharing of best practices and the exchange of information, they can find solutions that are adapted to their needs.

After two successful meetings in Athens in 2006 and in Rio de Janeiro in 2007, the IGF in 2008 held its third meeting in Hyderabad, India on 3-6 December 2008 and focused on the theme of “Internet for All”. When taking stock of the Hyderabad meeting, there was a general feeling that the IGF had matured and had become a space where difficult issues can be addressed. In general, there is strong support of the IGF’s multi-stakeholder environment, and the opportunity to learn from each other and share ideas and points of view was valuable.

The fourth meeting of the IGF is scheduled to take place in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, on 15-18 November 2009. The preparatory process is well underway. It started with two rounds of open

¹ Report of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG): <http://www.wgig.org/>

consultations in Geneva in February and May and two meetings of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) held immediately after the consultations.

The MAG proposed “Internet governance – creating opportunities for all” as the overall title and agreed on the wording of an agenda to be proposed for the 2009 meeting. The proposed agenda is as follows:

- Managing critical Internet resources
- Security, openness and privacy
- Access and diversity
- Internet governance in the light of WSIS principles
- Emerging issues
- Taking stock and the way forward – on the desirability of the continuation of the Forum.

Initially, the IGF was given a provisional lifespan of five years. The Tunis Agenda, in Paragraph 76, specifically calls on the Secretary-General “to examine the desirability of the continuation of the Forum, in formal consultation with Forum participants, within five years of its creation, and to make recommendations to the UN Membership in this regard.” These consultations will be held at the Sham El Sheikh meeting to allow for a timely decision by the United Nations Membership before the five-year deadline expires. A broad based consultative process has already been started and a questionnaire is available on the IGF Web site. Among other things, stakeholders are invited to let us know what has been the impact of the IGF, either directly or indirectly, and whether it has acted as a catalyst for change. Any contribution received will be posted on the IGF Web site and the contributions will be summarized in a synthesis paper that will be submitted as an input into these “formal consultations”. Based on these consultations, the Secretary-General will make recommendations in his annual report on WSIS follow-up and implementation which will be dealt with by the UN Member States in 2010.

The IGF has development and capacity building as its overarching priorities. By setting these cross-cutting priorities, the IGF made it clear that Internet governance is not an end in itself, but should be responsive to the economic and social dimensions of development. This is in line with the WSIS principles of working towards a people centered, development oriented information society. This development orientation is more relevant than ever today, during a period of unprecedented economic downturn. Our current economic difficulties should not let us lose sight of achieving the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development objectives.
