

Present and future of the IGF *[minuta de contribuição brasileira ao 4o IGF]*

The upcoming Internet Governance Forum (IGF) meeting in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, 15-18 November, 2009, will be the fourth in a series of five annual events scheduled by the Tunis Agenda (TA). After this initial period, the Tunis Agenda asks "the UN Secretary-General to examine the desirability of the continuation of the Forum, in formal consultation with Forum participants, (...) and to make recommendations to the UN Membership in this regard" (paragraph 76). As the review period approaches and the IGF outcomes mount, the time has come to reflect on its future in view of the forthcoming decision.

As far as Internet public policy-making is concerned, the building of a people-centered, development-oriented and inclusive information society depends on the deployment of decision-making processes that allow the Internet to evolve in the common interest, and with the participation of all, with particular attention to those who still do not benefit from its existence. This goal can only be achieved through a process of enhanced cooperation with global reach which – besides governments – should involve civil society, the private sector, intergovernmental organizations and the institutions responsible for the management of Internet resources, both globally and regionally. In addition to convening the IGF as a space for dialogue that should "Strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries" (Tunis Agenda, paragraph 72, f), the United Nations Secretary-General was called upon to initiate the process of enhanced cooperation by the final documents of the World Summit on the Information Society (Tunis Agenda, paragraphs 69-71).

Given its task of raising global awareness and providing a space for debate on public policy and Internet governance issues, the IGF mandate was quite accurate in identifying the major challenges and suggesting the correct tools to cope with them. First, it recognizes that properly addressing Internet governance issues requires broad participation, and establishes the IGF as an open multi-stakeholder body. Second, it notes the existence of Internet governance "issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body" (paragraph 72, b), and encourages the IGF to debate them. Finally – also in paragraph 72, b – it acknowledges that there are "bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet" where dialogue should be facilitated. The adequacy of the IGF mandate regarding its targets accounts for a great deal of the success of the Forum.

While there is still a lot to be done to ensure accomplishment of the IGF mandate, the progress so far has been remarkable, and all evidence indicates that there is room for improvement the first three meetings demonstrated that the IGF is a living and evolving experience – just like the Internet. A global space for debate – where stakeholders from all over the globe are encouraged to exchange views on all

aspects related Internet governance – was built in Athens, Rio and Hyderabad. It is time to move one step further.

In order to fulfil its mandate in the next two meetings already scheduled, the IGF should seek to convert this comprehensive set of issues and viewpoints into outputs that can contribute to making the global Internet governance regime as multilateral, democratic and transparent as provided by the WSIS final documents. There is a number of issues (e. g., the countering of child pornography) in which a consensus seems to have emerged in Athens, Rio and Hyderabad. In the fourth and fifth IGF meetings, priority should be given to the identification of such issues, as well as to the establishment of consensus-building mechanisms. In this regard, an adequate balance in geographic representation and participation of developed and developing countries within each stakeholder group should be met both in the IGF and in its preparatory meetings, for it is an essential pre-condition for the legitimacy of the recommendations that the IGF is allowed to make (Tunis Agenda, paragraph 72, g).

When it comes to the possible renewal of its mandate, one must bear in mind that the IGF is neither a self-contained process, nor a decision-making body. Its efficiency cannot be measured based on the quality of its outcomes alone. The IGF is rather a facilitating process for the implementation of all WSIS action-lines regarding Internet governance. In this context, the decision on the continuation of the IGF should be made in view of the contribution it can offer to the success of the WSIS implementation process in the future. There seem to be more than enough reasons for the continuation of the IGF, if the present situation is taken into account. Despite all progress that has been achieved since Tunis, the precise diagnosis that led to the creation of the Internet Governance Forum remains essentially valid. In other words, there is still room for an IGF. Looking on the bright side, the three first IGF meetings proved able to promote global awareness and pertinent debate on Internet-related public policy issues through an incremental implementation of its mandate.