

ETNO Reflection Document on Taking stock of the Hyderabad meeting and the way forward, as well as on the Review of the IGF



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Executive Summary

ETNO, the European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association (www.etno.eu) and its 42 members from 34 countries have been working for many years on a range of policy issues associated with the information society, including the World Summit on Information Society process and Internet governance. ETNO and its members are fully committed to the IGF process and participate in both the preparatory open consultations and the IGF meetings.

This document contributes to the discussions on Taking Stock of the Hyderabad meeting and the way forward, as well as to the discussions on the review of the IGF.

Comments on Taking Stock of the Hyderabad meeting and the way forward

ETNO and its members are grateful to the Government of India for hosting the 3rd meeting of IGF in Hyderabad. Some of our members attended the IGF in person, whilst others participated remotely. By all means, we do not consider the IGF just about the 4- days meeting and we recognize that the IGF Secretariat with very limited human and financial resources, as well as many members of Advisory Group, along the Indian authorities, put much time and effort for the best possible preparation of the Hyderabad IGF. ETNO highly appreciates the work, effort and time put by those above who contributed to the organization and success of the Hyderabad IGF.

We are now looking forward to the Sharm El Sheik meeting and we reiterate once again that good organization and programming are fundamental. We consider essential that a rough programme and schedule (content/themes, format/framework of discussions, and timetable of the preparatory process) for the Egyptian meeting become

available before the second open consultation in May and that they are finalized by September 2009. In this respect, we would like to request that the exact dates of the open consultations in Geneva (or at least the weeks during which they will take place) are announced the soonest possible (ideally this should be done in January each year), in order to facilitate preparations and help programming.

Regarding the format of the Hyderabad meeting, ETNO appreciates the improvement of the structure and believes that things in Hyderabad worked very well overall. The morning panel discussions were extremely interesting, while the afternoon open discussions were very interactive. The Hyderabad experience proved that using the co-moderator format was very constructive and ETNO prefers - where possible - that experts with communication skills are the moderators, instead of journalists. Also the same rules as agreed for Hyderabad should apply (no events during lunch, no events starting after 6 pm apart for social ones, etc.) for the Sharm El Sheik meeting.

On the negative side, we think that the workshops happening in parallel were still too many and we really cannot understand why similar workshops did not merge. After all, we believe that it is more efficient - if not more democratic - to have many diverse voices in one room, instead of having the same diverse voices scattered in various rooms, repeating the same views. Therefore, as we have stated many times before, it will be best if there are fewer events held in parallel of the main sessions, but with better quality, and that the number of workshops (and other events) be reduced and that the resources be optimized. Like last year, an early call would help in this direction and the IGF Secretariat and the MAG should continue to push for similar workshops to merge.

Regarding remote participation, ETNO continues to believe that the IGF is open and inclusive in principle and it should truly promote the participation of people from all groups and from all geographical areas. This does not mean only physical participation, which may be difficult for many for various reasons, but remote participation as well. We were very pleased to see that in Hyderabad real time transcripts were available live for all the discussions in the main room, as well as extensive live streaming broadcast not only in the main room, but also in all other rooms (where workshops and other events took place). This gave the opportunity to those who could not participate physically to follow discussions in real time. Unfortunately, technology for various – unknown to us - reasons did not work well. In many (but not all) cases there was picture but no sound, or the opposite, or neither picture nor sound, or so many interruptions which made it impossible to watch. What really worked was the live (and then archived) transcripts, which we understand is an expensive solution and difficult to be applied in all rooms.

Perhaps a simpler solution could be applied next time, bearing in mind the many technological problems, but also the cost for a solution whose quality is questionable. For example we suggest that for all the

other but the main rooms there is audio only and a web camera transmitting occasionally pictures, or at least there is a choice between video and audio only broadcast. Also, there should be an opportunity to either play or download all the archives as soon as possible, starting from the same day of the event. This could be useful even for same day events, due to the time differences around the world (it could be deep night in one place of the world when an IGF event takes place).

As regards written material, the final extensive Chair's summary gave a well balanced overview of what happened in Hyderabad and it was deeply appraised. We sincerely hope that all workshop organizers will respect the rule that they submit a written report, which will be posted on the IGF site.

Regarding the Synthesis paper, ETNO believes that a paper produced and published by the IGF Secretariat, translated in all UN languages is very much useful. However, we believe that such a synthesis paper must set the scene and it must be the starting reference of the IGF meeting. It should not be just a description of the preparatory process (on the way to the IGF) and an overview of the (limited) contributions received, but as we have said in the past, it could also be a background note for the IGF meeting and a critical review of the situation over the previous year, in order to boost discussions. ETNO ponders the continuation of the synthesis paper in the present form. Instead, we found quite useful the Background documents prepared for the media. Maybe these can be integrated in the Synthesis Paper, or become widely known and not just addressed to the media.

Also, ETNO would like to bring up the idea of a Newsletter, which could be published periodically (i.e. before and after each open consultation, daily during the IGF meeting). This newsletter could include short announcements, important information, calendar of activities etc., in other words what an IGF participant needs to or should know about the IGF. This newsletter could be prepared by an editing committee consisting by volunteers from any interested party, the IGF Secretariat and the MAG included. The Newsletter (with a proper disclaimer so that there are no misinterpretations) could be distributed in electronic form by the IGF Secretariat to a mailing list, open to subscription. Such a newsletter could improve dissemination of information and transparency.

Finally, we really applaud the improvement of the appearance of the official IGF site and we recognize that this was done with very few resources. We encourage to IGF Secretariat to continue improving the site, as it is still difficult to locate documents and further efforts are necessary.

Comments on the Review of the IGF

ETNO recognizes that the IGF has, will and must continue to promote the dialogue on Internet Governance, as well as the understanding of

all the complex issues behind. We believe that the success of the IGF relies on the multistakeholder on an equal footing approach and the non-decisive nature of the IGF, which must be maintained and strengthened. The 3 IGFs so far have provided an open and inclusive space for true multi-stakeholder policy dialogue, in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet. This new approach is both an experiment for UN and a unique experience for participants, where governments, intergovernmental organisations, civil society, academia, and the private sector truly come together, without official protocols to discuss and promote a variety of important policy issues. Certainly something you don't see often, worth extending to, or inspiring other organisations or bodies.

As the IGF has a mandate of 5 years, subject to review, and we have passed the middle of it, it is appropriate for this review to take place and we would like to put forward the following:

Para 76 of the Tunis agenda speaks clearly about the “desirability” of the continuation of the Forum and the UN Secretary General must examine this aspect in formal consultation with Forum participants, so he can make recommendations to the UN membership in this regard. Besides the formal consultation, para 76 does not specify how the review process will take place, so it is open whether this should be done in the form of internal evaluation only, external only, or both.

ETNO, first of all agrees in principle with the timetable presented by the IGF Secretariat last year and we see the formal consultation ending with a specific session on the last day of the Sharm El Sheik meeting, devoted to the Review. That session can lead us to informed conclusions, not to be confused with ‘decisions’. But before that session we have a long way to go and we need evaluation to help us make our mind. Coming back to the “desirability” issue, it is the stakeholders that will express a preference whether or not IGF is to continue. Any evaluation itself should not be considered as THE decisive factor, but another tool available to help us identify or recognize what we have covered thus far and what we have achieved, what we can do for the remaining period of the IGF and what is expected until 2010, what were the positive elements of the IGF and what needs to be improved, so we can establish a common ground before we take any action.

ETNO is of the opinion that a combination of internal and external evaluation under certain conditions could be the way forward. To be more specific:

As regards internal evaluation, we vision it starting by a call by the IGF Secretariat after the February consultation for written contributions. These can be “free,” meaning anyone can write whatever he or she thinks about the Review of the IGF, or replying to a structured questionnaire that the MAG will prepare and the IGF Secretariat will publish, or a combination of “free” and structured

questionnaire. A synthesis paper can then be prepared for the September open consultation. In all cases self evaluation contributions should be able to be submitted until one month before the 4th IGF.

During the May and September open consultations, interviews can take place, based on a structured questionnaire, which has simple questions, easy to be processed. If interviews for various reasons (mainly economic) can't take place, participants may be asked to fill in the questionnaire in writing and the IGF Secretariat can collect it. The replies can then be processed by the IGF Secretariat and the preliminary results can be presented in the September consultation, while the final ones in Egypt, possibly after taking into account replies from participants there. All replies should have a minimum set of required answers (i.e. name of respondent, affiliation of the respondent, information about participation in the IGF, etc.) to qualify correctly the representativeness of inputs. Obviously, these personal details must be treated in the proper manner, respecting data privacy requirements. Interviews can be carried by an external evaluator, should there be one. In any case, it would be important that when any assessment is reviewed, due weighting must be given to the volume of responses received from each stakeholder group in order to ensure no single group dominate the process.

As regards external evaluation, ETNO believes it may be needed, as self evaluation may not be enough. Many stakeholders do not participate in the IGF, or participate periodically, because they do not want to, or because they want but they can't. External evaluation could improve / correct representativeness' issues, cover the gap for those who do not participate in all IGFs and can see things with a fresh eye, without prejudice, or bias. But before we conclude that we need external evaluation, we need to agree on the working methods of the external evaluator (how the external evaluator is going to approach the work) and most importantly the resources needed. If evaluation requires significant money – even if there is an offer to cover that money - we need to take into account the principle of proportionality. Additionally, any offer – even if it is completely free - should not be accepted if we haven't agreed about the expected benefits, the objectives, as well as the working methods and if the external evaluator is not in a position to be neutral. For these reasons relevant information must become publicly available before the 2nd open consultation in May. Then we can decide whether there will be external evaluator and if yes, to be able to start work immediately, so the preliminary results to be presented in the September consultation and the final results before the Sharm El Sheik meeting.

By all means, whichever way we decide to go regarding evaluation, great attention must be given that proper balance of stakeholders is considered. Also, that there is proper balance of organizations or individuals and proper balance of old or new participants.