



## **Internet Society Comments: Taking Stock of the 2009 Sharm El Sheikh Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum and Suggestions for the Agenda and Format of the 2010 Vilnius Meeting**

The Internet Society (ISOC) would like to congratulate and express our gratitude to the government and the people of Egypt, host country of the 2009 meeting of the Internet Governance Forum. We will long remember the excellent facilities and hospitality shown to all stakeholders in Sharm El Sheikh. The organizing committee, led by Minister Tarek Kamel, truly did an excellent job. We also would like to extend our thanks to the IGF Secretariat, to the Multistakeholder Advisory Group and its Chair, to the workshop organizers and contributors, and to everyone who worked to make the fourth IGF an outstanding success. We appreciated the presence of United Nations Under Secretary-General Sha and his staff, who participated in the Forum and were receptive to hearing the views of all stakeholders as they carried out their assessment of the meeting and the IGF overall.

As many speakers from all stakeholder groups recognized during the 2009 meeting, the Internet is successful in part due to its unique model. It relies on processes and organizations that are local, bottom-up and accessible to users around the world. Those processes all exist together in the Internet ecosystem – a web of organizations that work together in a vital, responsive and cooperative manner. The Internet Society believes the IGF has become an important element in that ecosystem, making its distinct contribution to the future of Internet governance.

The Sharm El Sheikh meeting showed that the IGF continues to evolve, as one would expect in such an organization. The Forum's willingness to adopt different formats to encourage open discussion of difficult topics, as well as providing opportunities for capacity building, information exchange and building communities of interest. The presence of increasing numbers of ministers, parliamentarians and senior government officials, leaders of civil society and business, and outstanding technical and academic experts, speaks to the increasing success of the IGF. The overwhelming proportion of supportive comments made during the United Nations-hosted "Taking Stock and Looking Forward" session provides an impressive record of the value that the IGF brings to the rapidly evolving field of Internet governance. The comments that follow are



intended as contributions to the ongoing evolution of the IGF as it moves into its fifth year and, we hope, its evolution into an extended mandate.

The recognition that the IGF has evolved to address issues of Internet governance at different stages of development led to a decision to increase the number of relatively unstructured main sessions to allow free and open discussion of topics where there is no agreement. That innovation proved successful. ISOC recommends that those sessions be continued, but that they be shorter. Maintaining a focused debate during the three hour sessions seemed demanding for the moderators and for participants. We recommend that that large topics be sub-divided if necessary to fit a more concise format. When the main panel sessions included panel discussions, they brought together an impressive array of speakers, but the size of panels is still too large, so they do not encourage free exchange among all participants.

ISOC recently canvassed members for their views of the 2009 IGF, and we take this opportunity to relay some specific areas where they would like to see improvements. The first is to reduce the number of simultaneous sessions. There is general agreement that there were too many workshops running at the same time, all competing with main sessions. At the same time, our membership thinks there were too many workshops on very similar or identical topics. We recommend that IGF workshop organizers to be more open to working with others who have similar proposals, and the MAG needs to make greater efforts to persuade them to do so.

The IGF continues to develop in terms of its inclusiveness. A second area for improvement is for the IGF to have a stable platform for remote participation. The technology platform used in 2009 continued to be unreliable in some areas. But it is not just a question of providing the necessary technology and access. It also a question of more actively promoting the ability to participate remotely at the global level. One suggestion was to take advantage of the by now large group of IGF alumni, reaching out to them, and through them to their communities. The outcome would be greater participation and reach, and "digital inclusion".

Similarly, work needs to be done to encourage non-English speakers to participate in the other official United Nations languages, to fully make use of the interpretation facilities that are offered. In many main sessions and workshops, most discussion took place in English, often not taking care to speak slowly, so they can be readily understood by non-native speakers. This means that the IGF does not benefit as fully as possible from the breadth of experience and knowledge that participants bring to the meeting. One innovation in Sharm El Sheikh was the opening orientation session, "Setting the Scene." That should be



repeated, and should include brief comments on the need to speak slowly, as well as encouragement to use the interpretation facilities that are available.

Access for those in remote locations, for non-English speakers and for those with other special needs could all be improved by offering real-time transcription of workshops as well as main sessions. Transcription also provides a valuable permanent record of what was done in the IGF; a record that will have lasting value long after the meeting itself concludes.

Also, our members told us they were encouraged that the 2009 meeting had the strongest youth participation so far and, though small in numbers, the contingent of young people coalesced into a group and really made their presence felt. Efforts should be made to expand the involvement of youth next year, to ensure that the program is relevant and forward looking.

Finally, as a general comment on the content of the 2009 IGF, ISOC believes the content and level of discussion become more mature and thoughtful with each passing year. As a consequence more time may be required to encourage the workshops to drive to a conclusion, for example by being 2 hours long rather than 1.5 hours. This development also suggests that perhaps the IGF ought to allot more time to fewer topics in a different format. The IGF has reached a point where the participants and speakers are presenting very meaningful content. For this reason, it might be worth trying a new format that might encourage deeper understanding and the development of outputs *from* the IGF. For example, each day could have a driving theme and be structured around a series of workshops on that single theme. The afternoon could be a main session to bring together the outputs and insights from the workshops, and to explore other issues participants might want to bring in. And evenings could provide opportunities for informal follow up to the day's discussions. Such a format would help participants to be in a position to contribute and add value as a result of the full day engagement of the issue.

The Internet Society recognizes that the IGF cannot make all these improvements at the current level of funding, so stakeholders need to come to grips with the vital question of how the IGF can be maintained and improved. There are significant costs to making the IGF a success; most of all the host countries. Some not-for-profit organizations, including the Internet Society, make regular contributions to the secretariat, as do some businesses and a handful of governments. Others provide in-kind donations, or support attendance at IGF meetings. ISOC believes that the voluntary and multi-stakeholder funding model should be continued as the IGF moves forward, but recognizes that the Secretariat needs greater stability and assurance in order to do its job. Thus we call on all others from all stakeholder groups to help sustain the IGF by increasing their financial commitment to its success.



Turning to the upcoming 2010 IGF in Vilnius, the Internet Society believes that we should mark the accomplishments of the IGF's first five years, and look to the future of Internet governance. We believe that would be appropriate no matter what decision is reached about renewing or extending the IGF mandate. ISOC would like to propose the following as an overall theme: **Internet Governance for Sustainable Social and Economic Development: the Next Five Years.**

This theme would focus discussions on the horizontal themes of development and capacity building, and respond to the many voices calling for an increased focus on the development dimension of Internet governance. This theme would also emphasize that Internet governance discussions will not end after the fifth IGF, and by explicitly turning attention to the future, it would also provide a reminder of the importance of embracing the vitality and innovation that youth participants brought to the IGF in 2009.

The Internet Society remains committed to engaging with all other stakeholders in the Internet Governance Forum as we launch the process of planning for a successful event in Vilnius, 2010.

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#### **About the Internet Society**

The Internet Society (ISOC) is a non-profit organization founded in 1992 to provide leadership in Internet related standards, education, and policy. ISOC is the organizational home of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), the Internet's premier technical standards body. With offices in Washington, D.C., and Geneva, Switzerland, it is dedicated to ensuring the open development, evolution, and use of the Internet for the benefit of people throughout the world. For more information see <http://InternetSociety.org>