

HIGHLIGHTS

Tuesday, 17 November 2009

- On the third day of the Internet Governance Forum meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, participants from government, the private sector, civil society and the Internet community tackled the key issues of access and diversity as well as Internet governance in the light of WSIS principles. Parallel meetings held today included 20 workshops, as well as "best practices forums", "dynamic coalitions", and other meetings.
- At a press conference held today, Markus Kummer, Executive Coordinator of the Internet Governance Forum, said attendance in Sharm el-Sheikh had been the most important so far, with 1800 participants from 112 countries, including representatives from 95 governments. He also stressed that the discussions were continuing in an open and constructive manner, including on the issues relating to critical Internet resources, where governments were ever more engaged in the discussions. In this respect, Mr. Kummer said participants considered as "a step in the right direction" the recent signing of an agreement between the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and the Government of the United States providing for "the end of the oversight by one government" and inviting all governments to participate in the functioning of ICANN.
- Mr. Kummer also referred to an incident involving a poster displayed at the venue yesterday. The incident had been widely portrayed as an attempt by the UN to stifle freedom of expression. Mr. Kummer said that nothing could be further from the truth. The UN holds high article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which precisely guarantees freedom of expression. If it were otherwise, no room would have been assigned to the concerned organization -- the Open Net Initiative (ONI) -- to hold its meeting and launch the book. However, the UN also has to operate within certain rules, including the respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States as enshrined in the UN Charter. He regretted the misunderstanding about rules governing posters and welcomed efforts taken by ONI to correct the misreporting on the Internet concerning the chain of events. A representative of ONI took the floor and thanked the Executive Coordinator for clarifying the misunderstanding and confirmed that they have indeed taken steps to correct erroneous reporting on this matter.
- The four day meeting will conclude tomorrow with more meetings and workshops, including a special event chaired by the Her Excellency Suzanne Mubarak, First Lady of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on the subject of "Preparing the Young Generations in the Digital Age: A Shared Responsibility", as well as main session meetings on the desirability of the continuation of the Forum and on emerging issues.

Access and Diversity

- During the morning's main session, participants discussed issues such as linguistic diversity and disability, in this respect, a presentation was made on Web accessibility: the Web provides unprecedented opportunities for people with disabilities to interact, to access information, and to act as equal peers on the Web by providing content and by using the information and using the Internet.



The improvements in the coding that allows for a screen reader or other types of assistive technologies make it possible for people with different types of disabilities to use other types of assistive technologies, and in the end, benefit all, regardless which languages, cultures, or technologies they are using. This is an example of why standards in ICT are so important for people with disabilities and for the inclusion of accessibility requirements.

- The issues of affordability and accessible design were also discussed with respect to accessibility, disability and connectivity with the Internet. It was also underlined that accessibility for persons with disabilities was a significant obligation of the U.N. Convention on the rights of people with disabilities and was supported by the Tunis commitment of the World Summit on the Information Society. The Convention states the obligation of the signatories to promote the design, development, production, and distribution of accessible ICT and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost. Participants will need to interpret nationally what the U.N. Convention means in the context of the Internet.
- The UN Global Alliance on ICT and Development also indicated this morning that the Global Alliance had adopted a practical approach to the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals and would be submitting to the next Summit, in 2010, a program with clear indicators of how ICT can be used for development in every sector of development, including business, health, education, disability.
- Turning to the related issue of access, participants underlined the essential nature of literacy to access, the cognitive skills associated with being able to use the network. It was important to have access to relevant content, and access to institutional support, including political access and a voice. It was noted that global debates on access had moved from just infrastructure-based arguments to issues of policy, regulation, and rights. But infrastructure was critical, and focus was drawn to issues such as bandwidth and regulatory issues.

Internet Governance in the light of WSIS Principles

- The Principles adopted by the World Information Society Summit, as contained in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, served as a background for the open discussion (without panellists) that was held this afternoon.
- It was said that Internet governance was an "ecosystem of organizations"; the IGF was not an organization but basically a format, and the benefit of the WSIS principles was to force participants to define what were the respective roles and the modes of interaction.
- Cooperation between international agencies, civil society entities and NGOs to promote the use of Internet was also stressed in the context of applying WSIS principles.

Other events

- At a workshop on fundamental issues relating to the IGF's mandate, participants considered "Core Internet Values" in the process of the rapid evolution of the Internet. They said principles such as openness, user choice and control, among others, were central to a thriving Internet. These values are threatened when new policies are proposed with inadequate understanding of the core values; disproportionate responses are given through new legislation inspired by the misleading argument that an uncontrolled Internet is dangerous, and needs to be controlled. It was thought that a list of principles and values and a definition of each of the values should be developed.
- Participants in another workshop discussed addressing Internet governance issues so as to stimulate economic recovery and growth. By putting in place the necessary legal, policy and regulatory approaches that stimulate innovation, infrastructure and investment in the Internet, economies can be boosted.

- In the area of capacity building, it was agreed at a workshop that there was a need for training for both judiciary and the law enforcement agencies with the latest trends on cybercrimes so as to keep them empowered with the latest tools and strategies to deal with cybercrime cases. Cybercrime training for law enforcement and judiciary can contribute to a secure cyberspace, which in turn, is a fertile ground for further evolution of Internet Governance.
- On the emerging issue of social media, it was recognized that the "SocioNet" raised renewed legal and policy questions concerning privacy, responsibility of actors, freedom of expression, copyright protection, relevant jurisdictions, access to information and use of behavioral data. This workshop was aimed at helping prepare tomorrow's session on Emerging Issues.
- Other workshops considered identity theft, threats and solutions, greening the Internet, preserving free expression on the internet and protecting children's rights online, the privacy implications of cloud computing, equality in access to knowledge society through language and cultural diversity, and other issues.
- A workshop also considered the unique IGF experiment as a multistakeholder body going beyond the typical intergovernmental model in the international arena. And a "Dynamic Coalition" meeting considered freedom of expression and freedom of the media on the Internet.
