

INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM CONCLUDES MEETING IN SHARM EL-SHEIKH

Sharm el-Sheikh, 18 November 2009 - The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) concluded today its fourth meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, where it met from 15 to 18 November 2009 with calls from participants to extend the Internet Governance Forum beyond its current mandate. With more than 1800 participants from 112 countries, the 2009 Forum saw the largest attendance record since its inception in 2006. The participants reflected the diversity of internet users and came from governments, international organizations, the Internet community, the private sector, civil society and the media.

Discussions in Sharm el-Sheikh, chaired by Tarek Kamel, the Egyptian Minister of Communications and Information Technology, examined ways to improve Internet access by all and promote local content and cultural diversity; ensure the safety of the Internet and fight cybercrime; manage key Internet resources such as the root server system, technical standards, interconnection and telecommunications, the domain name system and Internet protocol addresses. The meeting also discussed new issues related to the continued growth of social networks, and the ensuing governance issues that are emerging, in particular, the need for new approaches regarding privacy and data protection, rules applicable to user-generated content and copyrighted material, and issues of freedom of expression and illegal content. Parallel to the main sessions on these issues, more than 100 workshops, best practice forums, dynamic coalition meetings and open forums were held around the broad themes of the main sessions and the overall mandate of the IGF.

The Forum, which was set up with an initial mandate of five years that expire next year, extensively discussed the issue of the future of the Forum beyond 2010, the end of its current mandate of 5 years. Sha Zukang, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, who led formal consultations with Forum participants on the "desirability of the continuation of the Forum", stressed the centrality of the principle of inclusiveness and the need for continued discussions on public policy issues related to the Internet in some form. A report on these consultations will be presented to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who will then communicate his recommendation to the General-Assembly.

High ranking government officials who took the floor at the opening of the meeting agreed that the IGF should continue to meet beyond 2010, stressing that IGF had proven its usefulness. Support for the continuation of the Forum was expressed all through the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting and reiterated in closing statements by representatives from all stakeholder groups, including state officials, many of whom said they were already looking forward to the meeting which Kenya hoped to organize in 2011.

In his closing statement, the Chairman of the 2009 IGF meeting saw wide consensus on "the need for the continuation of the IGF process with the legitimacy provided by the U.N. umbrella as well as the dynamic nature of the event", which was very clear in Sharm el-Sheikh and needed to continue.

In a chairman's summary distributed at the end of the meeting, it was noted that many speakers emphasized the usefulness of the IGF as a platform for dialogue, free from the pressures of negotiations. Most of the speakers who supported improvements would like the IGF to refocus its attention on certain points such as international public policy issues; capacity-building; participation by developing countries; improved transparency; improved communications; improved remote participation; creating a data base for best practices; more visibility for outcomes, and possibly the ability to make recommendations. Many speakers supported a continuation of the Forum as it is, that is to continue the IGF as a multistakeholder platform that brings people together to discuss issues, exchange information and share best practices, but not to make decisions, nor to have highly visible outputs. Other speakers, while supporting a continuation of the IGF along similar lines to its current form, they called for some changes. The proposed changes ranged from small improvements to major changes in its functioning, such as adding provisions that would allow it to produce outputs and decisions on a multistakeholder consensus basis. Most of those who supported the continuation of the forum would like to do so for at least another five year term.

Next year's IGF meeting will be held in Vilnius, Lithuania, from 14 to 17 September.