**Report of the ICANN Governmental Advisory Committe Open Forum at IGF 2014**

Members of the ICANN Governmental Advisory Committee, GAC, held an Open Forum for all interested participants at the IGF 2014. The ambition for the Open forum was to offer an opportunity to get to know and better understand the GAC and its role in the internet governance ecosystem. Volunteer GAC-members described the operation and dynamics of the GAC that lead to the Communiqué that follows each GAC meeting. Examples of how GAC-members prepare at their capitals for GAC-meetings was offered along with details of how the GAC agenda and work priorities are established and how members interact during the meeting and intersessional to arrive at consensus GAC positions. The GAC endeavours to reach out and increase transparency and understanding of its role and deliberations during its meetings. Presentations are available at the GAC website: gacweb.icann.org.

The moderator, **Anders Hektor**, representative to the GAC for Sweden, introduced the speakers and polled the audience on their experience with ICANN and GAC. It turned out most of the approximately 50 people in the room had attended an ICANN meeting and about a dozen participants are currently or had previously participated in the GAC.

**Thomas Schneider**, GAC-Vice Chair and representative to the GAC for Switzerland, spoke on GAC Operating Principles, ICANN Bylaws and the Affirmation of Commitments, and how they all regulate GAC efforts and the way it conducts its business, offering an institutional and political context. These documents guide the 144 members and 31 observers of the GAC and the three meetings that are held annually. GAC's main output is a Communique that follows each meeting and that constitutes a vehicle to communicate with the ICANN Board.

**Jandyr Santos**, representative to the GAC for Brazil, **Wanawit Ahkaputra**, representative to the GAC for Thailand, and **Olga Cavalli**, representative to the GAC for Argentina, shared in a dialogue with the moderator their views and experiences of having the task of being GAC representatives. The work-load for GAC representatives grows over time as the work of ICANN grows. This workload has to be balanced with other tasks GAC representatives may have for their governments.

The discussion evolved to address the extent to which governments  can source enough man hours to cover the necessary work of the GAC. Countries with better resources have greater opportunities to prepare for, and contribute to the GAC, while countries with more constrained means or that ascribe lesser priority to the GAC, may have difficulties contributing on all areas.

**Manal Ismail**, representative to the GAC for Egypt, also shared her experience from being a representative and provided a presentation of which Working Groups, Consultation Groups and Coordination Groups, that are active and where GAC-members participate, relating the level and complexity of work that are being conducted between GAC-meetings, including conference calls, mailing lists and meetings, based on voluntary contributions.  **Heather Dryden**, GAC-Chair, Participated in the panel and shared her experience as Chair of how the role of the GAC-representatives has developed over time and how expectations and work-complexity are increasing.

**Imad Y. Hobballah**, representative to the GAC for Lebanon, spoke of the context of the GAC-communique, and how it is designed, negotiated and presented. In addition to addressing the

meetings GAC is having with other constituencies, the GAC-Communique has an important role to communicate GAC advice to the ICANN board, presenting the negotiated results of deliberations conducted throughout the GAC meetings.

Almost all other meetings, except for the drafting of the Communique, are open to the public, and minutes from the meeting are made public on the website. Hobballah also related to the audience aspects of how hard the GAC works to reach consensus and the options that are available when consensus is not possible which is basically to convey through the GAC Chair to the ICANN board the full range of views expressed by members. But it can also be that the GAC continue deliberating the issue or agree to disagree and reflect the different positions in the communique. The ICANN board is obliged to respond to GAC advice. Exchanges between GAC and the ICANN board are recorded in a register available on the GAC website.

**Alice Munyua**, representative to the GAC for the African Union Commission, reflected on the process of negotiating GAC advice that is related to the ICANN board, responded upon with information on actions taken or requests for clarification which is registered in a scorecard process. Since GAC is not a decision making body but decisions are taken by the ICANN board, there is a critical issue of how GAC advice is received, interpreted and converted into action. This leads to situations where GAC perceive that the intention of its advice has not been understood or taken into account, an aspect to be considered in the continued work on ICANN accountability.


Reported by

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