



February 2, 2007

Mr. Markus Kummer
Internet Governance Forum Secretariat
Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Mr. Kummer:

The Information Technology Association of America (ITAA) is pleased to provide comments with regard to the upcoming consultation on the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). We start our comments with our thanks to the Executive Secretariat, Mr. Kummer, to the chair, Mr. Desai, and to the host government and stakeholders who all contributed to the success of the inaugural IGF.

ITAA is a trade association consisting of over 330 companies representing a broad cross-section of the information and communications industry, including ISPs, ASPs, computer hardware, software and telecommunications companies. ITAA has been a longstanding and active participant throughout the WSIS process and attended the Tunisian Summit. Through WITSA, where ITAA provides the Secretariat leadership, ITAA also participated in and attended the IGF in Athens.

The Role of the IGF

ITAA and its member companies were strong supporters of the forum concept and worked to build support from others, including governments, in the WSIS process. Thus, it is gratifying to acknowledge the success of the inaugural forum hosted by Greece and widely supported by all stakeholders.

We support continued efforts for cooperation among all interested stakeholders, including ongoing cooperation among the various international organizations. In particular, the concept of multi-stakeholder participation among all stakeholders was embodied in the Athens IGF, and must be maintained as the keystone to the IGF itself. ITAA appreciates the importance of the leadership of the Advisory Committee in ensuring the sustainability of the multi-stakeholder focus, and it is appropriate to extend our appreciation to all parties who have so successfully supported the WSIS' call for multi-stakeholder participation in the Internet Governance Forum.

The Athens IGF reinforced the value and importance of the multi-stakeholder forum as a valuable educational and information-sharing venue, designed to address common interests. The IGF should continue to be an inclusive, transparent and technology-neutral forum with broad participation from diverse stakeholders from all parts of the world, participating on an equal footing.

We note that the IGF should not of itself seek to change or expand its mission, which was the result of careful and lengthy negotiations within the WSIS. It has a key and unique role to play and should seek to extend its excellence and reach within that mandate, not attempt to take on

Information Technology Association of America

1401 Wilson Blvd. - Suite 1100, Arlington, Virginia 22209-2318 ■ Phone: (703) 522-5055 Fax: (703) 525-2279

negotiations of documents or agreements. The main focus of the meetings must remain sharing information and making connections between people who might be able to take actions in other venues.

Structure and Format

The venue and support provided by the host country, and by the Secretariat and Chair, contributed to the success of the IGF. Several structural supports should be continued, including the use of real time transcription, which helps to build an ongoing record, and extends the reach of the actual event itself. In addition, we would advocate the continued use of 'rapporteurs,' who can also help to identify and support themes that emerge from the dynamic interactions; the use of professional moderators; and the flexibility to allow for the showcase of a broad range of workshops/presentations.

It is also important to maintain a thematic approach to the IGF, in ITAA's view. However, ITAA offers some further suggestions for consideration. Issues being taken up are complex. While the exchange of perspectives and information are key to addressing complex issues, we would like to see not only problem identification, but also examination and discussion of real life solutions that are underway in addressing some of the themes.

As stated earlier, overall, the IGF must remain focused on education, awareness, and improved exchange of views, rather than negotiated conclusions. ITAA notes that the power of the IGF is its ability to attract all parties for discussion and for sharing of experiences.

As participants in the IGF (and, several of our member executives participated in a variety of ways), we suggest that an improved framework of support may be useful for the panelists, similar to what happens at international events and forums. This will take additional resources.

Moderators will particularly need to have an improved understanding of the purpose of the IGF itself, and of the issues that they are helping to examine. That can be accomplished by selecting a moderator with expertise, or by ensuring that the moderator has the support of knowledgeable resources to help them in their early preparations. While the Advisory Group should not be the only definitive resource in briefing the moderators or supporting the panelists, they can play a very helpful role in the preparatory process, as they did in the initial IGF. They could also extend the invitation to other knowledge sources to augment the Advisory Group in support of briefings for the moderators.

ITAA suggests that, if at all possible, improved outreach coordination among speakers on the panels, facilitated by the moderators, would be recommended. It was our experience that this aspect of the preparation could be strengthened.

The role of the Advisory Committee has to be carefully developed, so that they are not somehow taking on authoritative perspectives. Their role should be focused on process and identifying additional resources, not taking on the role of developing positions themselves. They are, however, a critical resource to help to ensure that the IGF is balanced in its ability to meet the needs of the wide span of stakeholders.

In order to ensure continued success, the IGF process of planning does need to begin early, and ITAA applauds the early convening of the informal multi-stakeholder consultation in February, 2007.

Ideally, the dates for future IGFs can be agreed very early by the hosts, and carefully checked against other important global/international events, such as ICANN's annual meeting; the ITU's significant events, such as WTSA, the Plenipotenary, etc.

As we meet in Geneva, ITAA proposes that the focus for planning should evolve toward creating a framework of process and format that can be relied upon as the structure for future IGFs, albeit with needed flexibility. Having a framework for how the forum works will augment the ability to focus in on the substance and interactions, rather than a continued debate about the structure of the event.

During the early stages of the WSIS, we were all learning about the concept of multi-stakeholder interaction. The inaugural IGF offered the first opportunity to 'trial' this approach. Undoubtedly, businesses and governments alike may have found some aspects challenging – for instance, the format for the panels. ITAA suggests that some changes are useful to consider in how many panelists per panel are optimal. It could be more useful to have 3-4 panels of 1 ½ hours in length, rather than two panels of 3 hours each. In addition, consideration could be given to having a number of workshops that are suitable for 'main room' attendance. This is where a topic of broad interest would be explored in some detail, at the tactical level that typically occurred in the workshops, versus the higher level discussions of the panels. Thus, we would support a combination of both lengthy substantive and shorter high-level workshops. Some of the structural supports provided by the Secretariat – including the excellent synthesis paper – which enabled review of contributions from stakeholders via the web site, are very useful and even critical supports to continue throughout the IGF. TAA would support the importance and usefulness of the 'synthesis paper' as a resource prior to the IGF 2007 in Rio. In general, however, ITAA suggests that there should be some reflection on contributions that are carried through from the synthesis paper and into the IGF itself, especially to ensure that the moderators have informed themselves thoroughly of contribution themes and key issues. The fact that the sessions were webcast and audio cast, and real time transcribed enabled not only remote participation in real time, but also even after the fact. Remote participants were able to post comments in IGF chatrooms and ask questions. This is an excellent example of how technology can enable broader participation. ITAA urges further use of the full potential of webcasting, chatrooms, and online collaboration tools in RIO, and beyond.

Topics for consideration –

ITAA believes that the first IGF worked well, with the four themes and cross cutting theme of capacity development. It may be that it is feasible to identify and prioritize perhaps one or two themes as 'lead themes'. ITAA finds value in the opportunity to explore topics of interest to different stakeholders as an opportunity to build knowledge and share experiences, best practices and find common cause. The role of the Internet in economic development and the importance of capacity-building should continue to receive attention as a key theme for the IGF. Care should be taken to focus on issues of importance to the developing countries. Much of the feedback that ITAA heard, and reinforced by our relationship with WITSA, leads us to urge that the IGF try to avoid a dominance of focus on the developed world's perspectives and make a conscious effort to address issues not addressed elsewhere, or where the multi stakeholder dialogue could offer a particularly unique and added value. Thus it may be useful to delve more deeply into three to four specific topics, with several sessions on different aspects of each topic.

We note that this may be a very useful strategy to draw more senior experts from all stakeholder groups to participate in the Internet Governance Forum events.

Thus, ITAA would support the importance of sustainable capacity building, with a focus on what works already in developing countries.

Candidates for Multi-stakeholder group

ITAA restates its view that the participants in the Multi Stakeholder Advisory Group should have significant experience, authority and seniority in their fields of endeavor. Whether members are high-ranking government officials, technologists, business or civic leaders, it is essential for participants to have vision, cross-sectoral knowledge, management skills and experience in consensus building.

ITAA's view on the Advisory Committee is that it must remain reflective of the mandate of the IGF, and that multi stakeholder nominations for changes would be in the hands of the UN Secretary General. It is unclear that it is critical to dedicate time to making changes in the Advisory Committee for 2007; and perhaps instead, thought can be given to some evolution for the 2008 and 2009 time frames.

ITAA greatly appreciates the support provided by the Secretariat that makes it possible to follow the work of the IGF 'online', and welcomes the public consultation. We would like to see additional transparency on the operations of the Advisory Group, such as the regular publication of its minutes.

ITAA believes that the formation of the IGF presents an excellent opportunity for global cooperation on critical issues regarding the future growth and development of the Internet. Our organization looks forward to working with you to ensure its success.

Sincerely,

Phil Bond
President
ITAA