
First Meeting of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG)

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I wish to welcome you here to Geneva in my role as Secretary-General of the World Summit on the Information Society, for the very first meeting of the UN Working Group on Internet Governance.

The topic of Internet Governance was extensively debated by governments and other stakeholders in the final stages of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. Although there were agreements on some basic principles, there also remained divergent opinions and different, even conflicting, visions in this area. It was recognized that these differences could not be resolved during the first phase of the Summit, so this gave birth to the idea of creating a multi-stakeholder Working Group on Internet Governance, under the aegis of the UN Secretary-General, which would report its findings to the Tunis phase of the Summit.

If you read the mandate of the Working Group, as stated in the Geneva decisions, without the benefit of having participated in the negotiations during the Summit PrepCom Process, it is likely that one might misunderstand the scope of the issues concerning "Internet Governance". For that reason, it is important to understand both the text of the mandate, and the spirit in which it was written.

During the discussion in the Geneva Phase, starting from the inter-sessional meeting in Paris, some delegates raised serious concerns about ICANN. Other delegations, who see the present ICANN mechanism as functioning well, said there was no need for change, or even for discussion about change. But those who interpret "Internet Governance" more broadly consider that the Internet should not be governed by a private company alone and that a multilateral organization with greater international legitimacy and democratic processes, such as ITU, should assume some of the functions of ICANN. There remains a large gap in both understanding and perspective between the two sides.

However, many of the issues that could fall under the wider political concept of “Internet Governance” have already been extensively debated during the first phase of WSIS and agreed principles and actions have been stipulated in the final documents of the first phase. There is wide agreement among governments, as stated in Hammamet, that these issues should not be reopened. Therefore, there is no need, for instance, to discuss such issues as free flow of information, countering spam, network security, regional root servers, privacy protection or misuse of ICTs. Instead, we should focus on the core activity of the management of Internet resources by ICANN, in particular top-level domains, which is where important issues remain unresolved.

Without having a shared common understanding and, most importantly, a narrow definition of Internet Governance, discussions in the Working Group are likely to remain unproductive. The Working Group, therefore, should strive to interpret the term “Internet governance” in its most narrow context.

In this regard, I would echo what your chairman, Nitin Desai, has said during the September 2004 consultations held in this very room: “The Working Group is not a negotiating forum. Its purpose is to facilitate the negotiations that will take place in Tunis.”

Therefore, you must strive to focus on the key issue at hand and act as facilitators to establish a dialogue of good faith among participants and actors, and to avoid a kind of “religious war”.

Let me conclude my remarks with a plea; that we do not reopen all of the issues that were already extensively discussed in the first phase. But instead, let us focus on those few issues of substance that were not resolved during the negotiations; namely on the future reform of ICANN. You must find common ground among different stakeholders where the interests of many can be reconciled and balanced.

Thank you and may I wish you the best of luck in your endeavours.