

**Contribution to the Consultations on the Establishment of the Working
Group on Internet Governance (WGIG)
Geneva, 20 - 21 Sep 2004**

By Makane Faye
Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)¹

I thank you Mr. Chairman for giving to ECA the opportunity to address this gathering, as member of the UN Regional Commission's group and also as Secretary to the African Bureau for the WSIS (Bamako 2002).

Our contribution is based on the results of the African Discussion List on Internet Governance organized by ECA in the framework of the UN ICT Task Force African Stakeholders Network (ASN), prior to the UN ICT Task Force's Forum on Internet Governance held in New York from 25 to 26 May 2004. We believe that issues raised by the Discussion list are still relevant today because there is still no change in the Internet Governance system.

The contribution attempts to address the issues to be covered by the two main themes of the consultations, namely, "Nature and Scope of Internet Governance: Setting the priorities", and "Working methods, proposed timeline for activities and membership".

I. Nature and Scope of Internet Governance: Setting the priorities

1. Common understanding and work definition of Internet Governance

There is need to come up with a common understanding or at least a "**working definition**" of Internet Governance, by taking into account the importance of the historical patterns and the current shaping of the institutional and political framework of the current Internet Governance system. Presently the large number of actors

¹ <http://www.uneca.org/aisi>

intervening in the international management of the Internet does not simplify things; in fact for some of our stakeholders it is confusing. Discussion List members believe that the common understanding can only be reached if there is no more confusion and if consensus is reached.

2. Regulations and cyber laws

As there is increased use of electronic communications and transactions in Government and in business and between Government and the outside world, the Discussion List participants recommended to look into appropriate regulations and cyber laws at all levels (national, regional and global) which would contribute to enhancing the Internet Governance system, with a positive impact to developing countries. ECA has set up a research group on regulation and cyber laws in the framework of the WSIS process.

3. Coordination

When looking at coordination issues, be they administrative, technical or operational, there is a feeling that Africa is not represented and is not benefiting fully from the current Internet Governance system. According to Discussion list participants, the African situation is characterized by lack of access, problem of Domain name management, allocation of IP addresses, regulatory environment and capacity building. AfrINIC has been officially launched with offices in South Africa and Mauritius to take care of IP addresses in Africa, hence there is hope in the months to come, but there is still lot more to be done on other issues.

4. Other important issues which should be tackled according to participants to the Discussion List include:

- Ethics and norms to protect children and vulnerable groups
- Intellectual Property Rights and Open Source Software to bring digital inclusion to developing countries
- Network security and data protection to prevent unlawful access, use of the Internet to perpetrate crimes and frauds, unsolicited mail and Spam

- Multilingualism and cultural diversity to provide the necessary tools for participation and access to the majority of the developing countries and indigenous groups.

In order to tackle the above issues, it is recommended to:

- take stock of best practices and problems/bottlenecks and get lessons learned, and
- prepare well researched issue papers at the regional and global levels for discussion and input in the process.

II. Working Group on Internet Governance: Working methods, proposed timeline for activities and membership

This first informal consultation and the UN ICT Task Force's Forum on Internet Governance have set the tune for multi stakeholder partnership on Internet Governance in terms of inclusiveness and participation of all stakeholders in equal footing.

5. Reporting and working methods

In order to make the process more inclusive and take into account stakeholders at the national and continental levels, it is recommended to organize official consultations at the regional level with on-line consultations and face to face meetings. This would allow stakeholders prepare common positions as well as unified input and come up with a common understanding at each region before moving to the global level.

In this regard, the proposal put forward by the WGIG on physical as well as virtual meetings and timeline seems to be suitable for ECA. May we take this opportunity to inform this meeting that the African Group's first face to face Internet Governance consultations will be held in Mauritius from 8 to 10 December 2004, following the AfriINIC and ICANN meetings to be held in South Africa. It will be organized by the Government of Mauritius, ECA and the Bamako Bureau for the WSIS, with support from the UN ICT Task Force.

We invite the Working Group on Internet Governance to take this opportunity to convene its first global meeting in Mauritius.

The next African face to face consultations on Internet Governance will be organized during the African Preparatory Conference for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society to be held in Accra (Ghana) from 29 January to 4 February 2005².

6. Membership

To make the work of the WGIG effective and successful, its composition should be based on a mix of expertise, geographic and linguistic distribution, gender balance and multi stakeholder participation, including youth and civil society organizations.

Even though the WGIG would be inclusive, its size should not be too large to prevent it from functioning properly. Hence in order to keep an optimum size with sufficient expertise, it is recommended to have a series of Working Technical Committees to advise and support the WGIG on specific issues.

The WGIG and its Working Technical Committees can be supported at the regional level by the UN Regional Commissions.

The Way Forward

The WGIG should develop privileged working relations with the UN Regional Commissions and use their convening power to facilitate regional consultations and channel input from the Working Technical Committees.

² Preconference workshops will be held from 29 January – 1 February while the African Regional Preparatory Conference will be held from 2 – 4 February 2005.