The following text is excerpted from an ongoing discussion on the IGF Advisory Group mailing list thread on its own future. The only changes made relate to an effort to anonymize the comments in respect of the Chatham House rule. The discussion took place between 30 January 2007 and 3 February, 2008.

(Writer A)

Thank you for posting comments from the advisory group list to the public forum -- thanks to Writer B for suggesting it and for all agreeing to allow their mail to be shared. It's been another positive step towards achieving the transparency the secretary general and community asked for.

I imagine it will be hard not to make extracts of future discussion threads from the list available in the same way.

About number, stakeholders, and balance etc.

(From Writer C):

>
>It seems to me that the simplest part of the puzzle may be the
>nomination of government members. There are established ways of
>nominating representatives from UN regional groups and I assume these
>can continue to be used with appropriate rotation.
>

Could anyone guess at the minimum number required to meet this requirement. Perhaps knowing this number and being able to build-out from there will give us an idea of the ideal size of the advisory group. I hope we can keep to around 40, less rather than more. Currently, seems about 21 members of the advisory group are employed by or represent a government department or agency, little under half to total of the group.

About special advisers to the chair(s). I think it would be helpful to explain what their role is, and discuss if guidelines similar to those Writer D suggested should be adopted:

(From Writer D):
>What I think is very important is the definition
>of what this kind of advisors is. Those advisors
>should be just advisors of the Chair, they can be
>subscribed to the list and participate in every
>face to face meeting of the AG, but they can
>speak (or write in the list) only if they are required to do so by the Chair.
>

The number should be decided by the chair, but I think there should be some distinction between an advisory group member and a special adviser. Or what's the point in the distinction in the name and process of their selection? Having 12 (as I think there are now) all potentially acting as any-other advisory group member just makes an already large group much too large. But whatever's decided it should be explained so it's clear to all what's going on.

Similar with observers: the name implies one thing and yet they do much more than observe, they speak in meetings, contribute to the list, suggest speakers to represent interests they believe important (which many would find quite an important "right"), etc. Fine, that may be the UN tradition, but we should make clear what their role is. Transparency about the group, its meetings and who does what.

About stakeholder groups. I think it's too late to say the Internet technical community shouldn't be represented, or should be subsumed by private sector, civil society and government. It's happened, and they have made important contributions. Bit like making email from this list available, that box has been opened and genie let out (mixing cliches to destruction...)

But that doesn't mean the membership shouldn't be re-balanced. I take Writer D's point (Writer D in particular) about not trying to cast membership by stakeholder group in stone, but I believe civil society and private sector (7 and 6 [or 7?] members respectively) have been under-represented in the advisory group and the number/proportion should be increased. If we want greater private sector involvement, and I think we need it, then great representation in the advisory group, particularly from the South may help.

Civil society's invested a great deal in the IGF: first arguing for it post-WGIG and since, for example, through significant participation as the largest stakeholder group in both Athens and Rio. And there's general sense in civil society (the post WSIS groups) that we're not fairly represented. Doesn't help that lack of resources can make it difficult for civil society advisory group members to attend all the consultations and our meetings. So a bit of re-balancing from government and technical community to civil society and private sector would be helpful.

If people are to talk about rotation, bringing in new members, then knowing what they are recommending people for would be useful. It would be helpful if there was an explanation of what the Advisory Group has done to date -- what decisions has it taken and how, and what we do at the IGF meetings.

On a mailing list recently someone compared the advisory group to people building a new nation. And while it's perhaps nice to think of us as founding mothers and fathers, I suspect the issues we discuss and influence are more those of a typical conference program committee... (perhaps if people knew what we did perhaps they would say we should be doing other things.) So an explanation of the advisory group's work could be helpful.

If possible, and I know this will be difficult, it would be helpful to know who will not be continuing so replacements could be found to fill any new gaps. Gaps in general, diversity and skills.

Minor thought on transparency -- perhaps a roll-call of those attending advisory group meetings would be useful. And a public list of all subscribed to the <igf_members@intgovforum.org> list (names and affiliations.)

(Writer A)

I know we are only making "proposals on a suitable rotation among its members", but even give that, shouldn't the AG continue to work until new members rotate in?

I thought the idea of rotation meant the AG would be considered an ongoing process. Unlike last year where we pretty much ground to a halt waiting for a renewed mandate, work would continue on a rolling basis, new member rotate into the ongoing work of the group, not a stop start process. If that's not the case then we haven't made much progress and can expect delays until after the May meeting.

(Writer E)

I agree that the invitation by the UN SG to the AG to propose a rotation should be interpreted a meaning that the AG is there to stay and operate. In fact, nothing short of a dismantling of this mailing list can prevent us from continuing to offer our advice and discuss the next steps. Unless any of us is so status-driven to require a formal reconfirmation, we can simply continue doing it, and also to fulfil the UN SG request as we go along.

(Writer F)

I agree that we should continue to work towards the planning of New Delhi regardless of how the AG rotation is decided. We can work on both issues at the same time, and in order to get the best speakers, we need to act soon (but I'm hesitate to contact potential speakers since the meeting dates are now up in the air).

(Writer G)

I share completely this appreciation: that we must continue to work in earnest. There are too many lessons still to be assimilated, for which we must hurry, and certainly one is that leaving things for later hasn't paid that well.

(Writer B)

I also agree with this approach.

(Writer H)

I also support this approach.

(Writer I)

I also support this idea.

(Markus Kummer)

Many thanks for your contribution. I would like to pick up one thread of your posting.

> Thank you for posting comments from the advisory group list to the
> public forum -- thanks to Writer B for suggesting it and for all agreeing
> to allow their mail to be shared. It's been another positive step
> towards achieving the transparency the secretary general and
> community asked for.
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> I imagine it will be hard not to make extracts of future discussion
> threads from the list available in the same way.

I take your point and I also take it that we will reverse the procedure from now on:

Any contribution to this discussion will be posted unless anybody specifically asks for it to be kept private!

Agreed?

This makes me wonder whether we should not go a step further. Daniel explained to me how the W3C works, also with regard to the commitment of the members of its various working groups (which is an aspect that we could look into when recruiting new members). Much of the W3C's work is based on online work that is made public. Please find below a link to one of the W3C's public mailing lists:

http://lists.w3.org/Archives/Public/public-html/

You will note that in many ways it is not that much different from our list. We would be able to arrange the list in the same way for ease of reference, so that you can check by date, by author or by discussion thread. I doubt whether this would be of that much interest to the public at large, but it would certainly help demystify our work.

We could create a second list - say AG-discuss - and keep the present list for more mundane communications, such as registration details or dinner arrangements or, as the case may be, for postings a member would prefer to keep private.

From a purely selfish point of view, it would make the Secretariat's life much easier, as it would be up to each member to opt in to the public discussion!

Reactions?

(Writer J)

Your suggestions sound good to me. I agree with your point that it should help to demystify the work of the Advisory Group, as well as easing the Secretariat's administrative burden.

(Writer K)

I agree, and I also remember sort of some kind of consensus where we said we "of course" should be able to have people not part of the AG sitting in on the meetings. There are, as you point out Markus, so few things that actually must be kept within a AG for formality reasons, that those issues could be managed during a fraction of the meeting time.

Example: on the ISOC BoT, we have open board meetings, and out of a 2 day meeting, only 30-45 minutes is closed where for example contract negotiation details, salary issues for staff and similar reports from the CEO is discussed.

So, I am strongly in favor of more open meetings. But at the same time, I think it is important that the AG is small, and that it is the AG that have the meetings. People that "listen in" are there listening. The meeting is still not open for everyone to participate in.

(Writer L)

(From Markus Kummer):
> *_Any contribution to this discussion will be posted unless anybody
> specifically asks for it to be kept private!_*
>
> Agreed?

>

Agreed.

Agreed

I also agree that the work of the AG should continue, while waiting for its official renewal.

(Writer G)

thanks for helping shape the discussion again, by creating the options and placing them starkly on the table.

Before jumping to conclusions I would beg our group to consider one important factor. Transparency brings with it accountability.

So, by holding any discussion as "in principle, publicly" those who take part agree for their contributions to be made public. But we also all have to agree that the lack of contribution becomes equally public.

And with that, in the minds of many, comes a declination of rights: if you have not taken part in a discussion for all of its duration, it is very hard to explain how you suddenly decide to contribute at the end or in the physical meeting when we do meet in Geneva at the end of the month.

If you are a public official, or somehow bound by a community for which you work, you may be called by other officials, or people in your country, do contribute, or to explain your silence.

There are more consequences here but I'll keep it brief for now.

(Writer M)

I support this suggested approach.

(Writer A)

In principle I'm fine with this. Except for any discussion about speakers, and similar,

But, I am concerned that opening the list completely might have a chilling effect on what's an already a pretty quiet list. For myself I have no objections, except for discussions of a couple of topics (naming people being the most obvious.) But I think we should consider if it would cause some members to be even more hesitant to post.

When there were calls to provide more transparency of our meetings we responded by trying to minute what was said rather than opening the sessions to anyone who wished to attend. And perhaps we should revisit that. So suggest similar approach with the list, continue with extracts of themes everyone is comfortable with, see how that works and reconsider in time for the May (and then if necessary September) consultations.

Once the list is opened I don't think it can be closed again easily. So let's make sure it's the right thing to do.

(From Markus Kummer):
>This makes me wonder whether we should not go a step further. Daniel
>explained to me how the W3C works, also with regard to the
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>ease of reference, so that you can check by date, by author or by
>discussion thread. I doubt whether this would be of that much
>interest to the public at large, except the few IGF aficionados or
>adepts of conspiracy theories, but it would certainly help demystify
>our work.
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>We cold create a second list - say AG-discuss - and keep the present
>list for more mundane communications, such as registration details
>or dinner arrangements or, as the case may be, for postings a member
>would prefer to keep private.
>
>From a purely selfish point of view, it would make the Secretariat's
>life much easier, as it would be up to each member to opt in to the
>public discussion!

And I know this isn't what the secretariat would like to hear! (sorry for the extra burden) And that using your resources to take extracts etc means not having them available for other things.

If helpful, I've no problem with this note being re-posted to the public forum and my name included. It's a matter we should hear comments on.

(Writer F)

I agree with your approach to make our discussions more transparent with a publicly accessible list. Transparency is an important goal for us.

At ICANN, our GNSO Policy Council email discussion list is publicly viewable, and I believe that is the right approach. People can still have private communications when required, they just don't have them on a publicly viewable list.

(Writer N)

My sense would be to keep two lists, one open, the other closed.

The open list could contain most of our discussion that might possibly be of interest to others. Keep the same name: igf_members@intgovforum.org, and archive this list in a world-readable manner.

The closed list could contain two kinds of messages. Give this list a new name: igf_members_admin@intgovforum.org, and do not archive it.

The first kind are messages that mention names, of speakers, of other types, anything that we would not want under ordinary circumstances to divulge because of the personal information involved. Most likely this will almost always be used for speaker and panelist names.

The second kind are purely administrative messages, dinner plans, etc. that are of either no interest or no use (or both) to anyone outside the group.

Then trust members of the group to use the right list. It's liley to work close to 100% correctly.

(Writer O)

What Writer N suggests is probably the most clean approach to the matter, and I would support it.

However, I agree with Writers A and G that a complete openness of our list comes at a prize. Not all members on this list feel comfortable speaking their mind. This is particularly true for those who don't speak in their own capacity. Opening the list makes it more difficult for us to discuss sensitive matters.

On the other hand, we don't even know right now the entire list of subscribers, and messages have been distributed to third parties before. So in the end, the difference between a private and a public list might be a mere gradual one.

(Markus Kummer)

Many thanks for your quick and thoughtful feed-back. While there is considerable support for more openness and for the proposed two-list-approach, there were also some concerns expressed that need to be taken seriously. My feeling therefore is that the time is not yet ripe for this approach.

Instead, we can build on the previous posting of an anonymized discussion thread. We are planning to create a special section in our forum section that would be reserved for the Advisory Group discussion. Depending on the volume of the emails, we could post a weekly or fortnightly digest of our discussion.

Based on our experiences, not least on the feed-back received, we could revisit the issue of an public list at a later stage, maybe at the meeting later this month or then in May. Linked to this issue is the suggestion, supported by several colleagues, to allow observers to the Advisory Group meetings, on condition that some agenda items can be discussed in a closed session.

Would this approach find the general support of the group?

(Writer H)

Markus, thank you for your update on the email list issues.

A few personal thoughts on the opening of the IGF advisory group meetings:

*Opening up parts of the advisory group meetings would be responsive to the requests for more transparency, and would help to demystify the AG discussions and work. I think that using some degree of caution in creating parts of the meetings that would be closed to address certain issues, and then providing a report/summary on entire AG meeting as has been done in the past would be useful.

*The number of observers may become an issue, and balance between the need for a real working meeting in a room that is conducive to achieving a constructive exchange among the members of the advisory group should be considered carefully. A large room that may accommodate an unlimited number of observers would be counter-productive.

*The observers from IGOs already come to the meetings, and from time to time have been asked to contribute to the discussions to share information about their work programme and other issues. The IGO observers [OECD, Council of Europe, ITU, for example] could be considered to be slightly different from the other observers that are being discussed.

*The new observers and all participants in the room should be asked to adhere to the Chatham House rule to create an environment where advisory group members can comfortably exchange views and keep the discussions productive. This does not prevent observers from conveying the substance of the discussion without attributing comments or specifics to individuals to their communities as they choose to. The new observers should not become participants in the discussion, but by being in the room they can perhaps more effectively contribute to ongoing public discussions and discuss issues with advisory group members in the breaks, and following the meetings. This could also help more people actively contribute to the discussions online, and during preparations for the consultations etc.

*If the advisory group meetings become in part open, this should be announced publicly in advance of the consultation/meetings to allow people who are keen to observe the open parts of the two day advisory group meetings to make travel plans ahead of time. [The last minute decision to turn the advisory group meetings into 'informal and open' meetings in May 2007 were in part criticized because some people who would have stayed on in Geneva were not able to change their travel plans at the last minute]

(Writer P)

I'd go with that, but I'd prefer that the member-only list be also archived (with restricted acl). Being able to read/look at past discussions is very important.

Regarding the public list, is it going to be read-write for everybody or just for the ag members ?

If it is completely open, and discussions start being active/productive with outside folks, how are we going to decide who goes to the ag f2f meetings ?

This openness is going to have side-effect of the ag evolution, so maybe we should debate first the openness of the ag itself.

(Writer N)

To clarify,

1. No problem with archiving both lists and restricting access to the private list.

2. The public list should be world read, but only advisory group members should have write privileges.

(Writer Q)

First I would like to thank Writers N, R and S for their effort in preparing a well thought proposal for the evolution of the IGF. After reading it and after looking at the e-mails from my colleagues in the advisory group, I have the following comments:

- We cannot ignore the important role of the technical and academic communities in all related issues to Internet Governance. Although paragraph 35 did not mention them as stakeholders, paragraph 36 recognized their work and contribution (who is better than them in knowing the issues related to IG). Therefore I support Writer B's comment: "I think the technical and academic communities played a strong and positive role in the first 2 iterations of the AG, though the individuals may have been selected as reps of other groups. Let's assume that this precedent will continue".

- It should be accepted that a balanced stakeholders representation may not be viewed in terms of equal numbers but rather in terms of equal overall representation for each stakeholder group. We should not undermine the representation of any stakeholder group especially the civil society whose participation and contributions played a major role in the success of the last two IGF meetings.

- I strongly support that advisory group should be balanced in terms of geography, gender and point of views. That should be reflected on the rotation process. Geographical and gender balance should be clearly referenced during the nomination process. So if a member from a geographical region is rotated, it is expected that a member from his region replaces him. The same thing should be applied on gender representation. This approach may help in maintaining the balance of the AG.

- With regard of selecting the AG members, I support again Writer B's comment: "I think the choice of AG members *must* remain in that black box known as "the UN Sec Gen, or we risk the process being manipulated or captured. That said, the various stakeholder groups (themselves a relic of the WSIS) should be encouraged to nominate people they think would be good (keeping in mind balance), but should also be encouraged to nominate more than whatever number is notionally allocated to their constituency."

- I think we should also consider the time frame for the rotation process. For the last two years the AG met three times a year (February, May and September). We should consider that the rotation nomination process should start immediately after the AG September

meeting and ends at the time of the IGF meeting. This means that during this period it is known which members of the AG will be rotated while using the period between the IGF meeting and the February AG meeting to finalize the selection of the new AG members. The February meeting should partially be a handover meeting between the outgoing members and the new ones.

- I would also suggest that the outgoing members of the AG may still be part of the AG mailing list. I believe this will help in preserving the continuation of work for the AG.

- I agree with Markus approach to make our discussions more transparent by posting it in the public forum. I also support Writer N suggestion to have a closed list when the AG discussion involves personal information.

(Writer T)

I would like to express my support to all the very wise recommendations of Writer Q. Regarding the idea of a "closed list" commented at the very end, I would like to stress that it should only be used when there is "personal information" involved and that it is necessary to be over cautious not to use it otherwise.

(Writer U)

I support the idea of allowing observers to the advisory group meeting, as this will serve the request for more transparency as well as enrich public online discussions.

We may want to look into options though, so that the number of observers does not become a matter of concern.

I also share Writer H's last comment that if the issue of allowing observers is agreed upon, it needs to be announced well in advance.

(Writer B)

An interesting discussion, not all threaded below, so I will top- post. Apologies that I also refer to both the questions of opening the meetings *and* opening the list in this one post.

Not surprisingly I suppose, I am in favour of more open posting, for the sake of transparency, and perhaps of generating a broader range of views for ourselves and others to think about.

But I think we have to acknowledge that there are some things we know we will not want to be public (speakers, trivia, etc., as Writer N and others say), things we may want to be

public (e.g., the renewal thread I originally suggested), and things we know we don't know right now whether they should be open or closed (to paraphrase Donald Rumsfeld -- sorry!)

I suggest we keep both open and closed lists for that reason, on the understanding that we prefer the open for meaningful discussion and debate.

On another point, the notion of doing summaries or extracts presupposes the Secretariat has ample resources, which we all know are in short supply. I am not sure it is practical. I am also not really sure it makes sense if we are trying to be more transparent -- just my view.

The question of the meetings being open to observers or not is also complex. I certainly support Writer K's comments, particularly that we need to be able to go in camera on fairly rare occasions, and that "observers" does not = "participants."

But with regard to both issues, I feel some discomfort about the silence we are experiencing from the vast majority of our colleagues on this topic: more so than some others. I do not know how to get our silent colleagues to speak up on the list. We know they're less reticent in meetings (which have almost all been somewhat closed). I would not want our drive toward openness and transparency to be successful at the price of not hearing all points of view represented in the group. My fear is that if we cannot get views out either/both on the list and in meetings, they will just build pressure that could erupt in the IGF itself.

(Writer V)

Trying here to capture some of the views in the recent flurry of proposals for the "new" AG.

It seems most are taking as granted that a selection made by the UN General Secretariat will be "neutral" (both regarding the Chair and the MAG members). This is a new setting in which it seems the new SG had almost forgotten there is an IGF process. We have had a great Chair so far -- but there is no guarantee a possible replacement will be as good and as able to cope with the complex handling of political tendencies. Neutral? I do not want a neutral Chair (the perfectly neutral Chair will be a robot) -- I want one with a vision of mission, and, with as little imperfection as possible, to be able to coordinate the process towards our mission reasonably balancing all interests -- this is what in my view Nitin has done. I hope he can continue. As to the MAG, it will be as good as the whole selection process. If we fail in submitting names according to the expectations of each group, the SG will not do miracles.

The original NRS (Writers N, R and S) proposal says: "Each stakeholder group will be responsible for submitting the names of the outgoing and incoming Advisory Group members to the Chair for approval (the Chair may consult as he sees appropriate with

regards to the proposed names). Stakeholder groups may provide more names than there are seats. The Chair's decision is final." Fine with me, as long as there is sufficient transparency and opportunity for the interest groups to know about the process and participate in the names' selection for submission. We should not run the risk of having the existing MAG members exclusively deciding their replacements (or not) in the name of their stakeholder groups.

I liked this guideline from the NRS proposal: "- AG members should be chosen on the basis of how large and diverse a community they connect to (which is different than "represent")." Challenge is, again, to make sure this is evaluated by the interest groups themselves, not only their current MAG members.

Most other comments I had to make have been made by Writer Q in his yesterday's post to the list, with which I generally agree.

(Writer X)

I would just like to pick up on Writer H and B's thoughtful contributions about observers (strung together below). I remain cautious about this issue and would not want to lose frank real-time interaction for the sake of maximum transparency. I think we need to discuss the issue further. I have said it before, but as well as the impact on the Chatham House rule (which I think is not easily solved), there is also the issue of equitable access.

Yes, some people may extend their stay in Geneva if they are there for other IGF or UN meetings, but for all of those who are not just an hour or two away from Geneva, there are real distance, time and cost barriers.

(Writer G)

On this point of observers, our group has to reflect carefully. Part of the care is for the reason Writers H and B, and now you stress: equitable access.

The other aspect, for which this Group has already gone through significant experience, is the pressure brought on it by observers who do not find the role fitting, and, not all having equitable access, make the pressure profoundly asymmetric.

Finally, indeed, the Chatham House rule is mooted by the presence of observers; the combination distills itself into a chilling effect. If there are anyway not enough incentives for all actors to be open about their views, those who prefer to deal in secrecy will have their day made by this combination.