

Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus's Inputs for the Open IGF Consultation, Geneva, 26th February, 2008

Statement II:

Main Session Themes for IGF, Hyderabad

Civil Society IG Caucus is of the opinion that the four general themes of access, openness, diversity and security (with Critical Internet Resources added in Rio) have served a useful purpose in organizing the IGF meetings in its early formative stages. We should now move on more purposefully to the serious business of providing directions, ideas and possibilities to global public policy making in the Internet arena, which is a primary mandate of the IGF.

We are of the opinion that the above general themes of access, openness, diversity and security should be the cross-cutting themes for organizing the next meeting of the IGF at Hyderabad, India. However, the main sessions should address specific public policy issues in the area of Internet Governance that are considered most important in the current global context. A series of thematic workshops should be organized around these main sessions, and their output feed into these sessions. Adequate preparatory work should go into preparing the main sessions and the connected workshops using dedicated working groups. These Working Groups should also synthesize appropriate outcome documents for each main theme.

For Hyderabad meeting of the IGF, we suggest the following main session themes.

1. Enhanced Cooperation - What Was Meant By the Tunis Agenda, and What Is the Status of It

Tunis Agenda speaks of the need for 'enhanced cooperation' for global Internet policy making. There are different views about what exactly is meant by this term, and what processes will/ can constitute 'enhanced cooperation'. IGF is the right forum to deliberate on the meaning and possibilities of this term, through wide participation of all stakeholders in the multi-stakeholder spirit of the WSIS. It is quite possible that such an open discussion pushes the process of 'enhanced cooperation' forward, which at present seems to be caught in a kind of a limbo, or at least some degree of confusion.

2. Network Neutrality - Ensuring Openness in All Layers of the Internet

Network neutrality has been an important architectural principle for the Internet. This principle is under considerable challenge as Internet becomes the mainstream communication platform for almost all business and social activities. This main session will examine the implication of this principle, and its possible evolutionary interpretations, for Internet policy in different areas. Issues about the openness of the Internet architecture are increasingly manifest in all layers of the Internet today.

3. A Development Agenda for Internet Governance

Development is a key focus of the Tunis Agenda and its mandate for the IGF. Development also was listed as a cross-cutting theme of the Athens and Rio conferences, but neither featured a main session that devoted significant, focused attention to the linkages between Internet governance mechanisms and development. However, at Rio a workshop was organized by civil society actors in collaboration with the Swiss government, Brazilian Internet Steering Committee and other partners from all stakeholder groupings on, “Toward a Development Agenda for Internet Governance.” The workshop considered the options for establishing a holistic program of analysis and action that would help mainstream development considerations into Internet governance decision making processes.

Attendees at this workshop expressed strong interest in further work on the topic being pursued in the IGF. Hence, we believe the Development Agenda concept should be taken up in a main session at Hyderabad, and that this would be of keen interest to a great many participants there. We also support the Swiss government’s proposal to consider establishing a multi-stakeholder Working Group that could develop recommendations to the IGF on a development agenda.

4. Transparency and Inclusive Participation in Internet Governance

The WSIS principles hold that Internet governance processes “should be multilateral, transparent and democratic, with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations.” Governments invoked these principles throughout the WSIS process, and in the Tunis Agenda mandated the IGF to, “promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet Governance processes.” Nevertheless, the IGF has not held any follow-up discussion on how to pursue this key element of its mandate. The Internet Governance Caucus has consistently advocated programmatic activity in this arena, and hence welcomes the Swiss government’s statement that implementation of the WSIS principles should be added as a cross-cutting issue at the core of all IGF discussions. To help kick-start that cross-cutting consideration, we propose that a main session in Hyderabad concentrate on two WSIS principles of general applicability for which progress in implementation can be most readily assessed: transparency, and inclusive participation. The session could consider patterns of practice across Internet governance mechanisms, and identify generalizable lessons concerning good or best practices.