AT-LARGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ALAC STATEMENT ON ICANN STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2021-2025

Introduction

On 20 December 2018, public comment opened for the ICANN Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025. The At-Large Consolidated Working Group (CPWG) decided it would be in the interest of ALAC to develop a statement on behalf of Internet end users. During the CPWG meeting that week, members of the working group discussed the comment, and initial penholders volunteered to draft the statement.

Marita Moll, North American Regional At-Large Organization (NARALO) ALAC Member, and Bastiaan Goslings, European Regional At-Large Organization (EURALO) ALAC Member, volunteered as co-penholders for the ALAC statement.

On 29 January 2019, ICANN policy staff in support of the At-Large community created a Google Document for the penholders to consolidate comments. Marita Moll consolidated initial comments into a template for CPWG discussion, and several meetings with the ALAC Subcommittee on Finance and Budget (FBSC).

On 06 February 2019, a final draft ALAC statement was presented to the CPWG for comment.

On 08 February 2019, a final call for comments was sent to the CPWG mailing list.

On 11 February 2019, Marita Moll and Bastiaan Goslings incorporated final comments from the CPWG and At-Large community into a final version of the statement.

On 11 February 2019, the ALAC Chair, Maureen Hilyard, requested that the statement be transmitted to the ICANN public comment process, copying the ICANN staff member responsible for this topic, with a note that the statement is pending ALAC ratification.

ALAC STATEMENT ON ICANN STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2021-2025

Summary of the ALAC Responses/Preamble:

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025. We acknowledge that this plan was created with the input of community members and in its broad strokes, there is much that we agree with. Here we are emphasizing a few elements that are of concern in the interest of making the plan more responsive to what we see as the future needs of the ICANN community and particularly those of At-Large which is specifically charged with representing the interests of Internet end users.

In this document we stress the importance of the ICANN's role in the multistakeholder model of Internet Governance. We make the point that the maintenance of resources needed to support the volunteers who work in the multistakeholder system will continue to be an issue during the term of this new Strategic Plan. Getting the balance right will be a major challenge for all players, but the goal of a bottom-up, inclusive decision-making process is deeply valued by the community and must not be compromised.

From the Internet end user viewpoint, we suggest a rebalancing of representation on the ICANN Board to bring out the end user voice and perspective.

We also note that more fulsome cost/benefit analyses of programs like the gTLD expansion should be available in order predict the future impact on total resources.

ALAC Statement:

Strategic Objectives

1. Strengthen the security of the Domain Name System (DNS) and the DNS Root Server System

As the draft Strategic Plan describes, the way the Internet has developed since the last version of the Strategic Plan, especially when it comes to its grown importance to the world's economic, social, and political systems in conjunction with the expansion of its user base, content, and applications, brings an increasing need for reliability, stability, and security of the DNS and Internet infrastructure. This actually touches on the core of ICANN's mission, which is to ensure the stable and secure operation of the Internet's unique identifier systems. The ALAC therefore agrees this should be the primary strategic objective for ICANN and strongly supports the four strategic goals 1.1 to 1.4 as listed in the draft strategic plan.

2. Improve the effectiveness of ICANN's multistakeholder model of governance

In order to perform the technical remit of ICANN's mission as incorporated into its bylaws, ICANN coordinates the development and implementation of policies with regard to the allocation of IP addresses (numbers) and the assignment of names in the root zone of the Domain Name System as well as the registration of second-level domain names in generic top-level domains. These policies are developed through a bottom-up, consensus based multistakeholder process and designed to ensure the stable and secure operation of the Internet's unique names systems. As such this multistakeholder process is unique and essential to ICANN as an organization, and it is essential that it works effectively.

Further to this, we offer the following suggestions:

Trade-offs

ICANN's unique role in the Internet governance ecosystem demands that it engage with large numbers of stakeholders in a bottom-up process to arrive at agreed upon positions. It is essential to find ways of dealing with this task without restricting the broad based bottom-up consensus input that legitimizes our

process. The simple fact that untold numbers of volunteers with no financial stake whatsoever in the process are willing to spend enormous chunks of their personal time to keep this model running is evidence enough that it is filling an important and otherwise unmet need. One of ICANN's great strengths lies in the financial support it is able to offer to bring all these resources to the table. Volunteers are bringing vast resources of time and knowledge to the table and this also needs to be a recognized and valued part of the exchange. We wish to underline the need to be aware of the trade-offs involved when we seek to introduce cost efficiencies while protecting the principles of accountability and transparency.

Keep the playing field as level as possible

The ALAC maintains an incredible portfolio in that Internet end user implications are not restricted just to the GNSO policy development processes but extends to other parts of the ICANN remit. We are charged by the bylaws to represent the Internet end users and we carry that load in good faith as best we can.

At the Internet end user level, participation in this process requires stamina, technical knowledge and political skills. This makes it hard for Internet end users who are impacted by this to find an entry point. It also makes it hard for multistakeholder participants to come together as equals as there are many types of multistakeholder participants - technical experts, paid lobbyists, legal, IT and trademark professionals, and unpaid volunteers learning how to express their views and concerns in a unique and challenging decision-making environment. To maintain the credibility and integrity of the multistakeholder system, special efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion, participation and support of the newcomer/volunteer segment of this model. This is essential to maintain an effective, broad-based decision-making model.

Rebalance input at Board level

We are concerned about the fact that At-Large, as an Advisory Committee with the power to nominate only a single Board member, does not have enough weight in determining the makeup of the Board to ensure the strong presence of Internet end user perspectives. We feel that ICANN's implementation of the multistakeholder model would be strengthened, were this to be addressed. Given the incredible diversity in the global Internet end user population, a second seat would allow At-Large to nominate Directors with differing backgrounds, geographic origins and lived experiences.

Linking objectives to budget

There needs to be a strong link between the budget and the objective of improving governance and participation. If the budgets are too restrictive with respect to the needs of multistakeholder partners, those partners will be unable to achieve the targeted outcomes and this will result in a compromise to the credibility and integrity of the multistakeholder system. The link between strengthening the multistakeholder decision making process and the financial ability of SO/ACs, RALOs and other partners to participate needs to be acknowledged.

Encourage cooperation

We believe the multistakeholder process should always be built upon cooperation between stakeholder groups. We believe that all groups should be adequately resourced to enable them to do the work they are charged to do. Not doing this simply endangers the entire process.

Iterative revisiting of priorities for reviews, policy development and decision-making

We welcome continued efforts to allow for maximum flexibility in the setting and periodic revisiting of priorities for ICANN in order to facilitate the effective participation of all stakeholder groups at any one time. In other words, the cumulative workload distributed across operational reviews, policy development processes and strategic decision-making at any one time must be reasonable.

3. Evolve the unique identifier systems to continue to serve the needs of the global Internet user base

The ALAC agrees with the forecasted exponential growth of Internet end users, especially coming from Asia and Africa, and the number of Internet-connected devices that is growing at an even greater pace.

So yes, ICANN must play a role in ensuring a single, stable, interoperable infrastructure, including delivering the IANA functions, to address the needs of all these (new) Internet end users and devices alike.

Promoting and improving Universal Acceptance and the implementation of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) as well as continuing to encourage readiness for IPv6, are therefore indeed necessary to reach a more diverse Internet end user base.

With regard to the introduction of new gTLDs: whether that is necessary is another debate, but if new gTLDs are to be introduced then they should be "properly funded, managed and risk-evaluated" (objective/strategic goal 3.4). The diversity of gTLDs and the diversity of the business model should also factor into the considerations.

4. Address geopolitical issues impacting ICANN's mission to ensure a single and globally interoperable Internet

Maintaining the credibility and global acceptability of the multistakeholder system must be an essential part of the Strategic Plan. We are conscious of the fact that Internet Governance is reaching a critical stage and the future will depend on how the current practical and political issues are addressed and resolved. Changes in data protection regulations in the E.U. have reverberations around the globe. The recent musings about multilateralism by French President Macron at the Paris IGF resulted in speculation about whether this was a challenge to the multistakeholder model. At-Large believes the multistakeholder process is worth fighting for, as it represents a governance model reflective of the original values around which the Internet was originally conceived – bottom-up and inclusive. The importance of the public interest in this process - and which is rightfully the responsibility of the entire ICANN community - cannot be overestimated.

5. Ensure ICANN's long-term financial sustainability

The ALAC agrees that ICANN must replenish its Reserve Fund and that ICANN must continue to fund necessary investments to address essential technology and security requirements. Also, anything ICANN can practically do to strengthen cost management and financial accountability mechanisms should be addressed with the help of community input. As proposed, data about the directions and trends of the market should be better utilized to effectively guide the organization. But the ALAC would like to see more analysis on this topic, more specifics on what ICANN is planning to do in this area. As mentioned on page 28 of the draft Strategic Plan, the risk that ICANN is unable to fulfill its mission due to its inability to adjust to changes in the domain name marketplace that impact funding is a serious concern to At-Large. Entry into the marketplace is not always positive. Recent research shows that many new entrants are dormant or failing. We note that we have still not seen any research from ICANN that shows where a TLD becomes a cost factor rather than a revenue factor for the organization. This would, we believe, help the organization and the community to make better decisions regarding the evolution of the marketplace.

The ALAC agreed with the recent Board decision (albeit with some misgivings about the process) to put a portion of the auction proceeds towards replenishing the Reserve Fund. However, this action should be an exception or "one off" occurrence, and ICANN Org must continue to make other positive efforts to address maintaining an agreed level of Reserve Funds, such as adjustments where essential to expenditure and in budgeting and of course continuing to make regular contributions.

With respect to the issue of lack of alignment or consensus on priorities and goals among ICANN's stakeholders that result in conflicts about resource allocation, we suggest that, where such lack of

alignment exists, it should be addressed and resolved in a process that engages the wider ICANN community.

Finally, the ALAC/At-Large strongly believes that ICANN's strategic priorities and goals must drive resource allocation, not the other way around, and that the maintenance and development of ICANN's unique multistakeholder system must be primary among those priorities and goals.