AT-LARGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ALAC Statement on Evolving the Governance of the Root Server System

Introduction

On 23 May 2019, public comment opened for Evolving the Governance of the Root Server System. On the same day, an At-Large workspace was created for the statement. The At-Large Consolidated Policy Working Group (CPWG) decided it would be in the interest of end users to develop an ALAC statement on the public comment.

During the CPWG meeting that week, members of the working group discussed the public comment, as well as the end user stance on the public comment and prior ALAC statements on the topic of the root server system.

Alan Greenberg, member of the North American Regional At-Large Organization (NARALO), Bastiaan Goslings, ALAC Member of the European Regional At-Large Organization (EURALO), and Fouad Bajwa, member of the Asian, Australasian and Pacific Islands Regional At-Large Organization (APRALO) volunteered as co-penholders for the statement.

On 21 July 2019, the first draft of the ALAC statement was posted by Alan Greenberg for community comment. ICANN policy staff in support of the At-Large community sent a call for comments to the CPWG and ALAC mailing lists, requesting feedback.

On 23 July 2019, the second draft of the ALAC statement was posted by Bastiaan Goslings for community comment. ICANN policy staff in support of the At-Large community sent a call for comments to the CPWG and ALAC mailing lists.

On 31 July 2019 and 07 August 2019, the CPWG discussed the draft ALAC statement on the ICANN public comment. A final call for comments was sent to the CPWG and ALAC mailing lists.

On 08 August, the penholders finalized the statement, incorporating feedback from the community.

On 09 August 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 Evolving the Governance of the Root Server System

The ALAC appreciates the opportunity to comment on the documents associated with the evolution of the Root Server System.

Although it might seem obvious, the ALAC first of all thinks it is important to state, as RSSAC037 notes numerous times, that the DNS Root Server System (RSS) makes the DNS root zone available to all DNS *users* on the Internet. The RSS must therefore be a stable, reliable, and resilient platform for the DNS service to all these users.

Since its inception the RSS has lived up to that expectation, and according to RSSAC037 the principles that have enabled this success of the DNS root service should remain core principles going forward. The ALAC agrees with this.

Root Server Operators (RSOs) have always operated completely independently, under their own good will and funding, and without any direct oversight by the stakeholders of the DNS root service. A service which has been provided solely based on historical trust and integrity.

The ALAC thinks RSSAC037 rightly establishes the fact that changes to the RSS governance model are required as developments over the years have led to:

> *"stronger needs for accountability, transparency, credible oversight, and continued scalability of the service to meet these demands. Stakeholders of the service must have accountability for its operation and assurance of its reliability and continuity."*

To achieve this, the RSS, according to RRSAC37, needs to evolve so it remains a reliable, resilient, and sustainable service in the face of increasing traffic and cyberattacks. Important parts of that evolution need to ensure that the operators of the RSS are accountable to their stakeholders, that robust processes exist to designate or remove operators, and that the operators have resources sufficient for its operation.

Delivery of the DNS root service indeed has essentially become a mandate for the RSOs, mostly unfunded by the non-RSO stakeholders of the service. The support and budget for providing the DNS root service comes from the RSOs' parent organizations.

The stakeholders of the RSS are the people, groups, and organizations that have an interest or concern in the proper operation of the RSS. The primary stakeholders of the RSS are, according to RSSAC037:

- Internet Architecture Board (IAB) / Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF).
- ICANN community in the form of several of its constituencies.
- Set of current Root Server Operators (RSOs).

Reading section 4 of RSSAC037, it seems that ICANN is not considered a primary stakeholder with regard to the RSS. The ALAC finds this rather strange given that the Domain Name System and its reliable and trusted operation is a prime reason for ICANN's existence.

Moreover, the ALAC finds it difficult to accept that Internet users, the ultimate user and beneficiary of the DNS, are not listed as having a stake in the existence and evolution of the RSS.

The financial model is also of some concern to the ALAC. As eloquently stated in RSSAC037, section 5.5.2:

> *"To date, the RSOs have borne the cost of service operations, mostly with no financial engagement from the non-RSO stakeholders. The operational costs have become an unfunded mandate. During the past four decades, this cost has increased with no commensurate funding*

for the operators from the service stakeholder beneficiaries. Billion dollar DNS businesses profit from DNS sales and resolution in which the DNS root service is a critical step.
....

Those entities that the RSS enables need to take responsibility in funding the service that they depend upon."

The ALAC thinks this makes sense and appreciates the option for operators that are financially self-sufficient to choose to opt-out of general funding.

Both RSSAC037 and the Concept Paper say that the funding must be stable and contributed from a variety of sources. The papers also imply that in addition to ongoing operational funds, there will likely be significant upgrades needs to the RSS, both initially and on an ongoing basis, including funding for research, development and testing.

No figures are provided to allow even order-of-magnitude estimates. It is surely time that we begin to understand exactly what level of funding will be required and hypothesize on where such funding will come from.

It is also unclear in the Concept Paper to what extent the ICANN Board sees ICANN itself as a source of funds, either funds directly under its control or funds passed through ICANN from its contracted parties. Although the ALAC strongly supports the renewal of the RSS and the establishment of a governance system involving ICANN, it is essential that there be clarity in the funding and in particular, that the funding of to the ICANN Community and other non-DNS, industry-based activity in the current ICANN budgets.

Summary

The proposed evolution of the governance of the Root Server System in RSSAC037 is arguably one of the most significant processes in the history of ICANN.

The RSSAC and those who contributed to RSSAC037 are to be congratulated as is the ICANN Board for its response currently under discussion.

The ALAC <u>strongly</u> supports the overall proposal and appreciates the opportunity to comment on it.

The ALAC offers two specific comments:

- Section 4 of RSSAC037 discusses who the stakeholders of the RSS are. Absent from this list is the explicit mention of USERS (both individual as represented by At-Large and the rest of the users who rely on the RSS). Without those users, there would be no need for the RSS, as is emphasized a couple of times in RSSAC037. The ultimate ICANN model must encompass this, and users should be explicitly represented on the Root Server System Governance Board (RGB).

- The financial aspects of this proposal will be key to its success. At a time when ICANN's budgets are being subjected to significant constraint, the Concept Model will without doubt have a high and ongoing cost. It is unclear where the Board currently visualizes these funds will come from. Cost estimates must be established. Once this is done, there should be a study of possible sustainable funding options. As important as the RSS is, the new funding must not come at great cost to other Community and non-DNS, industry-based activity support by ICANN org.