AT-LARGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ALAC Statement on the Community Input on Draft 2012-2015 Strategic Plan

Introduction
By the Staff of ICANN

Both Tijani Ben Jemaa, ALAC member from the African Regional At-Large Organisation (AFRALO) and Ganesh Kumar, ALAC member from the North American Regional At-Large Organisation (NARALO) composed initial drafts of this Statement after discussion of the topic within At-Large

On 14 November, this Statement was posted on its corresponding wiki workspace.

On that same day, Olivier Crépin-Leblond, Chair of the ALAC, requested At-Large Staff to send a three-day call for comments on the draft Statement to all At-Large members via the ALAC-Announce Mailing List.

On November 17, the Chair of the ALAC requested that Staff open a five-day ALAC ratification on the Statement. The Chair also requested that the Statement be transmitted to the public comment process, copying the ICANN Staff member responsible for this public comment topic, along with a note saying that the document was currently undergoing ALAC ratification with a vote to start shortly.

[End of Introduction]

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Executive Summary

The ALAC has seen an improvement in the formulation of the plan over the prior years, and is pleased about the early involvement of all of ICANN's communities including our At-Large Structures and Regional At-Large Organizations in the overall planning process. It is therefore generally supportive in general of the new timetable and the new format. That said, it also believes that some improvements are still possible.

At a macro level, the current strategic plan still fails at several thresholds. In particular the plan does not appear to (1) consider several environmental trends with potential impact on ICANN's mission, (2) detail the scope of the identified strategic initiatives, the justifications and the overall priorities, and (3) factor the resources and constraints ICANN has, and how they will be optimized vis-à-vis different efforts during the plan period.

At a granular level, the strategic plan should narrate how ICANN plans to pursue its stated focus areas, such as the engagement at the IGF at the leadership level, increased level of participation of all constituents in the multi-stakeholder model, aggressive risk management and compliance regime to ensure DNSSEC, promotion of IPv6, etc.

ICANN's strategic plan for 2012-15 seems to have taken an incremental approach by making revisions to its prior iteration, but net changes are clearly disproportionate to the magnitude of emerging trends.

Macro Level: Comments on the Strategic Planning Approach

A strategic plan is a vital document for any organization as it articulates how it "sees the future" in the, often dynamically evolving, context it operates in. The plan recognizes both the environmental trends and the organizational capabilities required to fulfill its mission. In essence, the plan should be the blueprint for an organization's efforts towards achieving its desired goals. The plan is used for communicating the organizational intent to its stakeholders, while serving as a guideline internally as a framework for requisite efforts.

With the definition at the beginning of this Statement in mind, the ALAC identifies the following areas where ICANN's draft strategic plan 2012-2015 could be augmented to better serve its purpose:

1. The plan should recognize significant environmental trends that can potentially impact on ICANN's mission.

As the Internet continues to expand to its global reach, ICANN's value proposition as an international governance body faces constant threat from "capture efforts" from both government and the industry. Additionally, US Department of Commerce has released a request for bid for IANA's operations that is due in March 2012. Although ICANN has expressed confidence in retaining the contract, there is no mention of such a disruptive event in the plan document. These two are just among many important trends in the

space of Internet governance. We recommend ICANN to further invest in efforts to comprehensively identify such trends as part of the "environment scan" it has included in the plan document, and align its strategic efforts to address them.

2. The plan should address how ICANN intends to fulfill its desired goals.

The plan document includes definitions for the four focus areas, along with a sparse narrative on the environmental scan, the associated strategic objectives and the metrics for each of the four focus areas. Although such an introduction to a strategic plan is required to communicate the intent of ICANN for next three years, it falls short of achieving the true purpose of a strategic plan: to serve as a blueprint for its organizational efforts. In line with prevalent practices with regard to the strategic planning, ICANN should augment its planning efforts to address the following in a detailed manner: (i) where is ICANN currently with regard to executing its mission, (ii) what does ICANN intend to achieve (projects and priorities), (iii) what will it require to achieve them (resources and costs), (iv) what will be the time-frame for different initiatives (timeline and metrics), and (v) who will be accountable. By incorporating these elements, the plan document that is currently useful for informational purpose could become a comprehensive blueprint for execution of its initiatives in an accountable and transparent manner. For example, an important (stated) strategic objective like "Strive to be an exemplary international stakeholder organization" is left un-detailed in the document as to how ICANN plans to achieve it, what resources will be dedicated to attain this goal and who will be accountable for it. Without guidelines, it will be impossible for ICANN to provide stewardship to its various constituents and internal resources in achieving the necessary progress. Furthermore, the good intentions and the efforts of the volunteer constituents may be wasted, as there may be conflicts internally due to the ambiguity in the stated goal. Similarly, for another significant goal such as risk management, the plan does not address details how it will be approached given the resources and limitations of ICANN.

3. The strategic plan, operating plan and the budget needs to be in total alignment.

As the plan document is silent in terms of the scope of the identified strategic initiatives, the relative priorities, timeline and the resource requirements it is difficult to understand how ICANN intends to align the operating and the annual budget to the stated intent. As accountability and transparency is a greater goal ICANN endeavors to achieve, this and this intent alone requires the strategic planning exercise to be further enhanced to develop such a linkage. Such an effort is not only required for the external communication but also is vital for providing a direction to its various constituents and internal resources. With this in mind, the ALAC has noted that previous versions of ICANN's Strategic Plan have unfortunately been poorly implemented, especially in fields related to public participation, outreach and protection.

Granular Level: Comments on the Plan Content

With regard the to the content of the draft plan, the ALAC urges ICANN to consider the following observations related to the each of strategic focus areas in planning its initiatives:

1. DNS stability and security: Whilst the ALAC supports the "Business Continuity Planning" and "Business interruption simulation exercises" Projects for registries and registrars, as well as the facilitation of IPV6 adoption, it believes that it can help in the effort of advocacy for IPv6 adoption by ISPs, business entities

and consumers thanks to its extensive geographic diversity and reach. Also, the ALAC may contribute in the global DNS security outreach, training for TLD operators and unique identifier SSR capacity building in developing countries using its large network worldwide. The ALAC is supportive of the initiation of a DNS risk management study with community and outside experts.

2. Competition, consumer trust and consumer choice: the ALAC thinks that it is necessary for ICANN to work with the IETF to introduce IDN email standards, IDN blogs, IDN application forums, etc. which will assist in expanding the deployment and success of IDNs globally and consolidate the presence of more languages and scripts on the Internet for more linguistic and cultural diversity. The At-Large community will be happy to assist ICANN in conducting education and training programs about the new gTLDs in the under-represented regions in partnership with other parties including local TLD operators, and the local ICANN communities. Improving the contractual compliance regime and encouraging the development of best practices for gTLD registrars and registries is of highest importance for the ALAC to lower the risk of registration abuse. The ALAC also supports that ICANN develop and implement more open and transparent policies and processes to enable real competition.

3. A healthy Internet governance ecosystem: The participation of ICANN in Internet governance forums, including the United Nations-organized (and other intergovernmental) Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is absolutely necessary to show that it is an exemplary model for multi-stakeholder bottom-up global governance. But the ALAC believes that this participation should reflect the multi-stakeholder bottom-up model by a substantive contribution made by its various constituencies in those forums, demonstrating that ICANN is not an organization where the policies are discussed and decided on by its management, out of the community involvement. Such kind of contribution is much more beneficial for ICANN than clinically nice communication speeches and shows. To improve the global participation in the policy development process, the ALAC has always advocated for capacity building for its At-Large structures members to give them the necessary information and knowledge that make them able to effectively participate in the process. The successful experience of Dakar makes it important to include in the strategic projects at least one (1) capacity building program per fiscal year for one (1) of the various Regional At-Large Organizations (RALO), and one (1) At-Large Summit each three (3) Fiscal Years for the whole At-Large community, the aim being to have covered all of ICANN's five (5) regions every three (3) years.

Whilst the ALAC understands that ICANN is developing metrics with regards to globalization, outreach, specifically in developing economies, inclusiveness, diversity etc. it points out that a significant effort will need to be made to track the identified shortfalls and that corrective action should be taken.

Conclusion

The ALAC has noted that previous versions of ICANN's Strategic Plan have unfortunately been poorly implemented, especially in fields related to public participation, outreach and protection. Oftentimes, organizations run into troubled waters if they do not heed the emerging trends in the environment they operate in. Additionally, even organizations with sophisticated abilities to identify strategic goals and direction fail in execution as they ignore how best to optimize the resources and limitations they have in their operation. Our recommendations, above, are intended to avoid ICANN falling into these traps.

Community input is vital to ICANN's success in its endeavors. It is for this reason that the ALAC has always advocated for capacity building for its At-Large structure members. The ALAC strongly urges the community input regarding the strategic priorities should be effectively taken into consideration by ICANN for the final plan establishment and adoption. As an organization that is powered by volunteer efforts of multiple stakeholders, we recommend the ICANN Board to adopt a plan that is useful as a framework to align various efforts of the organization.