

## **STATEMENT OF THE ICANN AFRICAN COMMUNITY ON THE NEW gTLD APPLICANT SUPPORT PROGRAM**

San Jose, Wednesday 14 March 2012

We, the African community members attending the joint AFRALO-AfriCANN meeting held on Wednesday 14 March 2012 in San José (Costa Rica), laud the ICANN board's adoption of the JAS Working Group Final Report which is aimed at supporting the applicants, in particular those from developing countries, requiring assistance in the application and operation of new gTLD's.

We recognize and appreciate the establishment of the implementation group that includes Board, community and staff members. We acknowledge that the group, as part of its mandate, has developed the Applicant Support Program (ASP) which details the support process in its entirety.

We, nevertheless, express our concern about the following issues:

- That the Applicant Support Program has as yet not been adequately communicated nor 'marketed' in the regions to those who have an interest in the new gTLD program but who lack the wherewithal to apply. In addition to the existing channels of promotion in particular online, ICANN needs to leverage events where sector related attendees are and send high level ICANN officers to such. The goal would be to further inform and persuade potential applicants from our region to make use of the support program, and also encourage regional competencies to volunteer for the "Support Application Review Panel (SARP)" membership and participate in the evaluation of the various requests for support.
- That the ASP as yet does not provide objective criteria for the evaluation of the Applicants' financial needs. At present the evaluation process as it exists is largely subjective in nature. A set of objective criteria balanced with the existing subjective evaluation will ensure a fair decision making process of applicants by the Applicant Review Panel. The need of such fair evaluation has been made

greater by the punishment documented in the Applicant Support Program for 'gaming', i.e. by designating forfeiture of the application fee for those judged as not meeting the financial needs criteria. This will ultimately result in the non-support of the applicants with genuine needs, in particular those from developing countries – the original focus of the ICANN Boards resolution 20, which was made in Nairobi in March 2010, and which resulted in the formation of the JAS Working Group.

- That the amount allocated, 2 million Dollars, currently reserved in a fund to the support program is barely sufficient to support 14 applicants.
- That a review of the ASP, post its period of implementation, needs to be integrated within its existing terms of reference.
- That it is necessary that the JAS working group continues its work to prepare for the next round of application, and propose better ways to support applicants from developing countries.
- That for a meaningful number of supported applicants at the next round, we believe that a fund should be constituted, and fed by various sources such as full or part of the new gTLD program incomes including the auction ones.

Finally, we emphasize that without the appropriate promotion of the Applicant Support Program in the developing countries, without the inclusion of a set of objective criteria for the financial need evaluation, and without the involvement of developing country experts in the process of evaluation, the ASP would not be successful. The addressing and adoption of the aforementioned issues will further contribute to the strengthening of a truly inclusive and multi-stakeholder model that ICANN strives to achieve.