<u>Reflections on African Internet Governance Forum (AIGF) 2013; Sep 24 – 26, Nairobi Kenya.</u>

By Bob Ochieng: Manager Stakeholder Engagement – Africa.

The African Internet Community converged in Nairobi Kenya on September 24 for a two day Forum on Internet Governance. The theme of the two-day forum was '***Building Bridges and Enhancing Multi Stakeholder Cooperation for Growth and Sustainable Development'*** The Forum was organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and was officially opened by Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for ICT, Dr. Fred Matiang'i.

The AIGF was preceded by pre-conference workshops focused on cyber security. In was noted that various regional bodies (SADC, EAC etc) have come up with frameworks on cyber security but these frameworks are disjointed either regionally or nationally. The forum also noted that there was no law forcing national governments to formulate cyber policies in harmony with regional policies hence this needed to be addressed. It is important to ensure that Cyber Security laws and guidelines are seamless up to the AU level for ease of implementation at national levels.

The forum was attended by key leaders and stakeholders from Africa as a whole including among others UN Economic Commission of Africa (UNECA) head of New Technology and Innovation Kasirim Nwuke, Internet Cooperation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) CEO Fadi Chehade, (Represented by Bob Ochieng: Manager, Stakeholder Engagement - Africa) and African Union (AU) Head of Information Society Moctar Yedaly.

Others included Kenya Network Information Centre (KENIC) Chairman Prof. Jimmy Macharia, Telecommunications Service Providers Association of Kenya (TESPOK) CEO Fiona Asonga, Communications Commission of Kenya Director General Mr, Francis Wangusi, government and civil society representatives from various African countries.

This forum was coming in the backdrop of a deadly terrorist attack on the Wetgate Mall in Nairobi and speakers noted the key role played by the internet in managing the attack through social media.

In his remarks, Dr, Matiang'i said that the Kenyan government is putting in place measures to have a secure, reliable, efficient and effective way of curbing cybercrime in the region. He added that consultations are ongoing to develop a master plan which will take into consideration the intricacies of cyber security concerns.

In a speech read on his behalf by the ministry's Senior Director of Administration Bruce Madete during the official opening of the forum, Dr. Matiang'i said that Internet Governance is of paramount importance to ensure its benefits are harnessed and is protected from abuse."In this digital economy, it is important to look at the principles, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the evolution and use of the Internet," said Dr. Matiang'i.

The Cabinet Minister specifically underscored the role of ICANN in managing the Internet Resources "We recognize the great role that the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) plays in managing name and numbering internet resources. Our very own Kenya Network Information Centre (KENIC) plays a great role by indentifying users and providing domain names; the dot.ke".

The Internet is an invaluable resource across the globe. In Dr. Matiang'i's words, the government continues to benefit immensely from online tax collection systems managed by the Kenya Revenue

Authority and the Kenya Internet Exchange Point (KIXP) enabling it to collect close to Sh5 billion (64 million dollars) daily.

He said Kenya and indeed Africa has experienced tremendous growth in the ICT sector in the last decade and has attracted several investors from abroad, and is also home to many tech hubs, including iHub, mLab and the 88mph Startup Garage Nairobi, among others.

He lauded the organizers of the internet governance forum saying Internet Governance foras have been of great help to internet users, industry, policy makers and regulators."This multi-stakeholder forum for policy dialogue on issues of Internet Governance has made it possible for stakeholders to share their knowledge which has contributed greatly in the governance of the internet," said Dr. Matiang'i.

Nwuke said internet can transform economies but at the same time can be used negatively to cause bloodshed. He called for increased accountability and transparency especially in ownership of internet accounts to eliminate their negative use and tap the potential of social media to spur growth. He noted that while the Kenyan government was using the Internet to manage the Westgate terror attack, Al Shabaab quickly updated their twitter account to claim responsibility for the deadly attack which claimed 62 lives and left over 170 people nursing injuries.

Fadi in his video message noted the importance of the IGF to ICANN, "The IGF is an extremely important forum. It is the forum that brings all the stakeholders together to discuss and advance the important issues related to the Internet Governance as well as internet coordination across the world". He pointed out ICANN's current commitment and focus in Africa especially under the leadership of Pierre Dandjinou, Vice President; Stakeholder Engagement – Africa. Fadi listed a number of initiatives already under implementation in Africa including DNSSEC road shows, recruitment of new managers for Africa (already onboard), 2013 Africa Domain Name awards in Durban just to mention a few initiatives and projects ICANN is undertaking.

Meanwhile, the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) is in the process of formulating guidelines on internet use to curtail its abuse and spur technological innovation.CCK Director General Francis Wangusi said the regulations will discourage the irresponsible use of internet platforms like Facebook and Twitter adding that guidelines are being prepared in close consultation with stakeholders and are at an advanced stage. He noted that apart from social media sites being used to spread hate speech, they have become platforms for terrorists and their sympathizers to glorify their cowardly acts of killing innocent people.

The Director General said the internet governance forum will address among other things hosting of social media sites and possibly recommend that individual countries be given the sole right of IP hosting so that they can effectively regulate internet use.

On the same tone, Moctar conveyed the AU's support for the AIGF and noted that it was time the AIGF was established as permanent secretariat within the African Union (AU). This would ensure stable funding for the forum and ensure resolutions are followed up closely. The AIGF can no longer rely on donations alone but needs stable funding from the AU secretariat, he noted.

The forum was closed with calls for concerted efforts to formulate stronger and seamless cyber security laws at National, Regional and African level to ensure ease and harmony of implementation. This can only be achieved through consultation will all stakeholders.