

**CCWG-Accountability WS2
Jurisdiction Subgroup
Draft Recommendations
October 2017**

Executive Summary

The CCWG-Accountability's final report for Work Stream 1 (WS1), Recommendation 12 proposed that a number of topics which were not essential for the transition and that could not be completed in WS1 (due to time constraints of the transition) be undertaken in a Work Stream 2 (WS2) effort by the CCWG-Accountability. This recommendation was approved by the CCWG-Accountability's Chartering Organizations as well as the ICANN Board at its 10 March 2016 meeting. Annex 12 of the final report included the following requirement:

Consideration of jurisdiction in Work Stream 2 will focus on the settlement of dispute jurisdiction issues and include:

- *Confirming and assessing the gap analysis, clarifying all concerns regarding the multi-layer jurisdiction issue.*
- *Identifying potential alternatives and benchmarking their ability to match all CCWG-Accountability requirements using the current framework.*
- *Consider potential Work Stream 2 recommendations based on the conclusions of this analysis.*

A specific Subgroup of the CCWG-Accountability will be formed to undertake this work.

The jurisdiction subgroup was created in June 2016 and held its first meeting on 25 August 2016. The Jurisdiction subgroup based its work on Annex 12 of the CCWG-Accountability final report. This proved somewhat challenging, as there are ambiguities in this text that lead to some lack of clarity regarding both the scope and goals of the Subgroup.

The subgroup proceeded to:

- Discuss the topics of "confirming and assessing the gap analysis" and of changing ICANN's headquarters or jurisdiction of incorporation.
- Work on refining the Multiple Layers of jurisdiction.
- Prepare several working documents. These included one exploring the question: "What is the influence of ICANN's existing jurisdiction(s) relating to resolution of disputes (i.e., governing law and venue) on the actual operation of ICANN's policies and accountability mechanisms?";
- Publish a questionnaire to allow the community to submit jurisdiction related issues for consideration by the subgroup.

- Develop a series of jurisdiction related questions for ICANN Legal which were formally answered.
- Undertake a comprehensive review of the litigations in which ICANN has been a party,

Based on this work the subgroup developed a master list of “proposed issues” (Annex E). From this list, the subgroup **agreed to prioritize**, in the time remaining, the issues relating to OFAC Sanctions and to the Choice of Governing Law and Venue Clauses in Certain ICANN Contract. After careful consideration of these issues the subgroup reached consensus on recommendations for each of these.

Commented [1]: It was more something that was done "on its own" since these are the issues that were actively transformed into draft recommendations. Others were just left untouched and so nothing happened to some extent, without the need for an agreement.

In summary the recommendations are:

Recommendations Relating to OFAC Sanctions

The Subgroup considered issues relating government sanctions, particularly, U.S. government sanctions administered by the Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC). OFAC is an office of the U.S. Treasury that administers and enforces economic and trade sanctions based on U.S. foreign policy and national security goals.

- **ICANN Terms and Conditions for Registrar Accreditation Application Relating to OFAC Licenses**

For ICANN to enter into a Registration Accreditation Agreement (RAA) with an applicant from a sanctioned country, it will need an OFAC license. Currently, “ICANN is under no obligation to seek such licenses and, in any given case, OFAC could decide not to issue a requested license.”¹ This uncertainty could discourage residents of sanctioned countries from applying for accreditation.

The Subgroup recommends that the above sentence should be amended to require ICANN to apply for and use best efforts to secure an OFAC license if the other party is otherwise qualified to be a registrar (and is not individually subject to sanctions). During the licensing process, ICANN should be helpful and transparent with regard to the licensing process and ICANN’s efforts, including ongoing communication with the potential registrar.

- **Approval of gTLD Registries**

In the 2012 round of the New gTLD Program, it was difficult for residents from sanctioned countries to file and make their way through the application process. The AGB (Applicant Guidebook) states: “In the past, when ICANN has been requested to

¹ <https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/application-2012-02-25-en>

provide services to individuals or entities that are not SDNs (specially designated nationals) but are residents of sanctioned countries, ICANN has sought and been granted licenses as required. In any given case, however, OFAC could decide not to issue a requested license.”

The Subgroup recommends that ICANN should commit to applying for and using best efforts to secure an OFAC license for all such applicants if the applicant is otherwise qualified (and is not on the SDN list). ICANN should also be helpful and transparent with regard to the licensing process, including ongoing communication with the applicant.

- **Application of OFAC Limitations by Non-US Registrars**

It appears that some non-U.S. based registrars might be applying OFAC sanctions with registrants and potential registrants, based on a mistaken assumption that they must do simply because they have a contract with ICANN. Non-U.S. registrars may also appear to apply OFAC sanctions, if they “cut and paste” registrant agreements from U.S based registrars. While ICANN cannot provide legal advice to registrars, it can bring awareness of these issues to registrars.

The Subgroup recommends that ICANN clarify to registrars that the mere existence of their RAA with ICANN does not cause them to be required to comply with OFAC sanctions. ICANN should also explore various tools to remind registrars to understand the applicable laws under which they operate and to accurately reflect those laws in their customer relationships.

- **General Licenses**

OFAC “general licenses” cover particular classes of persons and types of transactions. ICANN could pursue general licenses to cover transactions integral to ICANN’s role in managing the DNS and contracts for Internet resources, such as registries and registrars entering into RAs and RAAs, Privacy/Proxy Accreditation, support for ICANN funded travelers, etc. This would enable individual transactions to proceed without the need for specific licenses.

A general license would need to be developed in conjunction with the U.S. Department of the Treasury, which must amend OFAC regulations to include the new license. This regulatory process may be a significant undertaking.

The Subgroup recommends that ICANN take steps to pursue one or more OFAC “general licenses.” ICANN should first prioritize a study of the costs, benefits, timeline and details of the process. ICANN should then pursue general licenses as soon as possible, unless it discovers significant obstacles. If so, ICANN should report this to the [empowered] community and seek its advice on how to proceed. If unsuccessful, ICANN needs to find

other ways to remove “friction” from transactions between ICANN and residents of sanctioned countries. ICANN should communicate regularly about its progress, to raise awareness in the ICANN community and with affected parties.

Recommendations relating to Choice of Law and Choice of Venue Provisions in ICANN Agreements

This Subgroup considered how the absence of a choice of law provision in the base Registry Agreement (RA), the absence of a choice of law provision in the standard Registrar Accreditation Agreement (RAA), and the contents of the choice of venue provision in RA’s could impact ICANN’s accountability. These are standard-form contracts which are not typically negotiated; changes are now determined through an amendment procedure (see, e.g., Art. 7.6 of the RA).

The Subgroup understands that it cannot require ICANN to make amendments to the RA or the RAA. Rather, this Recommendation suggests possible changes to the RA and RAA for study and consideration by ICANN the Organization, the GNSO and the contracted parties.

The RA and RAA do not contain choice of law provisions. The governing law is thus undetermined, until determined by a judge or arbitrator or by agreement of the parties.

- **Choice of Law and Venue Provisions in the Registry Agreement**

The Subgroup identified several alternative approaches for the RA, which could also apply to the RAA:

1. **Menu Approach.** The Subgroup supports a “Menu” approach, where the governing law would be chosen before the contract is executed, from a “menu” of possible governing laws. The menu needs to be defined; this could best left to to ICANN and the registries. The Subgroup discussed a number of possible menus, which could include one country, or a small number of countries, from each ICANN Geographic Region, plus the status quo (no choice of law) and/or the registry’s jurisdiction of incorporation and/or the countries in which ICANN has physical locations.

The Subgroup has not determined what the menu items should be, but believes there should be a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of having different governing laws apply to the same base RA, which likely suggests having a relatively

limited number of choices on the menu. The Subgroup has also not determined how options will be chosen from the menu, e.g.: the registry could simply choose from the menu, or it could be negotiated with ICANN?

2. **“California” (or “fixed law”) Approach.** A second possible option is for all RAs to include a choice of law clause naming California and U.S. law as the governing law.
3. **Carve-out Approach.** A third possible option would be a “Carve-Out” approach, whereby parts of the contract that would benefit from uniform treatment are governed by a uniform predetermined law (e.g., California) and other parts are governed by the law of the registry’s jurisdiction by law chosen using the “Menu” approach.
4. **Bespoke Approach.** In the “Bespoke” approach, the governing law of the entire agreement is the governing law of the Registry Operator.
5. **Status Quo Approach.** A fifth possible approach is to retain the status quo, i.e., have no “governing law” clause in the RAA.

- **Choice of law provision in registrar accreditation agreements**

The options for the RAA are essentially the same as for the RA.

- **Choice of venue provisions in registry agreements**

Under the RA, disputes are resolved by “binding arbitration,” pursuant to ICC rules. The RA contains a choice of venue provision stating that the venue is Los Angeles, California as both the physical place and the seat² of the arbitration.

When entering into contracts with registries, ICANN could offer a list of possible venues for arbitration rather than imposing Los Angeles, California. The registry which enters into a registry agreement with ICANN could then choose which venue it prefers at or before the execution of the contract.

² The “seat” of an arbitration is the legal jurisdiction to which the proceeding is tied.

Background

The CCWG-Accountability's final report for Work Stream 1 (WS1), Recommendation 12 proposed that a number of topics which were not essential for the transition and that could not be completed in WS1 (due to time constraints of the transition) be undertaken in a Work Stream 2 (WS2) effort by the CCWG-Accountability. This recommendation was approved by the CCWG-Accountability's Chartering Organizations as well as the ICANN Board at its 10 March 2016 meeting. Annex 12 of the final report included the following requirement:

Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction directly influences the way ICANN's accountability processes are operationalized. The fact that ICANN is incorporated under the laws of the U.S. state of California grants the corporation certain rights and implies the existence of certain accountability mechanisms. It also imposes some limits with respect to the accountability mechanisms it can adopt.

The topic of jurisdiction is, as a consequence, very relevant for the CCWG-Accountability. ICANN is a nonprofit public benefit corporation incorporated in California and subject to applicable California state laws, applicable U.S. federal laws and both state and federal court jurisdiction. ICANN is subject to a provision in paragraph eight³ of the Affirmation of Commitments, signed in 2009 between ICANN and the U.S. Government.

ICANN's Bylaws (Article XVIII) also state that its principal office is in California.

The CCWG-Accountability has acknowledged that jurisdiction is a multi-layered issue and has identified the following "layers":

- *Place and jurisdiction of incorporation and operations, including governance of internal affairs, tax system, human resources, etc.*
- *Jurisdiction of places of physical presence.*
- *Governing law for contracts with registrars and registries and the ability to sue and be sued in a specific jurisdiction about contractual relationships.*
- *Ability to sue and be sued in a specific jurisdiction for action or inaction of staff and for redress and review of Board action or inaction, including as relates to IRP outcomes and other accountability and transparency issues, including the Affirmation of Commitments.*

³ 18. ICANN affirms its commitments to: (a) maintain the capacity and ability to coordinate the Internet DNS at the overall level and to work for the maintenance of a single, interoperable Internet; (b) remain a not for profit corporation, headquartered in the United States of America with offices around the world to meet the needs of a global community; and (c) to operate as a multi-stakeholder, private sector led organization with input from the public, for whose benefit ICANN shall in all events act.

- *Relationships with the national jurisdictions for particular domestic issues (ccTLDs managers, protected names either for international institutions or country and other geographic names, national security, etc.), privacy, freedom of expression.*
- *Meeting NTIA requirements.*

At this point in the CCWG-Accountability's work, the main issues that need within Work Stream 2 relate to the influence that ICANN's existing jurisdiction may have on the actual operation of policies and accountability mechanisms. This refers primarily to the process for the settlement of disputes within ICANN, involving the choice of jurisdiction and of the applicable laws, but not necessarily the location where ICANN is incorporated:

- *Consideration of jurisdiction in Work Stream 2 will focus on the settlement of dispute jurisdiction issues and include:*
 - *Confirming and assessing the gap analysis, clarifying all concerns regarding the multi-layer jurisdiction issue.*
 - *Identifying potential alternatives and benchmarking their ability to match all CCWG-Accountability requirements using the current framework.*
 - *Consider potential Work Stream 2 recommendations based on the conclusions of this analysis.*

A specific Subgroup of the CCWG-Accountability will be formed to undertake this work.

Overview of the Work of the Subgroup

The Jurisdiction Subgroup based its work on Annex 12 of the CCWG-Accountability final report. This proved somewhat challenging, as there are ambiguities in this text that lead to some lack of clarity regarding both the scope and goals of the Subgroup.

The group initially discussed the topics of “confirming and assessing the gap analysis” and of changing ICANN’s headquarters or jurisdiction of incorporation. The Subgroup then worked to refine the [Multiple Layers of Jurisdiction](#), based on the discussion in Annex 12 of the WS1 Final Report. It was hoped that identifying specific layers (or types) of “jurisdiction” would help avoid the ambiguity of referring to each of these as “jurisdiction,” as was often the case in informal discussions. The following were identified as “layers of jurisdiction”:

1. Jurisdiction of incorporation.
2. Jurisdiction of Headquarters Location.
3. Jurisdiction of other places of physical presence.
4. Jurisdiction for the Law used in Interpretation of Contracts, etc. (Choice of Law), including contracts with contracted parties, contracts with other third parties, and actions of the Empowered Community.
5. Jurisdiction for the physical location of litigation of disputes (Venue).
6. Relationships with national jurisdictions for particular domestic issues.
7. Meeting NTIA requirements.

While the Subgroup did not come to agreement on whether each of these layers of ICANN’s jurisdiction should be addressed by the Subgroup, there was broad agreement that these were the categories or “layers” of jurisdiction.

The Subgroup then prepared several working documents, including one exploring the following question: “What is the influence of ICANN’s existing jurisdiction(s) relating to resolution of disputes (i.e., governing law and venue) on the actual operation of ICANN’s policies and accountability mechanisms?”; and another discussing a hypothetical case involving litigation challenging ICANN’s actions (or inactions) involving actual operation of its policies (e.g., delegation of a gTLD; acceptance of certain terms of registry operation) as violations of law. The Subgroup did not reach consensus on these documents [, which may be found along with other working documents of the Subgroup in the “Supplement of Working Documents”⁴].

⁴ [This will be a compendium of documents worked on by the group but not finished. It will be clearly noted that these documents are not consensus documents and do not represent findings by the Subgroup.]

The Subgroup then agreed it would be worthwhile to develop and publish a Questionnaire to give the broader community an opportunity to provide factual information that could help inform the Subgroup. The Questionnaire⁵ is set forth below:

QUESTIONNAIRE
<i>Responses must be transmitted via email to: ccwg-acctws2.jurisdiction.questionnaire@icann.org</i>
1. Has your business, your privacy or your ability to use or purchase domain name-related services been affected by ICANN's jurisdiction* in any way?
<i>If the answer is Yes, please describe specific cases, situations or incidents, including the date, the parties involved, and links to any relevant documents. Please note that "affected" may refer to positive and/or negative effects.</i>
2. Has ICANN's jurisdiction* affected any dispute resolution process or litigation related to domain names you have been involved in?
<i>If the answer is Yes, please describe specific cases, situations or incidents, including the date, the parties involved, and links to any relevant documents. Please note that "affected" may refer to positive and/or negative effects.</i>
3. Do you have copies of and/or links to any verifiable reports of experiences of other parties that would be responsive to the questions above? If the answer is yes, please provide these copies and/or links.
4 a. Are you aware of any material, documented instance(s) where ICANN has been unable to pursue its Mission because of its jurisdiction?* If so, please provide documentation.
b. Are you aware of and able to document the existence of an alternative jurisdiction where ICANN would not be so prevented from pursuing its Mission? If so, please provide documentation.

The Questionnaire was published on February 9, 2017 and the response period closed on April 17, 2017. The Subgroup received 21 responses to the Questionnaire, which are in **Annex B** and also may also be found at

<https://community.icann.org/display/WEIA/Jurisdiction+Questionnaire>. Members of the Subgroup reviewed and evaluated questionnaire responses and presented them to the Subgroup.

The Subgroup also developed a series of Questions for ICANN Legal, which may be found at <https://community.icann.org/download/attachments/59643282/JurisdictionQuestiontoICANNLegalv2.doc%20%281%29.docx?version=1&modificationDate=1487972569000&api=v2>. The

⁵ The Questionnaire and links to responses may be found at <https://community.icann.org/display/WEIA/Jurisdiction+Questionnaire>.

Questions were sent to ICANN legal on March 2, 2017 and responses were received on April 10, 2017. The Questions and ICANN Legal's responses are attached as **Annex C**. These responses were discussed in the Subgroup and with ICANN Legal.

The Subgroup also undertook a comprehensive review of the litigations in which ICANN has been a party, a list of which may be found at <https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/governance/litigation-en>. Members of the Subgroup reviewed many of these litigations, using a "summary sheet" completed by the reviewer of each case. The cases that were reviewed were presented to the Subgroup by the reviewer and then discussed by the Subgroup. The litigation summaries are collected in **Annex D**.

Based on this work the subgroup developed a master list of "proposed issues" (Annex E). From this list, the subgroup agreed to prioritize, in the time remaining, the issues relating to OFAC Sanctions and to the Choice of Governing Law and Venue Clauses in Certain ICANN Contract. After careful consideration of these issues the subgroup reached consensus on recommendations for each of these.

The Subgroup arrived at the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING OFAC AND RELATED SANCTIONS ISSUES

BACKGROUND

The Subgroup has considered several related issues under the common topic of the effect of government sanctions on ICANN's operations and accountability. In particular, these issues have been raised in relation to U.S. government sanctions administered by the Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC).

OFAC is an office of the U.S. Treasury that administers and enforces economic and trade sanctions based on U.S. foreign policy and national security goals against targeted individuals and entities.⁶ Where a nation is subject to sanctions, the sanctions may extend to its citizens, regardless of their personal character or activities. OFAC has been delegated responsibility by the Secretary of the Treasury for developing, promulgating, and administering U.S. sanctions programs. Many of these sanctions are based on United Nations and other international mandates; therefore, they are multilateral in scope, and involve close cooperation with allied governments. Other sanctions are specific to the national security interests of the United States.

OFAC acts under executive and legislative authority to impose controls on transactions and to freeze assets under U.S. jurisdiction.

OFAC also enforces apparent violations of its regulations, based on its Economic Sanctions Enforcement Guidelines.⁷ Enforcement may result in civil penalties up to \$250,000 per violation or twice the amount of a transaction, whichever is greater.

Persons Subject to Compliance Obligations

According to the OFAC website, "U.S. persons must comply with OFAC regulations, including all U.S. citizens and permanent resident aliens regardless of where they are located, all persons and entities within the United States, all U.S. incorporated entities and their foreign branches. In the cases of certain programs, foreign subsidiaries owned or controlled by U.S. companies also must comply. Certain programs also require foreign persons in possession of U.S.-origin goods to comply."⁸

Covered Persons

⁶ Target individuals and entities may include foreign countries, regimes, terrorists, international narcotics traffickers and those engaged in certain activities such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or transnational organized crime.

⁷ See OFAC Final Rule, "Economic Sanctions Enforcement Guidelines," November 9, 2009. The Guidelines outline various factors used by OFAC in taking enforcement decisions, which may include how compliance programs within an institution are working to comply with OFAC regulations. https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/fr74_57593.pdf.

⁸ https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/faqs/Sanctions/Pages/faq_general.aspx#basic.

OFAC maintains a list of specially designated nationals (SDNs) that U.S. persons cannot transact with. These are individuals who are singled out for sanctions. However, where a sanction applies to a country, citizens of that country who are not SDNs often cannot freely transact with U.S. persons, without regard to their personal character or activities.

Prohibited Transactions

Under OFAC, certain transactions may be prohibited. Such transactions cannot be consummated unless there is either a specific license or a general license permitting the transaction.

OFAC Licenses

OFAC has the authority, through a licensing process, to permit certain transactions that would otherwise be prohibited under its regulations. OFAC can issue a license to engage in an otherwise prohibited transaction when it determines that the transaction does not undermine the U.S. policy objectives of the particular sanctions program, or is otherwise justified by U.S. national security or foreign policy objectives. OFAC can also promulgate general licenses, which authorize categories of transactions, without the need for case-by-case authorization from OFAC. General licenses are actually regulations, which must be adopted and then can be found in the regulations for each sanctions program⁹ and may be accessed from OFAC's Web site. The regulation covering a general license will set forth the relevant criteria of the general license, including the classes of person and category or categories of transactions covered by the general license.

Specific licenses are applied for by one of the parties to the transaction and issued on a case-by-case basis. A specific license is a written document issued by OFAC authorizing a particular transaction or set of transactions generally limited to a specified time period. To receive a specific license, the person or entity who would like to undertake the transaction must submit an application to OFAC. If the transaction conforms to OFAC's internal licensing policies and U.S. foreign policy objectives, the license generally is issued.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ICANN and U.S. Sanctions
- ICANN Contractual Language in RAA Relating to OFAC Licenses
- Applicability of OFAC to Non-US Registrars
- Approval of gTLD Registries

⁹ 31 CFR, Chapter V (Regulations). http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?sid=db8ee7ba44af7af5a01907d23d67dae4&c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title31/31cfrv3_02.tpl#500

- Application of OFAC Restrictions by Non-US Registrars
- General Licenses

ICANN and U.S. Sanctions

There is a tension between ICANN'S goal of administering the Internet as a neutral global resource and the imposition of sanctions by the U.S. on other countries.¹⁰ Sanctions laws and policies, when applied to domain name registrars and registries, can hamper access to the domain name system by innocent users and businesses, simply based on their nationality. For these persons to transact with ICANN, they or ICANN will need to apply for an OFAC license.

ICANN Contractual language in RAA Relating to OFAC Licenses

Currently, the Registrar Accreditation Agreement states that "ICANN is under no obligation to seek [a license for a transaction with a non-SDN resident of a sanctioned country] and, in any given case, OFAC could decide not to issue a requested license."

This is not an encouraging policy for potential registrars from sanctioned countries, even though ICANN has informed the Subgroup that it has sought such licenses in the past and has been successful in doing so. If ICANN chose to exercise its discretion and not seek a license in any given case, this would have the effect of hampering ICANN's ability to provide services, inconsistent with the spirit if not the letter of ICANN's Mission. ICANN likely could not be held accountable for this decision under the current contract, because the contractual language gives ICANN unfettered discretion to decline to seek a license, without any indication of the criteria ICANN would use to make that determination.

This uncertainty and lack of transparency may deter potential registrars domiciled in sanctioned countries from pursuing registrar accreditation. This is not a good result. Instead, ICANN should seek to minimize the hurdles for residents of sanctioned countries seeking registrar accreditation. In turn, this should encourage the growth of the Internet in these countries.

Recommendation

Currently, the RAA reads as follows:

" 4. Application Process.

Applicant acknowledges that ICANN must comply with all U.S. laws, rules, and regulations. One such set of regulations is the economic and trade sanctions program administered by the Office of Foreign Assets Control ("OFAC") of the U.S. Department of the Treasury. These sanctions have been imposed on certain countries, as well as individuals and entities that appear on OFAC's List of Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons (the "SDN List"). ICANN is prohibited from providing most goods or

¹⁰ The Subgroup recognizes that many countries impose sanctions regimes and cooperate in the creation and enforcement of sanctions. As a practical matter, the effect of sanctions other than US sanctions has not been a concern for ICANN operations. Therefore, this report focuses on concerns raised by US sanctions. However, the concerns and recommendations in this report could be considered and applied in the context of other jurisdictions' sanctions regimes if there are effects from those regimes.

services to residents of sanctioned countries or their governmental entities or to SDNs without an applicable U.S. government authorization or exemption. ICANN generally will not seek a license to provide goods or services to an individual or entity on the SDN List. In the past, when ICANN has been requested to provide services to individuals or entities that are not SDNs, but are residents of sanctioned countries, ICANN has sought and been granted licenses as required. **However, Applicant acknowledges that ICANN is under no obligations to seek such licenses and, in any given case, OFAC could decide not to issue a requested license.** [Emphasis Added]

The last sentence should be amended to require ICANN to apply for and use best efforts to secure an OFAC license if the other party is otherwise qualified to be a registrar (and is not on the SDN List). During the licensing process, ICANN should be helpful and transparent with regard to the licensing process and ICANN's efforts, including ongoing communication with the potential registrar.

Approval of gTLD Registries

In the 2012 round of the New gTLD Program, it proved to be difficult for residents from countries subject to U.S. sanctions to file and make their way through the application process. The AGB (Applicant Guidebook) states, in language highly reminiscent of the RAA: "In the past, when ICANN has been requested to provide services to individuals or entities that are not SDNs (specially designated nationals) but are residents of sanctioned countries, ICANN has sought and been granted licenses as required. In any given case, however, OFAC could decide not to issue a requested license."¹¹

It is the Subgroup's understanding that new gTLD applicants from sanctioned countries who are not on the SDN list found that the process for requesting that ICANN apply for an OFAC license is not transparent, and that response times for ICANN replies felt quite lengthy. In particular, ICANN apparently did not provide any indication that it had applied for an OFAC license. Furthermore the process is quite lengthy, even if ICANN is proceeding with speed. As a result, applicants may have felt they were in limbo.

Recommendation

ICANN should commit to applying for and using best efforts to secure an OFAC license for all such applicants if the applicant is otherwise qualified (and is not on the SDN list). ICANN should also be helpful and transparent with regard to the licensing process, including ongoing communication with the applicant.

¹¹ New gTLD Applicant Guidebook, 1-25.

Application of OFAC Limitations by Non-US Registrars

It appears that some registrars might be following the rules of OFAC sanctions in their dealings with registrants and potential registrants, even when they are not based in the U.S and it would appear they are not required to do so. In particular, it seems that some non-US registrars may be applying OFAC restrictions even when they are not obliged to do so, merely based on an assumption that because they have a contract with ICANN, they have to apply OFAC sanctions. If registrars that are not based in the U.S. and do not have OFAC compliance obligations are nonetheless prohibiting registrants in sanctioned countries from using their services based on a mistaken belief that OFAC sanctions apply, that raises concerns with the availability of Internet resources on a global and neutral basis.

There may be other ways that non-U.S. registrars give the impression that these registrars are following OFAC sanctions. For example, the Subgroup was provided examples of two non-US registrars with registrant agreements that stated that persons located in sanctioned countries could not use their services due to OFAC sanctions.¹² Both registrars apparently used a registrant agreement “cut and pasted” from other sources.¹³ One of the two registrars (Gesloten) has since revised its registrant agreement significantly, and removed any mention of OFAC restrictions.

OFAC restrictions could have been included in these registrant agreements as a “cut and paste” error or because the registrar believed (rightly or wrongly) that OFAC sanctions applied to it. In either case, the conclusion is the same: registrars should understand which laws apply to their businesses, and they should make sure that their registrant agreements accurately reflect those laws.

ICANN cannot provide legal advice to registrars. Each registrar must make their own legal determination of how and whether OFAC restrictions apply. However, ICANN could provide a clarification to registrars that registrars do not have to follow OFAC sanctions solely based on the existence of their contract with ICANN.

ICANN is not a party to the registrant agreements, so there is nothing that ICANN can do directly. Nonetheless, non-U.S. registrars could also be encouraged to seek advice on applicable law and to accurately reflect the applicable law in their registrant agreements.

Recommendation

ICANN needs to bring awareness of these issues to registrars. ICANN should clarify to registrars that the mere existence of their RAA with ICANN does not cause them to be required to comply

¹² One was Gesloten.cw (http://www.gesloten.cw/support/legal.php?requestfor=registrantagreement&from=agree_page), a Curacao (Netherlands Antilles) registrar; the other was Olipso (<https://www.olipso.com/en/domain-registration-agreement>), a Turkish registrar (Atak Domain Hosting). For

¹³ For example, both agreements used “Mumbai time” as a standard even though neither is in India, located in that time zone, or has any particular contacts with India.

with OFAC sanctions. ICANN should also explore various tools to remind registrars to understand the applicable laws under which they operate and to accurately reflect those laws in their customer relationships.

General Licenses

In contrast to specific licenses, a general license covers classes of persons and types of transactions. ICANN could consider seeking one or more general licenses to cover particular classes of persons and types of transactions that are an integral part of ICANN's role in managing the DNS and in contracting with third parties to provide Internet resources. Broadly speaking, these licenses could apply to registries and registrars entering into RAs and RAAs, respectively, and to other transactions that may be core functions for ICANN (e.g., Privacy/Proxy Accreditation, support for ICANN funded travelers, etc.).

An OFAC "general license" is actually a regulation. Creation of a general license involves a regulatory process, which is in the purview of the executive branch (more specifically, the U.S. Treasury, of which OFAC is a part). Indeed, 31 CFR § 595.305 defines a general license as "any license or authorization the terms of which are set forth in this part." In other words, the general license is a part of the OFAC regulations.

As such, one does not merely "apply" for a general license. One must determine the desired parameters of the general license(s) and work with the U.S. Department of the Treasury and provide appropriate reasoning, support, etc. so that the Treasury undertakes the regulatory effort to bring the general license into being.

The Subgroup believes that one or more general licenses could make future transactions with "covered persons" easier to consummate. Individual transactions would no longer require specific licenses, as long as the persons and transaction types were covered by the general license. Thus, the Subgroup believes that one or more general licenses would be highly desirable. However, this may be a significant undertaking in terms of time and expense. As such, it would be prudent for ICANN to ascertain the costs, benefits, timeline and specifics of seeking and securing one or more general licenses for DNS-related transactions. ICANN would also need to determine the specific classes of persons and types of transactions that would be covered by each license. ICANN would then begin the process of seeking these general licenses, unless significant obstacles were uncovered in the preparatory process. If obstacles are revealed, ICANN would need to find ways to overcome them. Failing that, ICANN would need to pursue alternate means to enable transactions involving residents of sanctioned countries to be consummated with a minimum of complication and uncertainty. If ICANN does secure general licenses covering DNS-related transactions, ICANN should make the Internet community aware of this.

Recommendation

ICANN should take steps to pursue one or more OFAC "general licenses" with the U.S. Department of Treasury in connection with DNS-related transactions. Initially, ICANN should make it a priority to study the costs, benefits, timeline and details of seeking and securing one

or more general licenses for DNS-related transactions. ICANN should then pursue one or more OFAC general licenses, unless significant obstacles were discovered in the “study” process. If there are significant obstacles, ICANN should report them to the [empowered] community and seek its advice on how to proceed. If unsuccessful, ICANN would need to find other ways to accomplish the ultimate goal -- enabling transactions between ICANN and residents of sanctioned countries to be consummated with a minimum of “friction.”

[INSERT CHOICE OF LAW AND VENUE RECOMMENDATION HERE]