Notes from 28 July 2020 APAC Space Web Conference

This APAC Space session was a readout of ICANN68 where eight community leaders/members shared their key perspectives and takeaways:

1. ICANN68 Overview – Samiran Gupta, ICANN Head of India
2. Subsequent Procedures (SubPro) PDP – Cheryl Langdon-Orr, SubPro PDP Co-Chair
3. Review of Rights Protection Mechanisms (RPM) PDP – Heather Forrest, RPM PDP WG
4. At-Large Policy Sessions – Holly Raiche, ALAC Member
5. GAC Perspectives – T. Santhosh, GAC Member
6. GNSO Council and Registrar Stakeholder Group Perspectives – Pam Little, GNSO Council Vice Chair
7. Registry Stakeholder Group (RySG) Perspectives – Donna Austin, RySg Chair
8. Youth Perspectives – Elliott Mann, Youth4IG

Edmon Chung (DotAsia CEO) kindly facilitated the community sharing and discussion thereafter, which centered on fostering APAC participation in ICANN Meetings and PDP work.

Details of Session

ICANN68 Overview: Samiran Gupta (ICANN Head of India)

ICANN68 saw 1,714 registered participants with 356 from Asia and 47 from Oceania – forming an APAC total of 403 or 23.5% of all participants. The meeting, though online, was held in the Kuala Lumpur (KL) time zone with over 50 sessions. Three plenaries set the scene for the policy discussions in this four-day Policy Forum:

1. DNS Abuse and Malicious Registrations during COVID-19
2. The DNS and the Internet of Things: Opportunities, Risks, and Challenges
3. ICANN and COVID-19: Advancing Policy Work in the Current Environment

There were also substantial discussions on Subsequent Procedures (SubPro) PDP. The GAC was very active, while ccNSO held Tech Day and ALAC had a session on Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs) and Universal Acceptance (UA).

For the first time, Prep Week was expanded into two weeks of Prep Sessions, and a virtual interpretation platform was used for the six official UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish).

Subsequent Procedures (SubPro) PDP: Cheryl Langdon-Orr (SubPro PDP Co-Chair)

Apart from time spent with the GAC, the SubPro PDP Working Group (WG) held an open meeting during ICANN68 where it had discussed on a remaining topic left open – a predictability framework for the next new gTLD round. The framework   k was meant to establish a predictable way to review unforeseen issues that might arise after the next round is launched. The WG also held a routine work meeting but opened it to public viewing.

The WG was on track to deliver its Final Report to the GNSO Council in Q4 2020 after being granted an extension, though this may only be at the very end of the quarter (more in their detailed timeline tracker). The entire Draft Final Report would be published for public comment, though public expectations needed to be set that new information was welcomed over restating known positions. Significant progress had been made in developing draft Final Recommendations, including on challenging topics though some of these may not be able to achieve consensus. These were topics like the predictability framework, but also:

- Closed Generics – gTLDs made of a generic or commonly used word (e.g. .book etc.) that do not allow second-level registrations by any other registrant except the registry itself; and
- Private String Contention Resolution – resolved by private auction, which could lead to future applications only for financial advantage or leverage and not genuine gTLD business purpose.

Such topics could need to be called out for wider community comment in the Final Report. Nevertheless, the WG was making sufficient progress to rationalize the additional time spent. Cheryl also shared that At-Large would hold a public SubPro capacity-building webinar on 3 Aug 2020.

Review of Rights Protection Mechanisms (RPM) PDP: Heather Forrest (RPM PDP WG)

The RPM PDP was chartered in March 2016 to conduct a two-phased PDP. Phase 1, nearing completion, was to reviews all RPMs developed for the 2012 new gTLD program, i.e. use/effectiveness of Trademark Clearinghouse (TMCH), Sunrise and Trademark Claims RPMs, and Uniform Rapid Suspension (URS) RPM (URS RPM is also known informally as "UDRP Light"). Phase 2 would only begin after Phase 1's completion, and would review the Uniform Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP) that applies to all gTLDs.

At ICANN68, the WG held an open session reviewing public comments received on its Phase 1 Initial Report. The WG was currently split into sub-groups A and B – the former reviewing public comments on everything except URS while the latter focused on those just for URS. The sub-groups were using a very useful review tool developed by ICANN Policy Support staff (found further down the page in the aforementioned "reviewing" link). They were looking for any new perspectives the WG had not considered before as part of their recommendations process to put forth to the GNSO Council. The WG aimed to submit the Phase 1 Final Report to the Council by mid-October 2020. Earlier this year, RPM PDP extended its timeline by nearly six months.

At-Large Policy Sessions: Holly Raiche (ALAC Member)

ALAC held four cross-community sessions at ICANN68: two on DNS abuse (this topic remained a major concern for ALAC), one on new gTLD Applicant Support Program (ASP), and one on Universal Acceptance (UA) as follows:

"DNS Abuse: COVID-19 and End-user Issues" – revolved around the rise in online criminality playing off from the virus, as well as accessibility, participation, and privacy issues (particularly concerns around contact tracing apps). While more people could now participate in ICANN meetings easily and affordably, there was also a significant loss of in-person interactions. End-users, being locally based, were harder to reach and engage without physical meetings. Samridh Kudesia asked for details about abuse around contact tracing apps, to which Holly explained that privacy was impacted from both personal and location data being gathered.

"DNS Abuse: Setting an Acceptable Threshold" – ALAC felt the discussion was useful to help look forward on what was being done and what more should be done to address abuse. ICANN CTO David Conrad spoke on what DAAR (Domain Abuse Activity Reporting) could do. While DNS abuse was very little overall, it was challenging that some of the entities that could help address abuse cases were not ones that would attend ICANN meetings.

"New gTLD Applicants: Expanding the Circle" – looked at the barriers and biases faced by new gTLD applicants using ASP in the 2012 round. These ASP applicants felt there was a lack of outreach and support, yet at the same time others in the domain industry feared that such applicants would game the system through ASP. Possible improvements to ASP were also offered and discussed. Edmon, who was a presenter in this ALAC session, added during the APAC Space open sharing that APS meant "needy applicants" had to be "poor enough" but yet resourceful enough to be supported by an industry player to run a TLD. Hence, this would not contribute to "expanding the circle" of overall gTLD applicants in reality. ASP was also deemed expensive, with subjective scoring, and untrained/unspecialized evaluators.

"Aligning Universal Acceptance and IDNs with the Multilingual Internet" – the UA and EAI (Email Address Internationalization) experience in Africa and Europe was shared, as well as the enablers and obstacles to UA adoption, and support required from ALAC.

ALAC also held a policy session on Public Interest Commitments (PICs) and the PIC Dispute Resolution Process (DRP), which provided insight into what PICs could or could not do, how they were monitored, and the extent of ICANN Compliance's role. PICDRP was seen as actually being a fact-finding mechanism which needed time, money, and enforcement from ICANN.

GAC Perspectives: T. Santhosh (GAC Member)

The GAC held several meetings at ICANN68. This included with various WGs and the ICANN Board. The GAC itself also covered several topics, but SubPro PDP and DNS abuse were features.

With the SubPro PDP WG, the GAC gave feedback that a standard Public Comment period might be too short for a PDP of this stature. They also discussed outstanding topics like the predictability framework and private string contention resolution.

The GAC discussed the topic of DNS abuse with the following:

- Public Safety WG – the GAC noted in their two sessions that while registrars showed willingness to communicate with public safety officials during this pandemic period, law enforcement agencies were concerned about continuous misuse of privacy proxy services causing investigation delays.
- ICANN Board – the GAC believed capacity-building and training initiatives should be prioritized, and new efforts to tackle DNS abuse should not replace existing efforts but complement them.

The GAC also discussed with the Board on gTLD registration data inaccuracies, where it highlighted the need for a final Phase 2 recommendation for EPDP (or Expedited Policy Development Process on the Temporary Specification for gTLD Registration Data), and a mechanism for the SSAD (System for Standardized Access/Disclosure) model. The GAC also pointed out that a specific plan was needed to continue the EPDP to address unresolved issues between natural and legal entities in ensuring data accuracy.

GNSO Council & Registrar Stakeholder Group (RrSG) Perspectives: Pam Little (GNSO Council Vice Chair)

The GNSO Council did not hold many sessions as many of its Councillors were in non-APAC time zones. However, the Council did pass a resolution to request an Issue Report for the Transfer Policy Review (TPR). The process had started some time back but was impacted by the EPDP Phase 1 Report which had a recommendation for TPR to be reviewed for any inconsistencies. Pam highlighted that the only way to change an existing policy already adopted by the Board and implemented by ICANN org was to initiate a new PDP, and hence why all RPMs were going through a PDP as would TPR.

Sharing the GNSO's Action/Decision Radar, she said the Council recognised the importance of DNS abuse as a topic and was closely watching ongoing discussions about it within ICANN, though it currently had not decided yet what to concretely do about it (e.g. initiate a PDP). With SubPro and RPM PDPs likened to marathons, Pam said EPDP was meant to be a sprint but had not turned out that way. EPDP Phase 2 was nearing completion, and the Council spent much time discussing it and processing a change request from the EPDP team for extra time in light of the team's transition in Chair (where EPDP Vice Chair Rafik Dammak would succeed Janis Karklins).

For RrSG, it also discussed areas such as DNS abuse. Graeme Bunton ended his four-year tenure as RrSG Chair, handing over to Ashley Heineman from GoDaddy immediately after ICANN68.

Registry Stakeholder Group (RySG) Perspectives: Donna Austin (RySG Chair)

RySG did not hold any major sessions at ICANN68 but did have a closed-door meeting with the Public Safety WG, discussing processes that registries took on abuse cases. Donna highlighted that the TLD market was not a uniform one in terms of business models as not all registries were run with significant business operations. There was surprise especially amongst law enforcement agencies that some registries were run by as small as a three-person operation. In a separate webinar on DNS abuse prior to ICANN68, both registries and registrars noticed an uptick in pandemic related registrations thought most of these were legitimate.

Youth Perspectives: Elliott Mann (Youth4IG)

ICANN68 was seen as a big opportunity for APAC youth, and Youth4IG's main focus was on communications to help ensure no one felt lost in the meeting. Before it, a primer call was held to go through what to do or expect and what sessions to target, especially since this was to be the first meeting for many since ICANN64 Kobe, or their first ICANN meeting at all. A Slack channel during the meeting week facilitated interaction and discussion in addition to the regular WhatsApp group Youth4IG already had.

The KL time zone was the biggest advantage as more people could attend than they would otherwise physically be able to. This especially applied to many APAC youths who could otherwise only attend an ICANN meeting physically through NextGen or Fellowship.

Although policy-heavy, there were sessions that youth felt they could jump in on, such as the IPC APAC Open House (Youth4IG members filed reports on sessions they enjoyed such as this). While needing to change Zoom from Meeting to Webinar mode due to Zoombombing, this was not ideal because it became harder to connect with anyone in Zoom chat when it was not possible to see who was in the sessions. Many newcomers struggled as a result.

Open Sharing and Discussion

The discussion focused mainly on the question of fostering APAC participation. Heather asked Elliott if Youth4IG had considered how it would engage in or provide feedback on ICANN69 which would be in a non-APAC time zone. Elliott replied they would be keen to contribute public comments on ICANN's plan to return to physical meetings. He noted the situation was interesting because there were also many Youth4IG members who were meant to be Fellows since ICANN67 Cancun.

Donna shared that one of her Youth4IG mentees was to be in NextGen but had been deferred due to COVID-19 and the placement later rescinded. While this was totally understandable it left the question of impact to participation in general, especially for those in APAC due to time zone challenges. ICANN69 would be in Hamburg time which would disadvantage APAC participation, and she felt APAC generally suffered time zone issues more than most. Having online ICANN meetings following the time zones of their original host locations might not be optimal.

Pam felt this time zone challenge was a chicken-and-egg problem. She cited how community planning polls sometimes did not even offer any APAC-friendly time options for meetings. However, if APAC did not increase participation to reach a "critical mass", the issue would not be addressed. Heather shared that while the RPM PDP held one in four calls in APAC time, it was generally agreed that no major decision could be made on the APAC-timed call because most of the WG would be absent. While this could just mean more in APAC had to "tough it out" to show up for calls, she was concerned this would be unsustainable.

Cheryl suggested that more major events needed to be held in APAC time where the rest of the global community had to attend. Edmon pointed out that even when meetings were held in APAC-friendly timings, there were still occasions with APAC absences. He suggested that regular rotating time zones might help.