The Internet is a worldwide diffused network which is not owned by any single entity or group of entities. The International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is one of the major players in the field of Internet governance, due to the fact that since 1998, it has been handling Internet addressing, mainly domain names and IP addresses. As of October 2009, ICANN announced its independence from the US, therefore paving the way for involvement of all countries in Internet governance.

The efforts that started in 2003 with the launch of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and continued in 2005 with the second phase have encouraged all countries to take part in managing the Internet. One of the many outcomes of the WSIS in 2005 was to “... ask the UN Secretary-General, in an open and inclusive process, to convene, by the second quarter of 2006, a meeting of the new forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue—called the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).” Since then, the IGF was held three times in Athens (2006), Rio de Janeiro (2007) and Hyderabad (2008) while the 4th meeting of this forum scheduled to take place between 15 and 18 November 2009 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.

On the regional level, UN-ESCWA has been actively participating in the global debate on Internet governance since 2004, in the IGF process since its inception in 2006 and in the ICANN meetings since 2008, advocating policies aimed at empowerment of the region and at promoting the level of participation and involvement of policy makers and experts from the region in Internet governance.

Internet governance comprises five key public policy areas: critical Internet resources, access, diversity, openness and security. In 2008, UN-ESCWA embarked a comprehensive study entitled “Internet Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for the ESCWA Member Countries” covering a selected number of issues that are pertinent to the region. The study aimed at increasing the knowledge and understanding about Internet governance and its implications on the Arab region and promoting the role of Arab countries in the global Internet society. Published just weeks before IGF-IV, this study constitutes a key reference for the Arab countries in order to better benefit from and understand the Internet governance process.

The involvement of UN-ESCWA in the Arabic Domain Names predates its involvement in Internet Governance. The area of diversity over the Internet and the so-called multilingualisation in cyberspace has been one of the most important issues at stake discussed under both the ICANN and IGF umbrellas during the elapsing years. In fact, multilingualisation over the Internet goes back to the mid-nineties of the last century. Since the early conception days of the Internet and up until recently, American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) characters were the only allowed characters for high-level Internet addressing, namely domain names which form a major area in the list of critical Internet resources. As the Internet reached more and more communities, lack of knowledge of the English language became one of the main reasons for low Internet penetration in countries where English was not widely used.
In the mid-nineties, the concept of IDN was introduced to overcome this language barrier by allowing UNICODE characters to be used as part of the domains names. Soon enough, and similarly to the remaining regions of the world, the Arab region started working on developing the Arabic domain names system (ADNS).

In 2003, UN-ESCWA had established the Arabic Domain Names Task Force (ADN-TF), a group that developed global guidelines for using the Arabic script in IDNs. In 2004, the League of Arab States (LAS) formed the Arab Working Group on Domain Names and Internet Issues (AWGDNII), a team dedicated to the study and development of the ADNS from the Arabic language perspective. In 2007, UN-ESCWA co-founded the Arabic Script in IDNs Working Group (ASIWG) in partnership with regional and global Internet experts to discuss technical and linguistic issues related to the adoption of Arabic script in IDNs. During 2008-2009, with the assistance of UN-ESCWA, LAS was able to secure the political backing of Arab ministries of Communications and Information Technology to support the application to ICANN for the ownership and operation of the “.arab” generic top-level domain (gTLD).

As a continuation to the joint cooperation between UN-ESCWA and LAS in both ADNS and Internet governance, and as a regional preparation for IGF-IV, UN-ESCWA and LAS are organizing a regional workshop, subject of this information note, in partnership with the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT).

### Objectives

This workshop aims at disseminating knowledge to a wide array of stakeholders about Internet governance from a regional perspective. More specifically, the workshop will discuss the plans and roadmaps for the deployment of the “.arab” gTLD, the establishment of a global gTLD registry for this purpose, as well as the full-fledged implementation of IDN country-code top-level domains (ccTLDs) in the Arab region.

### Topics/Issues

Following are the main topics and issues to be discussed during this workshop:

1. Importance of IGF-IV and the opportunities it brings to the Arab region;
2. Internet governance: cyber security considerations;
3. Challenges facing critical Internet resources;
4. Update on ICANN’s new gTLD and IDN ccTLD processes;
5. Engagement of stakeholders in new gTLDs and IDN ccTLDs in the region;
6. Progress on the “.arab” project;
7. Best practices and success stories of selected ccTLD registries in the Arab region;
8. Roadmap for Internet governance in the region;
9. Action plan for the implementation of Arabic domain names in the region.
Outcomes

The workshop expects to accomplish the following:

1. Raising awareness on using IDNs and impact on Internet penetration in the region;
2. Updating stakeholders on the progress achieved in the “.arab” project;
3. Engaging Internet service providers (ISPs) and registrars in the implementation of new gTLDs and IDN ccTLDs;
4. Drawing a regional roadmap for Internet governance;
5. Setting an action plan for the establishment of Arabic domain names.

Organization

The workshop is co-organized by LAS and UN-ESWCA, and hosted by the Egyptian MCIT, in cooperation with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Arab ICT Organization (AICTO) and the Saudi Network Information Center (SaudiNIC). This one-day workshop is scheduled to take place on the 14th of November 2009 from 09:00 till 16h30 at the Savoy Hotel, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.

Participants

This is a multi-stakeholders event: core participants include mainly Arab ccTLD managers, domain name registries, registrars and resellers, in addition to small and medium enterprises, ISPs and telecom operators interested in the implementation of IDNs in the Arab region.

Language

The main working language for this workshop is Arabic noting that English will be used as an auxiliary language, especially during presentations and referencing technical words.

Additional information

Submissions, inquiries and requests for additional information should be addressed to:

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