Welcome Note of  
Dr. Yousef Nusseir, Director  
Information and Communication Technology Division, UN-ESCWA

Dear <names and titles of high level officials and organizers present at the event>

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me pleasure to welcome you to this Regional Workshop on Arabic Domain Names and Internet Governance, held right before the fourth Internet Governance Forum (IGF). A workshop I see exceptional in its nature, it is the result of all past efforts ESCWA performed with its esteemed partners, and a milestone to the plan ahead.

The workshop is jointly organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States, and generously hosted by the Egyptian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology; in cooperation with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Arab ICT Organization (AICTO) and the Saudi Network Information Center (SaudiNIC).

It was back in 2003 that ESCWA first started its involvement in Arabic domain names by spearheading and harmonizing efforts in the region.

As a major regional player, ESCWA realized the importance of joining the global move towards Internationalized Domain Names (IDN) and; hence, laid down its vision for the ADNS by establishing the Arabic Domain Names Task Force (ADN-TF). The Task Force had goals ranging from awareness, to promotion, to standardization to acquiring global recognition of developed standards and eventually supporting the actual implementation in a coordinated fashion.

During the past 6 years, ESCWA, with the cooperation and partnership of regional stakeholders, has been able to achieve major goals and set the building blocks for an Arabic domain name system, and we are proud today that we are putting the final touches on the last goal.

To give you a quick overview, through the ADN-TF, the global guidelines for using the Arabic script in IDNs from an Arabic language perspective, were set in the form of an Internet Draft in 2004. This Internet Draft was later abridged to focus on linguistic aspects and was submitted to the IETF for publication as an informational Request for Comments (RFC) in 2009. It has in fact received an RFC number and is awaiting the final approval step. We would like to thank the IETF for their collaboration in this regard.

ESCWA was also involved in the establishment of the Arabic Script in IDNs working group (ASIWG) in 2008 which is working to set the technical guidelines for using the Arabic script in Internet domain names from the perspective of different languages including Arabic, Urdu, and Farsi.

Furthermore, with the help of a group of experts, ESCWA also developed a comprehensive preliminary feasibility study for the establishment of the domain name registry for the “.arab” gTLDs.
It should be noted here, that collaboration and continuous cooperation with the LAS has been crucial particularly to integrate regional efforts for realizing our common goals. Our most recent collaboration has been to identify pertinent steps for setting the “.arab” registry and hopefully submitting the relevant ICANN application in March of 2010. The forthcoming steps are highly critical to ensure the success of the “.arab” initiative through selecting the best candidate or consortium to establish and operate the registry.

There is a need to continue coordination on the regional and international levels and to strike a balance between the different collaborators. This is the role that ESCWA pledges to maintain.

On the level of Internet Governance, ESCWA has been an advocate of the World Summit on the Information Society and its implementation in the region. Therefore, it has organized several meetings to ascertain that its goals are reached, the latest being the “regional follow-up to the outcomes of the WSIS” which was held in Damascus mid of this year.

ESCWA has been actively participating in the IGF as well as ICANN Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) meetings in addition to LAS meetings for Internet governance issues. ESCWA has also been supporting the region to obtain access to ICANN fellowships as part of our role to empower the region in the Internet Governance arena.

Just weeks before this fourth IGF, ESCWA has completed and published a comprehensive study entitled “Internet Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for the ESCWA Member Countries”. The study is a collaborative work which is intended to act as a guidebook for the Arab region in this area. It will be officially launched on the 3rd day of the IGF, during the UN-ESCWA Open Forum which will be held at the Nile Valley, Room 8, between 2:00 and 3:30 pm. You are all welcome to attend the launch of this study.

I hope this workshop will reach its intended goals of drawing the proposed outlines for a “Roadmap for Internet Governance in the region” and an “Action plan for the implementation of Arabic Domain Names in the region”; particularly that it draws on the experiences and views of prominent experts joining us today for sessions which will cover all aspects of Arabic domain names and Internet governance.

I thank our colleagues from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology for their support, and the League of Arab States for tremendous efforts spent to make the best out of ADNS and Internet governance, and I thank our teams, experts, and researchers from UN-ESCWA who have been behind these efforts; and I wish you all a successful workshop.