

Internet

For the People; By the People; With the People



A Presentation on Behalf of the

Young Leaders in ICTs

ITU-Youth Programme's Network; www.itu.int/ITU-D/youth/YLinICTs

by

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0 Disclaimer

Even though I am a fellow of the International Telecommunications Union's *Telecom Africa 2001* program representing the *ITU Young Leaders in ICTs* network, this document contains (exclusively) my personal views and those derived from online discussions of the *ITU Young Leaders in ICTs'* (YLinICTs). Therefore, the content of this presentation not necessarily represent the views of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), its Secretariat, or its Membership.

1 Introduction

The Internet has become central to our existence, offering numerous opportunities in work, play and/or life at large – and is no longer seen by all as just an international network of networks for computers and other electronic devices. From the corners of a village house in a rural community to the highest floor of a skyscraper in the most urban location of the world, the Internet is connecting otherwise underserved people with information, solution and less myopic views of their existence. It is therefore not very surprising that there is a high level of interest in issues surrounding the Internet. During the second phase of the recently concluded World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the *Working Group on Internet Governance's* work was followed very closely by all stakeholders. As a necessary outcome of that same WSIS process, the world agreed to an *Internet Governance Forum*, and set out its mandate in paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda, in which we asked 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)*¹”

¹ Culled from paragraph 72 of the Tunis Commitment, outcome of the Tunis phase of the United Nations' World Summit on the Information Society

The IGF was mandated to, among others, “*discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet; facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body; interface with appropriate inter-governmental organizations and other institutions on matters under their purview; ... strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries; identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations; contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise; promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes; discuss, inter alia, issues relating to critical Internet resources; help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users; and publish its proceedings*”².

This may be described as an ambitious or far-reaching mandate, but the need is obvious – the need to use the Internet as an opportunity to improve lives, restore hope for the underserved, and ensure a sustained global action. The terms of the mandate speak for themselves and must be commended for its ability to envelope nearly every issue that may surround the subject of Internet governance. It is also important to emphasize as we did during the WSIS process that the IGF is process, of course, is about development.

2 The Making of a Global Forum

If anyone had fears about the IGF process being about people and development (rather than profit and technology for its own sake), the overall theme of the first

² Culled from paragraph 72 of the Tunis Commitment, outcome of the Tunis phase of the United Nations’ World Summit on the Information Society

meeting must have put such fears to rest. The official website for the first meeting of the Internet Governance Forum to be held in Athens stated that, “*In accordance with the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, **Internet Governance for Development** has been chosen as the overall theme of the meeting, with capacity building as a cross cutting priority*³.” With multistakeholder models as core of its operations and key issues identified as *openness, security, diversity and access*, the Internet Governance Forum comes at a time when our world is undergoing fundamental socio-economic and political changes that make the questions being asked about just any topic significant.

The forum’s identification of capacity building as cross-cutting must be commended. Truth is that the average user of the Internet is not very bothered about the complex details of its governance but the eventual outcome of such internal dynamics will always reflect on the user’s rights and privileges. The farmer in *Ilorin*, the software specialist in *Bangalore* and the data entry operator in *Vancouver* may not be able to define access, but they all need to be able to “plug and play” in order to meet their respective needs. The deliberate choice of the forum’s closing sessions to “*conclude with a panel of young people who will look at emerging issues and issues of concern to youth, both from a technology and public policy perspective*⁴” is a strong reflection of a standing reality: that young people are at the core of the present ICT revolution. We are the proof of sustainability of today’s hard-earned results, and the bridge between today’s policy and tomorrow’s visible action.

In discussing openness, the IGF should not only look at the “*[f]ree flow of information, freedom of expression, empowerment and access to knowledge,*” but must also consider the issues of open standards that can assure all Internet users of a truly level playing field. We will do ourselves more good if we ensure that security is not just confined to discussions on identification, prevention and prosecution; but that the core issues of why cybercrime (for example) has become so prevalent is considered. Could there be a socio-economic dimension

³ Culled from the website of the Internet Governance Forum, <http://www.intgovforum.org>, last accessed on September 27, 2006

⁴ Culled from the website of the Internet Governance Forum, <http://www.intgovforum.org>, last accessed on September 27, 2006

that lies just beyond technical and legal propositions? How can children – my brothers and sisters – be assured of safety while surfing the waves of knowledge from their various devices? Who is that *me* that sends me eMails claiming to be me? Security on the Internet is a big issue that the IGF has done well to include in its agenda, but must do much more in thrashing to its roots.

Diversity is a factor that makes the world beautiful – my experience of being in a room where many languages were spoken simultaneously cannot be forgotten in a hurry, it was beautiful. When will the Internet begin to truly reflect this beauty? Multilingualism and local content are key issues that the IGF must now take from international meeting rooms to every desktop, mobile phone and any other device that brings information to any user. And the last of the themes, access, cannot be over-emphasized. If the Internet truly exists as an international resource, why do my friends *plug and play* while I (and my other friends in developing economies) rather **plug and pray**? The world's youth – regardless of location – need affordable and easy-to-come-by Internet access, otherwise we will be widening the divide that we seek to bridge. Unfriendly policies and interconnection costs that make some side of the world pay twice for using a service just once must be reviewed in the spirit of global development – and this includes the need for the affected nations to also look inwards.

3 Voice of the People

As we inched closer to this forum, various stakeholders met to consider the issues – nations, businesses, civil society, international organisations, special interest groups and more. The more I consider all the various inputs, as can be seen on the IGF website (and other platforms – including discussions held by *Associations des Jeunes de Nouvelles Technologies* and the *Nigerian Youth ICT4D Network*), the more I think of the thoughts of various young people across the globe. Online, offline and in any possible way, this concerned generation analyzed issues and considered possible approaches that can guarantee not only better-informed Internet governance, but the application of the same

towards development. Under the aegis of the **Young Leaders in ICTs**⁵ (a representative group of young people from various countries of the world), thoughts have been expressed – and propositions have been made. These include the need to ensure that **the Internet, as a public resource, must be entrusted with institutions that are truly multistakeholder and international.**

The following needs resound, as one carefully listens to the voice of the people, the voice of the world's youth:

(a) There is a strong need to provide capacity building platforms for young people around the issue of Internet Governance – they are the proof that today's discussions will influence action in the next few years;

(b) Young people must be seen as stakeholders in the Internet Governance process, and not just a constituency that must be handed tokens as a method of pacification;

(c) As a pragmatic way of further reducing the digital divide, the obvious divide between the world's youth – in developed and developing nations – must be bridged. We welcome every ongoing initiative that seeks to address this problem, and call for more global action towards this all-important need;

(d) Issues of cyber security must be addressed with urgency, and cybercrime (in particular) must be stopped through a sustainable global action led by young people themselves;

(e) As the definition of *work* continues to change, the rights of *Virtual Workers* must not be trampled upon, especially that of young people who are able to find expression through this new model of *work*;

⁵ “Young Leaders in ICTs” is an online ITU platform created by the ITU-Youth Programme for all the ITU-Telecom Youth Forum Alumni, who jointly (with other global youth leaders in ICTs) interchange ICTs experience and opinions. The network's website is [http:// www.itu.int/ITU-D/youth/YLinICTs](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/youth/YLinICTs)

(f) Access is a fundamental right for the world's children and youth, and whatever it takes to deliver this must be done – either in terms of policy instruments, financial re-calculations or technology support;

(g) While young people may not have direct influence on Internet Governance decision processes as they stand today, we can at least persuade decision makers to take into consideration our concern regarding present-day Internet Governance and its future! Our vision of Internet Governance is one that is entrusted to a neutral, international and multistakeholder organization (that fairly considers the interest of all governments/nation-states) -- to promote reduction in costs, and increased access to facilities that will help bridge the evident global, regional, national and local digital divides.

4 Before We Leave Athens

One day after another, the IGF will reach its conclusion. But before that happens and we begin to talk about Rio – especially as we move into the transition period between Athens and Rio – the world's stakeholders must agree to focus on the real issues that surround Internet governance.

The future of our existence as a global community is extremely related to how we go about the issues around Internet governance and this is probably the best time to remind this important and powerful gathering that the **Internet is for the people** (their ability to access and use it's applications for development), the **Internet** must be developed **by the people** (they must be able to, at least, generate their own local content), and the **Internet** will grow best **with the people** (through multistakeholder partnerships and international collaboration).

The world's youth have seen this come to pass as we daily log on and express ourselves through Internet platforms – and what we have seen as a bright global future we share with the world: a vision of the ***Internet for the people, by the people and for the people!***

Thank you.