**The role of public policy in promoting multilingualization of the Internet**

The government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as one of the stakeholders, appreciates the opportunity to respond to this important CWG Internet Consultation. Since the early days of the Internet, English has been the dominant language and most protocols and applications, including the domain name system (DNS), only supported the Latin script. While this is understandable from a historical perspective, the proliferation of the Internet as a universal technological network means that today two-thirds of the Internet users do not have English as their first language. Multilingualization of the Internet is therefore a necessity, allowing people to absorb information and use the Internet in their own language. As such, multilingualization, in our opinion, is a key enabler for meaningful connectivity.

In the last two decades technology has (partially) responded to these needs and we are happy to see that all of the core systems and protocols that enable the Internet have been updated and no longer have a restriction to only use Latin script.

Many technical barriers have been lifted and especially in the DNS, we observe a significant uptake in the use of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs). The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), reports that 61 country-code Top Level Domains have been assigned that use non-Latin character sets. An integral part of website and email addresses, this means that in those countries, people no longer require the use of Latin domain names to access and communicate across the Internet.

Yet, we observe that actual use of such non-Latin domain names remains low, even in cases where such domains are available under the same conditions and pricing as the equivalent Latin script ISO two letter code.

In our opinion a key element to success is raising awareness and building human capacity towards deploying and using a multilingual DNS.

ITU could play an important role in supporting members in capacity-building projects and encourage sharing of best practices among members. Specifically, the ITU-D sector could play an important role in the acceptance of IDNs and raising awareness through capacity building, sharing best practices and providing information on IDNs, in cooperation with other stakeholders.

The already existing Universal Acceptance (UA) day, on 28 March, provides a great opportunity to raise global awareness of IDNs and draw attention to available capacity building resources. We encourage ITU, its members and all stakeholders to join UA day and participate in an event or organize one.

By encouraging meaningful connectivity through multilingualism the internet becomes more accessible, open and inclusive for all of its users, contributing to our efforts to bridge the digital divides. According to WSIS Action Line C8, linguistic diversity is under threat due to the disproportional digital content related to culture, the imbalanced provision of cultural goods and services, and the digital divide of indigenous communities. The universal acceptance of IDNs contributes to linguistic diversity and encourages the use of languages outside of the Latin script.

An important challenge for multilingualization is the awareness of IDNs among internet users. IDNs ‘look’ different than the Latin script and are therefore less trusted by users in terms of safety and security. By spreading more awareness of IDNs and encourage capacity building projects one can limit the impact of such presumed risks of IDNs.

One of the key objectives of Universal Acceptance is to raise awareness amongst software makers and vendors to ensure technical standards are implemented fully and correctly. This should ensure that IDNs can be used and are represented correctly on all systems.

Such awareness is also key to the success of the various programs developed or supported by ITUs development sector that aim to further the digitalization of public services, including DPI.

Public procurement programs can be used to incentivize software vendors to include support for a multilingual internet, including support for IDNs. Providing a clear signal to the market, it would reduce the (presumed) risks associated with such investments.