# Developing the Potential of the Internet through Coordination, not Governance

## The Internet Society at the 'World Summit on the Information Society' (WSIS 2003)

**The Internet Society (ISOC) is a global not-for-profit membership organisation founded in 1991 to provide leadership in Internet-related standards, education, and policy issues. We are dedicated to ensuring the open development, evolution and use of the Internet for the benefit of people throughout the world. Our education initiatives, for example, have helped bring Internet connectivity to virtually all developing countries over the last 12 years. ISOC is the organisational home of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) – an open consensus-based group responsible for defining Internet protocols and standards.**

Through our participation in WSIS 2003 we aim to increase understanding and awareness of what is important in order to develop and maintain the Internet's stability, open nature and global reach.

### The Internet has come of age

In many countries, the Internet has become a mass medium. This has brought with it reflexive pressure on policy makers to regulate it as if it were radio, television, or other mass media. While Governments naturally seek to address their citizens' interests regarding online privacy, spam, Internet security, intellectual property protection, the price of Internet access, and the digital divide, our position is that better use of technology, and broad participation in today's Internet coordination processes, not Government regulation, are the most effective and appropriate ways to satisfy these concerns.

The biggest barrier to the Internet fulfilling its immense potential could turn out to be misinformed and inappropriate intervention in the way in which the Internet's technologies, resources and policies are developed, deployed and coordinated. The Internet Society can help provide guidance here.

### What is the nature of the Internet?

The Internet is a modern distributed communications medium. No one is in charge of the Internet and yet everyone is in charge. Unlike the antiquated system of national telephone network monopolies, the global Internet consists of tens of thousands of interconnected networks run by

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Internet Service Providers, individual companies, universities, Governments, and other institutions. Some of these are global in scope, others regional or local. Hundreds of different organisations and thousands of different companies make decisions every year that contribute to how the Internet develops.

These varied entities, together with the users of the Internet and the developers of Internet technologies and applications, have specific needs for coordination. Collaborative processes that are critical for the future stability and evolution of the Internet, and which should not be modified arbitrarily or abruptly, satisfy these needs.

### Coordination, not Governance

It is misleading to use the term 'Internet Governance' when the Internet is clearly not a single entity to govern. It is more useful to refer to 'Internet Coordination'. The multiple facets of the Internet require different types of coordination, each calling for specific competencies and sensitivities to balance the needs of the Internet user community globally and locally.

Specific Internet Coordination activities are taking place globally at three levels:

- ***Coordination of the definition of Internet standards***

- ***Coordination of the availability and assignment of Internet resources***

- ***Coordination of the policies preventing misuse of the Internet***

This coordination is best performed by the existing set of organisations using proven processes. Because of the diverse nature of these activities, it is unrealistic to expect a single body - Government or otherwise - to take on all these roles effectively.

### Coordinating Internet standards

The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) under the umbrella of the Internet Society, is one of the oldest and most successful Internet coordination processes. Other organisations are also involved in Internet-related standards, including the IEEE, the W3C and the ITU.

Many of the protocols at the heart of today's Internet (e.g. TCP, IP, HTTP, FTP, SMTP, Telnet, PPP, POP3, the DNS protocol etc.) were developed through IETF standards activities. The results of the IETF are well engineered and practical open protocol standards that are trusted and open to global implementation with little or no licensing restrictions - they are freely available on the Internet, without cost, to everyone.

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The strength of the IETF process lies in its unique culture and talented global community of network designers, network operators, service providers, equipment vendors, and researchers. They all openly contribute their individual technical experience and engineering wisdom in an environment that fosters innovation and the open exchange of ideas.

This process, which is open to anyone, helps quickly identify and articulate problems of common interest. It also helps build the trust required to make the further investments necessary for a protocol to be usefully implemented and deployed. Ultimately, however, it is the Internet users themselves that determine whether or not a protocol is valuable and useful enough for widespread use. Here the IETF track record of producing useful, widely deployed protocols is unrivalled.

### *Coordinating Internet resources: The Internet registry system*

There has always been a need to manage the allocation of Internet resources such as the unique addresses that identify devices connected to the Internet (IP addresses), generic top-level domain names (e.g. .org), country code top-level domain names (e.g. .ch), domain names (such as www.isoc.org), and the systems that translate domain names into IP addresses (e.g. the Domain Name System or DNS).

This coordination activity has been handled by long-standing, not-for-profit membership organisations such as the Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) and top-level domain (TLD) registries.

More recently, coordination at a global level has been supported by ICANN (the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers). Established in 1998, ICANN is also a not-for-profit organisation. Business, technical, non-commercial, academic, governmental and end-user communities participate in ICANN.

These organisations are a meeting point for bottom-up, consensual, industrial self-regulation by the groups and individuals that use their services and resources.

### *Coordinating policies preventing misuse of the Internet*

As we have seen, organisations such as the RIRs, TLD registries, ICANN and the IETF all have very specific roles. It is neither within their charters, nor within their capabilities, to take on responsibility for all areas of Internet Coordination – particularly that of preventing inappropriate use of the Internet. For example, areas such as 'cyber crime' (e.g. fraud and child pornography) require coordinated global attention by lawmakers – and not by those responsible for the equitable coordination of the underlying Internet infrastructure. Security matters also need to be addressed by organisations providing Internet access (not only by

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standards developers), and intellectual property issues may best be handled by organisations such as WIPO.

In discussions about these broader Internet policy issues there is cooperation between all the organisations mentioned above. ICANN for example works with WIPO to implement its Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP). And the Internet Society, with technical advice from the IETF, works with Governments and policy makers to explain the effects and possibilities of new Internet technologies.

### The way forward – Make your voice heard

Existing consensus-based processes have given us the Internet and have successfully coordinated its phenomenal growth: thousands of new networks, new policy procedures, new top-level domain names, new protocols etc. All of them constantly balance the needs and stability of today's Internet with future demands.

An open debate is now needed to move towards common, globally acceptable policies, processes and technologies to prevent misuse of the Internet. Governments have a vital role to play here as a concerted effort on the part of the Internet community, non-governmental organisations and Governments can help strengthen and extend today's successful coordination processes.

The successful continued development of the Internet for the benefit of everyone can be ensured by participation in these proven processes rather than by attempting to create new untested mechanisms that are inappropriate to the unique characteristics of the Internet

The Internet Society remains dedicated to providing information and orientation about Internet structures and processes. We encourage broad participation in the activities of each of the organisations involved in Internet coordination.

**Join the Internet Society today: www.isoc.org**