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'The Internationalised Domain Name ccTLD Fast Track - A model for future co-operation?

Under the IDN ccTLD Fast Track a number of territories will very soon launch their IDN ccTLD and more will follow over the next few months. The process that led to this is unique in the history of ICANN. Whilst not perfect, it does demonstrate that the various elements that make up ICANN's multistakeholders can work co-operatively to produce a result within a relatively short time frame. What lessons can be learned from the development of the Fast Track and could the methodology used be a model for future co-operation within ICANN and beyond?'

Personal Introduction – Roles at auDA / ccNSO

Introduction

- 5 May 2010 was a historic day – the first non-Latin characters were used for top-level domains. The first IDN ccTLDs were inserted into the DNS root

zone – representing Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

- Many more will follow, however we are now at the end of a unique policy-development process.
- While ICANN embraces consensus-based, bottom-up policy processes, the IDN ccTLD fast track was not a traditional PDP and showed that the wide range of stakeholders within ICANN can come together and collaborate to deliver a successful outcome within relatively tight timeframes.
- Learning from this, the fast track's methodology may provide a useful model for cooperation within ICANN and in other fora.

IDN Fast-track History

- The ICANN Board took its first steps towards introducing IDN ccTLDs at its meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil in December 2006.
- A number of countries and territories expressed an immediate need for the introduction of IDNs within tighter timeframes than those usually expected of an ICANN policy process.

- In response, a process for accelerating the introduction of ccTLDs associated with the ISO3166-1 list was initiated.
- By March 2007, ICANN stakeholders had developed a list of questions and issues that needed to be resolved before IDN ccTLDs could proceed.
- In June that year, the ICANN Board resolved that the whole ICANN community (GAC, ccNSO, GNSO, ALAC) should collaborate on developing responses to those questions.
- The ccNSO developed and released two documents regarding possible interim approaches for IDN ccTLD introduction and the establishment of a joint working group.
- The resultant IDNC WG was chartered by ICANN's Board to develop and report on feasible methods, if any, that would enable the timely and stable introduction of a limited number of non-contentious IDN ccTLDs.
- By February 2008, the WG published a discussion draft document and continued consultations until its final report was produced in July 2008. The WG identified the need for two mechanisms: for the

selection of the IDN ccTLD string, and for the designation of an IDN ccTLD manager.

- ICANN staff were then tasked with developing an implementation plan to turn the WG's policy decisions into a process document. This gained Board endorsement in October 2009.

- Applications commenced on 16 November 2009 and led to the approval and launch of IDN ccTLDs for Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates earlier this month.

IDN Fast-track Lessons

- From commencement to "go-live", the entire process took less than four years.

- ICANN stakeholders were able to collaborate on a complex policy matter.

- The Fast Track process provides a practical example of the enhanced cooperation called for by the United Nations' World Summit for the Information Society in 2005. As Paragraph 87 of the Tunis Agenda notes:

  "… the exchange of views and sharing of effective practices and resources is essential to implementing the outcomes of WSIS at the regional and international levels. To this end, efforts should be

made to provide and share, among all stakeholders, knowledge and know-how, related to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of e-strategies and policies"

- ICANN was able to respond to stakeholder demand by successfully spinning a "sub- process" off from a longer, larger PDP.
- Additional detailed analysis, including of how the internet's security and stability might be affected, were successfully incorporated into the fast track timelines.
- Highly complicated technical and standards-related issues were successfully addressed. Successful resolution of this included engagement of participants from outside of ICANN.

- ICANN is a successful model of inclusive, multi-stakeholder, bottom-up, consensus-based policy development. However, even ICANN's PDPs can be protracted and generate conflicting, problematic stakeholder input.
- The IDN ccTLD fast-track model, is a flexible, responsive solution to real, immediate stakeholder demand.

- While ICANN's policy development agility is often promoted as feature of its governance model, the methodology of the IDN ccTLD fast track process represents the next evolutionary stage of policy development in a multi-stakeholder environment.

- The introduction of IDNs shows what can happen when stakeholders respond to the call in Paragraph 71 of the Tunis Agenda for "relevant organizations (to) commence a process towards enhanced cooperation involving all stakeholders, proceeding as quickly as possible and responsive to innovation" and Paragraph 29's recognition that all this work should take into account multilingualism.

- The IDN Fast Track initiative is a stunning example of enhanced co-operation at work within the ICANN framework and displays just how much can be achieved – and how quickly - when governments embrace the spirit of WSIS and meaningfully engage and cooperate with the private sector in the development of internet policies and processes.