

**Transcription ICANN Singapore  
IDN Variants Update to the Council  
Saturday 07 February 2015**

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Jonathan Robinson: And then the next item is to deal with the IDN variants. And we agreed a while ago to have a recurring update on the work going on with respect to IDN variants and a status update on the program. And Sarmad is here to give us that update. So have we started the recording for this session already? Have we got - for the next one? We're good to go? Thank you.

So the next item is to deal with an update to the Council and the GNSO on the work going on with respect to IDN variants. And it'll be presented by Sarmad Hussein from ICANN staff. Welcome, Sarmad.

Sarmad Hussein: Thank you. And thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide you with an update. Next slide, please. So I'll take all of you through the main projects we are currently undertaking so we will go through the IDN TLD program, an update on IDN ccTLD fast track, IDN tables work we are initiating, IDN implementation guidelines, our communications and outreach efforts and a little bit of discussion on our next steps. Next slide, please.

So just to give you an update of the program itself, the IDN program is undertaking multiple projects. One of the larger programs it is undertaking is called the IDN TLD program under which we are developing the label generation rule set for the root zone.

And once the label generation rule set is developed we're also developing a tool set which will enable the community to use it and also create portions of that LGR for different scripts. And then using obviously the LGR, the next steps would be to have IDN variant implementation and works already progressing on that as well.

And then, again, other programs include the fast track implementation IDN tables, as I'll explain later, and IDN implementation guidelines. Next slide please. Next slide.

So one of the larger programs which we are undertaking is the IDN TLD program. This is just a very brief historical perspective of it. The program started back in 2011 where the program is trying to find a consistent definition of what variants are across different scripts.

And by doing some case studies it was determined that obviously this definition must come through the community and based on that there was a project - a process developed in the third phase which was called P2.1, Project 2.1, which basically said that communities - different script communities should be organized in script groups called generation panels and each of these generation panels should come up with proposals which will go into a - integrated into the central core LGR for the root zone.

That project is (unintelligible) and also some additional projects which will allow these LGRs to be used and then eventually implemented. So next slide, please.

Just to give you a status on the progress, as far as the LGR for the root zone is concerned one of the first steps is if you look at the bottom on the slide is developing a (unintelligible) starting repertoire. This is done by an independent expert panel called an Integration Panel for all of the scripts.

So once the starting point is defined the script communities basically (unintelligible) on their scripts starting from the MSR and developing a final proposal on which code points should be used for - within top level domains and which of those code points are variants of each other and also specify if there are any additional restrictions which will be on the labels for that script.

This particular slide, as it's suggesting, that Arabic Generation Panel, which was one of the first ones to start about more than a year ago, is meeting finally face to face here in Singapore and will be completing their work so that will be the first generation panel finishing up their proposal. And it will be handed over to integration panel for evaluation. But before that is done it will also release its work for public comment so that's something which will be coming out for all of you to consider as well.

Armenian and Chinese generation panels have been formally seated, which means that they have turned in a proposal. The integration panel has reviewed the proposal and has found enough diversity in its membership and relevant scope of work for going forward to develop the eventual proposal for the LGR.

There are also active community - script communities, Cyrillic, Japanese, Korean, Myanmar and New Brahmi script communities which are actually working currently organizing themselves and working on the initial proposal to set them up as a formal generation panel.

And we're also working closely with other communities, people from Cambodia, Greece, the Latin Generation Panel is also coming together, some of the other panels, (unintelligible), they're also coming together but are still at initial stages.

So there's a good involvement of the community. Obviously we continue to look for work for additional involvement from the community in this process. Next slide please.

So as far as - if you remember I just shared that maximal starting repertoire is the starting point for this work. The first version of the MSR was released last year. It contained 22 scripts, however, it did not contain all the scripts and the reason for releasing a first version, which was relatively incomplete, was just to make sure that communities which are already active have a starting point available to them.

But that work needed to be completed. So over the last six months the integration panel has worked and added the six scripts which were still not part of it and MSR 2 has now been released with those additional six scripts for public comment.

It is currently - the public comment period is currently open and we'd encourage all of you to kindly look at the proposals for different scripts and give us feedback. After the public comment closes we will be publishing the second version of MSR which will contain all the scripts the integration panel currently thinks are needed in MSR.

MSR 2, which will be released, will obviously be upwardly compatible with MSR 1 and is currently based on Unicode 6.3. Next slide please.

In addition, we actually gained a lot of experience on what are the challenges for generation panels to work, what are the questions which come up in the process. And based on that we have developed very detailed guidelines document which help the generation panels to organize their work and proceed with their work.

We've also developed some detailed documents or technical documents on variant rules, (unintelligible) evaluation rules and representation of LGR in XML structure, again, for generation panels to look at what, you know, the technical work they need to undertake as they dive deeper.

All these documents are currently available for public comment as well. And we look forward to feedback from the community before we finalize them. Thank you. Next slide, please.

So that's the work around MSR and LGR. We are also developing a tool which will eventually enable the use of this data which we are creating for all these languages. We are actually - this was released for public comments and we received some comments on the design of this (offer).

Basically we will be releasing it in three phases, the first phase will cover the creation of an LGR, which means that generation panels will have a tool in which they can enter their linguistic data. And it automatically creates the machine readable format of that data. Currently this has to be done manually which is not very easily possible all the time.

Once the - in the second phase what we will do is release the tool which will allow the use of these LGRs. And what that means is that you should be able to type in a label in the software and - in any script - and this software will tell you that whether that label is valid or not as a TLD. And also it will tell you what are the list of variants for that label so that - and for each of those variants whether that's an allocatable variant or a blocked variant.

So that tool will help the community to get more, you know, visibility into the LGR work and the use of LGR work. And once that is also developed we will eventually develop additional tools to manage LGRs which will allow people at the back end to actually use different LGRs, compare whether two LGRs are same or different and so on.

And all these tools are going to be developed with open source technology and released to the community for use also for second level, for example, eventually. So next slide please.

Next slide. We also obviously are undertaking the work for evaluating IDN ccTLD applications. Currently we successfully evaluated and announced 45 TLDs from 35 countries and territories. Some of these are not showing up properly on the screen. Next slide, please.

And so the IDN fast track process, IDN ccTLD fast track process undergoes an annual review. And currently it is open for annual review for feedback from the community. Some of the items in that review as - though any item in the process can be reviewed during the annual feedback.

But we've specifically requested for some particular items and some of them like string similarity are also relevant to GNSO. So we would also request the community here to please look at the request for comments and give your feedback.

Next slide please. Next slide. So this is - the next item is the next project is the IDN tables. This is a project we've recently started. Basically we had got feedback from GNSO Council and members during their meeting with BVWG. There was a concern shared that IDN tables which are submitted as part of the new gTLD applications and are tested during the predelegation testing process, there was no reference available for them.

And BVWG, the Board Variant Working Group, directed the staff to work on this item. As a first step the reference tables which are being used by dotSE, which is assisting ICANN in the process, have been published by - on their Website but they're still not authoritative so as a second step what we are doing is we've developed a process in which we will develop these set of tables as reference tables for testing.

And I wanted to share that with you the - (unintelligible) we also posted after this ICANN meeting (unintelligible) that our process is finalized. We will actually go ahead and execute that process so to create these reference tables for (PGT) and also RSEP.

The process basically - so these are second level tables which new gTLDs use. They can be for languages or for scripts. And each new language or script which a gTLD has to support they have to submit these tables for that language or script.

So the process to create the reference tables are - would be what's being proposed is as a first step whoever the provider for these tables will be will have to provide high level guidelines on how these tables will be developed, what will be the legal process, what will be the criteria for selecting authoritative sources and so on.

Once the overall high level guidelines are finalized and formalized for each language the provider will go and seek authoritative sources. Authoritative sources would mean national (unintelligible) on those - for those languages, published dictionaries for those languages and see which characters are used, which characters would be variants of each other and so on.

And they will document those authoritative sources, analyze those authoritative sources and based on that analysis create a reference IDN table. Once that IDN table is created it will be sent for expert review as a next process. There will be two different expert reviews, one expert review on the linguistic content of that reference table and one review - expert review on security and stability concerns of that IDN table.

Once - and each expert review will publish actually an expert report on this aspect for each language. The documentation of authoritative sources, the machine-readable form of that table, the expert reviews will all be published for public comment. Once public comments are received on these these contents will be devised and eventually all of these contents, the documentation expert reports and the LGR contents for each table, will be published by ICANN for reference.

Again, this - we'd love to hear you feedback on this process. And we will also - you'll also get an opportunity to comment on it later on when its released for public comment after this meeting. And obviously as soon as we finalize that we will start executing this process.

Next slide please. Next slide. Another work which we are undertaking is revision of IDN implementation guidelines. These are guidelines which are applicable on new gTLDs at second level. And there was, again, a request from GNSO Council and community to review these guidelines.

At this point we have reached out to both GNSO and ccNSO to provide us a list of issues which they think are - we should consider going forward. And as - and the current status is we are actually waiting for feedback from the community on it. And we'll proceed as soon as we receive feedback.

Next slide please. So we've actually - as part of making - creating more awareness of the IDN program what work is being undertaken, we have been regularly reaching out to the community. We provide detailed sessions at ICANN meetings. We also go and provide updates to different SOs and ACs. And we've also been reaching the community at large so we've had IDN related presentations at various national and international forums and obviously we maintain active online presence and mailing lists.

Next slide. Next slide please. As far as our future work is concerned we'll continue to support the generation panels to do the - fill in the script data for the LGR, for the root zone. And we are expecting that the Arabic Generation Panel work is going to be completed and handed over to ICANN within next couple of weeks.

Once that is done we will release that for public comments and as soon as the public comments are finalized we will - this proposal will go into evaluation. And after the evaluation LGR 1 is released the first version of LGR will be released. If there are any additional script proposals by that time

those will also be included. And we are hoping that the first version of LGR will be available in the third quarter of this calendar year.

The - as discussed, we will also be working on developing the LGR tool and compiling the feedback from the community on IDN implementation guideline issues and taking next steps in that regard. There has been active work which has been started on IDN variant implementation. Already the staff has been working on it for - actively for the last three to four months now.

And Board Variant Working Group currently has been spending considerable effort and attention on this project. And we will very soon, based on the Board Variant Working Group that actions coming back to the community for additional feedback in that context as well.

And as soon as we get feedback on the process we will start developing the IDN tables and of course we continue to reach out to the community to give them update and get them involved in this programs. Next slide please.

I would also like to point out for those of you who want more details on what is going on with the program, we have two public sessions on Monday. There's an IDN program update for general community and for generation panel members we are organizing a workshop on IDN root zone LGR (unintelligible) on Wednesday. And we look forward to seeing at least some of you there. So thank you very much.

Jonathan Robinson: Thank you very much, Sarmad. We asked for a update and we've got a comprehensive update so I think no one can say we aren't fully appraised of what's going on in that area. Questions, comments? Yeah, I'm not sure - whether - do we have a roving mic or a floor mic?

Man: (Unintelligible).

Edmon Chung: Yes, I'll just use this. Yeah, this is Edmon Chung. First of all I guess - thank you so much for the update. I'd like to start by saying this is one of the most comprehensive updates we've heard. And I'm very excited about it, very enthusiastic about the progress, quite a bit of progress that has been made.

One quick update, I think it was probably this same room here that I brought up the issue about the LGR and stuff and participation from the policy side and how a lot of these will implicate on policies. And I'm happy to report that I think that's being handled and we're moving forward on that.

A few questions, actually four areas, of - I'll finish everyone and you (unintelligible) I guess. I keep repeating this every time anyway, I think it was originally called Project 7. I think you included it as IDN variant implementation. I think this is very important especially for this Council to understand, this is - if I'm not mistaken, this is how the process of adding IDN TLD variants into the root and has implications on new gTLDs, obviously IDN gTLDs, that particular process.

So I would - I'm encouraged that you have at least included it as part of the work plan and have started working on it. But I think earlier to see what might be there and I guess some - to try to get the feedback from, you know, the community is very important because this has direct implication on policies and in fact and also obviously on gTLDs, this is Number 1.

Number 2, is you mentioned the RSEP process and reference tables. I'm - it seems a lot has been done. And I think the - my key question is right at this point is the process being produced or the tables being produced?

My - the biggest worry or, you know, I'm somewhat anxious if ICANN would be tasked to create reference tables because I think, you know, this might - IDN tables might better be produced by the community from the (unintelligible) linguistic community and where ICANN would kind of be a clearing house rather than actively producing such reference tables.

So I think, you know, that's a clarification I'm - I think just want to get a sense of and also the timeline for that. I know a lot of new gTLDs are going through the RSEP and somewhat lost in the IDN whether it require, not require, what's required, you know, to initiate an RSEP. That's - so that is of importance.

Number 3 is you mentioned about the IDN guidelines and re-look at some of the terminology. I think that's a great idea. And much has progressed and we have, in fact, I think much more stable terminology now. And I think, you know, it's good to try to consolidate it and that's probably the right effort.

One of which is the word variant itself, somewhat terminology on making sure that IDN variants is what we mean by IDN variants might be something that's really useful.

Finally, on the topic that I see you didn't include but I think is very relevant to this is universal acceptance. I think, you know, the acceptance of IDNs by users and applications is very important. So my question is whether this team has interactions with the team that is doing TLD universal acceptance because this is, you know, I think this should be the leading effort in terms of universal acceptance.

(Unintelligible) all along because it ties the gTLDs with the ccTLDs because we both have IDN TLDs. And IDN universal acceptance is really - should be the forefront of the universal acceptance initiative. So those are the four items, I guess.

Sarmad Hussein: So let me very briefly respond to each of them. As far as the Project 7 is concerned, which is the variant implementation - IDN variant implementation, as I shared staff has been very actively working on it. We have identified - reviewed the whole process for both gTLDs and ccTLDs and identified where there are policy input needed and where there is operational details which

need to be further highlighted. That report has already been submitted to the Board Variant Working Group.

And Board Variant Working Group is currently, as I shared, spending a very large chunk of their time on discussing this and based on their feedback we will determine (unintelligible) and based on that direction we will also come out - come back to the community for further input. So there's very active work going on in - on that project now.

As far as the reference tables are concerned, so current process, as I shared, ICANN is basically intending to develop these tables. But the process includes - so these are reference tables for RSEP and PDT testing, they're not reference tables for that generally reference tables. I think that needs to be clarified.

And then the process includes expert review from language experts. So in a way community is represented. If you feel that is not the right process and community really should be developing those tables we will be releasing this process for public review, public comments. Please give your comments.

Though if it is eventually becomes a community-driven process, please do realize that it will have an impact on the timelines when this work gets completed because obviously that is - that currently we're considering that we have 30 language tables which have been identified so we're talking about 30 different language communities.

Fifteen of them are urgent based on complexity and frequency of use and 15 are not very urgent so we have divided this work in batches of 15 tables, two batches. And we intend to get the first batch completed within the next three to four months after the public comment is finalized. So we are happy to consider an alternate process as well based on community feedback so please do provide us feedback and we'll proceed accordingly.

As far as the IDN guidelines are concerned we have - we are seeking input from the community at this time. Please do provide us a list of issues. We certainly agree that there is need to revise it but having a concrete list of issues makes it easier for us to take the next step.

As far as the universal acceptance is concerned the IDN team is an integral part of that effort. But that is a separate effort from IDNs because it has to deal not only with IDNs but also other TLDs, new TLDs. And if you are interested in information there is a session on universal acceptance on Monday. Please do attend that. But, yes, the IDN program and the universal acceptance program are internally very well synchronized. Thank you.

Jonathan Robinson: Okay great. One more quick add-on and then I think we've got to move on. Go ahead, Edmon.

Edmon Chung: Edmon here. Just a quick response to the ICANN creating the IDN tables. I understand your feedback in terms of the time or efficiency of such but I guess I would caution that efficiency sometimes is, you know, if you involve the community efficiency might actually be better and many times.

So perhaps a hybrid approach might work for certain languages or, you know, when - to go out with a call and work together with the community. And if those communities - that is not yet ready or not there yet there is a mechanism whereby ICANN could take the proactive role or reactive role depending on the situation. That might actually be a good approach. But I think we will definitely respond to the public comments. Thank you.

Jonathan Robinson: Thanks, Edmon. Thomas, you want to come in with the last remark or question?

Thomas Rickert: Yeah, actually I have a quick question for you. I've said this on a couple of occasions but I think that making IDNs work and universal acceptance is key for ICANN to actually fulfill its mandate to be globally inclusive.

And I understand that you're suffering from, you know, maybe too little community participation and that there might be the need for more outreach. But what I'd be interested in is learning whether you think that ICANN sufficiently resources your work so that, you know, at least ICANN can support this at the highest speed possible.

Sarmad Hussein: So I will - to respond to that question I would want to distinguish between the IDN program and the universal acceptance program because those are two different programs at ICANN even though the IDN program is working with the universal acceptance program.

As far as the resources are concerned, for the IDN program, for which I am directly I guess responsible for within the staff, there are sufficient resources available to us to undertake that work so at this time there are no resource constraints. Thank you.

Jonathan Robinson: Thanks, Thomas. Thank you. And thanks, Edmon, for your vigilance on this subject as usual. Let's draw a line under that, stop the recording and then prepare for the next session.

Sarmad Hussein: Thank you.

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