SINGAPORE – Updates from the Middle East Strategy
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BAHER ESMAT: Community members and partners in this strategy are going to talk to the details of each and every project. Last year during the ICANN meeting in London, ICANN signed an agreement with the Egyptian National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA) on establishing a DNS Entrepreneurship Center.

This is a center that aims at developing local [inaudible] and expertise in the field of DNS in the various aspects of DNS from technical policy to business, marketing and all this. We've been working on the project plan and we finalized a training program that is going to start next month in March. We have four training sessions confirmed right now, two under the technical track and another two under the business policy track. [inaudible] from NTRA will be joining us shortly and she's going to talk to the project in detail. We also have our colleague, Tom Barrett, who's helping us with the business track of this program.

The other main project we have this year, it's actually a continuation of what we started last year, the taskforce on IDN – Arabic script IDNs. This is a taskforce of community experts in the field of linguistics, IDNs, and DNS who are looking into the issues related to IDN variants and label generation rules for the DNS root. They have been working hard on finalizing the LGRs for the Arabic script, and as far as I know, the Arabic script team is head of other linguistic teams in this regard. I'm happy to see our friend, Meikal Mumin, one of the members of the taskforce who is also going to talk to you about this project.

The third project we have this year is a DNS market study, which we're planning to conduct very soon. This is also one of the recommendations of the Middle East strategy. It was to conduct a study on the state of DNS and the potential of the DNS industry in the Middle East.

Currently, we are working on finalizing the request for a proposal (the RFP), and I hope within the next month it will be published and it's going to be a public RFP, so any interested party can apply.

The purpose of the study is, in addition to looking at the current state of play and analyzing the data and state of the DNS market in the region, also to make recommendations on how to develop this industry, where the potential is, what kind of best practices could be followed to make progress, whether on the ccTLD side or the gTLD side, whether on the registry level or the registrar level or the reseller level, or even the registrant level. It's going to look at the broader ecosystem, not only of the DNS but also of the Internet itself, because we are cognizant of the fact that we can't have a mature DNS industry while we're also facing key challenges with regard to other elements like hosting services, like maybe content. I'm talking here whether content in Arabic or even English and so forth. So the scope is going to be a little bit broader than the core DNS part.

There are two other activities that are going to continue this year as well. Last year, we started with two regional events. We introduced two new regional events in the Middle East. One is the Middle East DNS Forum, and we had the first edition of that forum held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates and hosted by the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of UAE. I'm happy to announce that the second edition of this

forum is taking place next month on March 9th and 10th in Anman, Jordan, and hosted by Talal Abu-Ghazaleh organization.

The DNS forum, as you probably know, is a regional forum that takes place in the Middle East as in other regions like Latin America, like Africa. And the purpose to get the DNS community together and offer them the space to discuss issues of interest to the region, of interest to stakeholders in the region, and of interest to businesses and decision makers in the region.

The second event is the Middle East School on Internet Governance. We had the first edition last year in Kuwait, and this year we are going to see the second edition taking place in Tunisia, hosted by ISOC Tunisia end of May. It's going to be back to back with the AfriNIC meeting.

Of course, other activities are going on as business as usual. We're trying to encourage and increase the number of remote hubs that are set up for ICANN meetings or during ICANN meetings to allow communities and people who are not able to travel to attend ICANN meetings to take part in those meetings remotely.

We've seen remote hubs in many countries in the region from Lebanon, to Pakistan, Yemen, Tunisia and others, and we'll continue to encourage this practice as we go.

The other thing we're trying to also improve is ICANN's visibility in local and regional media. We've seen some progress in that regard. Do I have more slides or is this one slide? There are more slides, okay. Sorry, I was talking to this thing.

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On the last point, the media outreach, first of all, we're glad to have an ICANN Communications Director for EMEA, for Europe, Middle East, and Africa – Luna Madi. I saw her in the room this morning. I thought she was here.

Luna joined ICANN last year and we've been seeing improvement in our media activities since then. More media outreach, more media activities around ICANN regional meetings and other regional meetings as well with EMEA newsletter nowadays being published and we're also working on improving our social media presence, whether via Twitter or other means.

I think with that I gave the overview of where we are currently with the implementation, and as I said, other panelists will talk to the details of each and every project. My colleague, Fahd Batayneh, is leading on all these activities in terms of coordination, in terms of working closely with partners on implementation issues. He's also going to brief us on a way forward on our plan for the next fiscal year, FY16.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to Meikal to talk about the taskforce on IDNs. Thank you.

MEIKAL MUMIN: Yes. Hello. Good morning, everyone. My name is Meikal Mumin and I was asked to speak on behalf of TF-AIDN, of which I'm a member. I'm trying to brief you today a bit about the updates on what we have been doing in our working group recently.

TF-AIDN is a community-driven way, because as a group, it's a creation which is oversight by the community and based with the Middle East Strategy Working Group.

As such, there's a more holistic approach. There's a more holistic approach to this. There are different aims which TF-AIDN is working towards. One of them is the Arabic script label generation ruleset for the root zone. We are glad to announce that the job and the work on this is basically done. We are just in the process of finalizing some details on the documentation of that.

But there are other thing we are supposed to do such as second-level label generation rules for Arabic script, Arabic script internationalized registration data, issues of universal acceptability, technical challenges, operational software, DNS security matters and technical training material all around Arabic script IDNs.

The group itself currently consists of 33 members and applications are still being received, so it continues to be open to new membership. At the moment, there are members from 18 countries and these members of members of language communities using Arabic script from nine languages with expertise of further language and writing traditions in Arabic script. Members come from very diverse disciplines and industries.

The membership is open since it's community based. If you care to know more about our work, the details and the interests of the members are posted on the MESWG website. Also, discussions are publicly archived [just as] news and e-mails, so there are different URLs

on the slides and there are ways in which you can follow up on our work, reach out to us or join us if you care to.

Basically, what is the scope then of our work? Well, at the moment, I believe there are some 20 Arabic script TLDs which are assigned or delegated and we are working and our work will have an impact on this I believe and for the TLDs.

We have been trying to outreach to the community. We gave various talks and presentations. We also held workshops at IGF meetings, at Middle East DNS forums, at different ICANN meetings, at an APTLD meeting. We have been trying our best to communicate our efforts.

Let's come then to results [inaudible] work. Well, first of all, we have been able to set up things, which means we have submitted a proposal for an Arabic Script Generation Panel to ICANN, which was accepted and subsequently, the panel was formally seated.

Then we proceeded to conduct a code point analysis of the Unicode repertoire of Arabic script. For that, we first had to do an analysis also of the maximum starting repertoire and give feedback to the integration panel because we were the first label generation – the first generation panel which took up work I believe, and therefore at the point when we took up our work, the MSR wasn't finalized yet and [we're] still in public comment phase.

After that, we proceeded to establish principles for inclusion, exclusion, and deferral of code points. Then we went on to conduct an analysis code point by code point to establish if and how they are used by

different languages using Arabic script and whether they were needed, therefore, in the root zone or not.

Once we had established which code points should be used we went then on to establish variants and group them into variant groups, these code points. We established principles for that, again which we documented, and then we did a code point variant analysis. Once we had code points grouped by variants, we then worked on the variant dispositions of considering them allocateable or blocked.

Lastly, we were working on whole label evaluation rules, and again we established the principles for those before determining those whole label evaluation rules for the root zone.

Lastly, which will be the final step of our work in the regard of the label generation rules for Arabic script for the root zone, we have to document our work, which means we have to give a more full write-up of our work. We're also doing this in an XML format as per the procedure of doing these things.

It was quite a long job. It took us more than a year. Even though there's a brief talk, I was trying to give you an example of some of the things we have been doing.

Here you can see a chart of the Unicode code points, and those marked in white are those which are already excluded by IDNA 2008 or [which are digits]. Meanwhile, those which are marked in pink or however you want to call that color, they are excluded by the MSR, so they're not eligible for inclusion either.

Now, the rest of them, we had to work on this and that means we included in the end 135 code points to the label generation root, and we excluded some 86 which are those which are crossed out here on the table.

We had numerous difficulties because of the vast number of languages and writing traditions associated with the script. To give you one more example, we for example, were faced with the issue of Hamza spelling. In numerous languages, it seems that things are commonly left under-specified when we look at spellings on the Internet.

One example is that ʾālif is often much used where orthography would demand ʾālif Hamza in Arabic language. This practice, for example, is so common that also the ccTLD of United Arab Emirates, if I'm not mistaken, has been delegated using the code point 0627 instead of 0625, and other ccTLDs have made similar choices.

To ensure the stability and security, both characters should be part and were made part of the variant set, but the question is always how we deal with these wring practices. So we decided that ʾālif and ʾālif Hamza, for example, should be allocatable variants, since ʾālif is commonly used in place or in lieu of Hamza. But at the same time, ʾālif Hamza does represent the theoretically speaking correct orthographic use, and obviously we cannot block the standard orthographic use.

The point is that if we do that, this has implications because there are parallel cases. So we also have cases with Hamza spelling and the four letters yāʾ and wāw. If we were to then transfer our approach for this character to other characters, that would mean that we have quite an overproduction of labels because of the large set of variants.

So in this particular situation, for example, we did choose to make variants allocatable in both directions only in the case of the [inaudible] forms, but not, for example, in the case of the wāw or yāʾ forms to balance out somehow conservatism and production of labels and variants to what was needed.

To come to the next steps and to end up this talk, next we will have to finalize this Arabic script LGR proposal. We are conducting a final internal review, checking style and putting in references and things like this. Subsequently, we will publish for comments, and finally we will submit it to ICANN.

After that, TF-AIDN has chosen to take a look at universal acceptance next and also at label generation rules for second level. That's the end of my talk for today. Thank you for your kind attention.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, Meikal. Thank you very much. So we're going to go to the next panelist, and then we'll have time for Q&A afterwards. Our next speaker is Manal Ismail.

MANAL ISMAIL: Thank you, Baher and thank you [inaudible]. First of all, allow me to apologize for coming in late. I hope you won't mind if, again, I'm forced to leave before the session ends, because due to some scheduling conflict, I have to be at two places at the same time. I appreciate your understanding.

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As you may know, the ICANN regional strategies for Africa and the Middle East have both indicated the need to develop the domain name industry ecosystem in both regions. So the goal of the DNS Entrepreneurship Project is to establish a center that's mandated to foster the DNS sector in Africa and the Middle East.

This is a partnership between the NTRA and ICANN. The agreement was signed at ICANN 50 in London, the memorandum of agreement. It's available online at the URL we have on the screen. Where NTRA will incubate the center during its founding phases and provide training facilities in partnership with local partners, and ICANN would help provide in expertise to build the local capacities.

It's worth noting here that NTRA has already signed another back-to-back MOU with [an] institution back in Egypt where we can host this and incubate the center during its founding phases.

Why Egypt? As I always say, we are lucky enough to fall within both regions – Africa and the Middle East. On one hand, it's a bridge between both regions, and on the other hand, it's also one of the largest Internet markets in Africa and the Middle East. We have a population of 87 million with 25% of this population a young population between the ages of 18 and 29. We also have mobile subscribers more than the population itself and Internet users in the range of 45 million.

Finally, also, the richness in the skilled human resources which I hope all will serve having a successful center.

So the vision for this DNS Entrepreneurship Center is to be the repository for DNS knowledge and expertise in Africa and the Middle

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East. So its mission will be to develop a robust and healthy domain name ecosystem across both regions.

Regarding the scope of work for the center, as indicated earlier, it's mandated to foster the DNS sector and develop related industries such as web development, content provisioning, and any other related tools and applications. But the main three services that are within the scope of this center would be capacity building and professional training that would certify potential candidates qualified from Africa and the Middle East, both in business aspects as well as technical operations.

Also, providing consultancy services again in both regions. And finally, as needed, may also have some technical operation [inaudible].

In addition to the preparatory phase, which has already taken place in the MOUs that were signed and announced, we foresee this center going through three phases. The first is like the first year, which is the foundation phase. The second phase is the launch phase, which is the second three years. Then the operations phase, which is the last phase.

During the first phase, this center would be working on developing capacity as necessary for the establishment of the DNS Entrepreneurship Center which is more of train the trainers program so that we can come up with a nucleus that would help us establish the center itself.   As I mentioned, the programs would cover various DNS technical policy and business aspects.

During its second phase, the DNS center should be launched as an independent entity. Again, it would continue the training services, but also would add consultation services in Africa and the Middle East. By

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then we should have the expertise that could provide those consultancy services.

At a later stage, those expertise can for sure lend their knowledge across both regions, but also there is a possibility of assuming a DNS operational role as needed across the regions.

As some concrete outcomes or expected outcomes from the different phases, during phase one, of course to complete the training program. We were just thinking how can we measure the success of the center or the progress of the center, so it's more of completing the training programs, [inaudible] can obtain fellowships, and also complete the foundation process of the DNS Entrepreneurship Center itself.

During the second phase, we expect to have more of a three-year strategic plan to have curricula and education material available in the languages spoken within our two regions. Again, the training and consultation services that will be carried out in both regions.

The third phase should [inaudible] again more or improvement in curricula and education material in the languages spoken or used in both regions. Also, to continue training and consultation services and other services that may appear to be unnecessary for the industry in Africa and the Middle East.

We are working now on two training tracks, the technical track and the business track, where the technical track I believe ICANN is already discussing with NSRC and the dates should be announced shortly. This would cover registry operations, secure registry operations, DNSSEC and the like, and virtualized machines.

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The business track would look into the registry/registrar models, the business models and marketing strategies, registration policies and also dispute resolution of course.

The business track is expected to take place immediately after the technical track. We're working to have some fixed date on those that would be shortly announced.

So, as I mentioned, and particularly before the very early phases where we're looking for train the trainers or potential candidates to more compose the nucleus that would establish the center. We're looking at candidates who have some background. They work in the field for the technical track. They should have UNIX and/or Linux system administration experience, knowledge of TCP/IP protocols and layer and 2 and 3 networking, and of course understanding of network and systems security basics.

For the business track, they should be aware of business development, product development and branding, digital marketing, consultancy and Internet business innovation and strategies, and also financing and legal issues.

As a cross-cutting requirement for both tracks, candidates should be able and have the desire to teach, including ability to talk and present in front of groups of people, and also willingness to use what was learned during the program to teach and mentor other people.

The structure of the center itself is foreseen to be a Lean organization with a multi-stakeholder board of trustees and the human resource mix of full-time staff, which could be a limited number of full-time staff,

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mainly with two functions to start with – the business development and the technical training, but also virtual teams of expertise which would [constitute] the workforce of this center from all over the region. And those are the experts that would work on developing the industry, providing the consultancy, giving the training at later stages.

The business model for this center, basically it's going to be the repository for DNS best practice and information on technology, policy, and operations. Also, a competency center offering training and consultancy services. Again, if necessary, would look also into operations, helping creating local registrars, helping local registrars to be ICANN accredited registrars, helping with future new gTLD registries from our region and helping also maybe building the DNS infrastructure in both regions as necessary.

One of the things that we see could help the sustainability also of the center is extending partnerships with the different stakeholders, and the more this happens, I think the more the model would sustain.

Partnerships would include from the government sector, we have the NTRA, the regulator, and also the ITI where we signed the back-to-back agreement to incubate the trainings taking place during the foundation period, among others of course. The Internet technical community represented in ICANN, but also could be ISOC, RIRs, regional TLDs, ccTLDs. And as I mentioned, the technical track is being discussed with EURid and I hope we'll be able to share the dates soon.

Normally from the business sector would be the registries, the registrars, ISPs, Internet businesses, among others. Other stakeholders of course could be universities, consultants, experts, and even donors.

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On the work underway or the way forward and our next steps, we're trying to reach out to potential partners and discuss possible roles. As I said, [inaudible]. We're discussing locally with the ITI and other potential candidates with the local registries with the industry, and ICANN is also discussing with the [experts] NSRC, EURid and others.

We are trying to raise awareness among our local and regional stakeholders and seek support from them, getting them on board with us, and a partnership [inaudible] win/win relationship.

We are finalizing details of Phase I in relation to the training program selection criteria for the trainees, and also setting the timeline and milestones for each program, and hopefully very shortly kick-starting the training programs really soon.

With this, I leave it at this and I'm happy to take any questions. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, Manal. Now moving to the business track of this program. Tom will walk us through more details. Tom?

TOM BARRETT: Thank you. My name is Tom Barrett. As a way of introduction, my background is both in the registrar as well as registry business. I currently run two ICANN registrars – EnCirca and NameShare. We're also a trademark agent to the Trademark Clearinghouse. I also am a tech contact for .PO, the country code for the Republic of Palau.

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Previously, I was a founding member of Afilias and did some work at Neustar. I've had a broad variety of experience in the industry.

What I want to talk about is the business track curricula that was put together and give you an idea of what that looks like.

Target audience for the business track is really anyone interested in starting or building a business in this industry. It could be technical people such as programmers or engineers. It could be marketing people, product and brand managers. It could be investors.

Essentially, we want to give them a business perspective on starting a business or growing and building a business in the DNS industry, as we call it.

It is envisioned to be a five-day workshop, essentially. Day one we're going to focus on the basic elements of a business plan. All the things that you typically might learn if you go to business school in terms of what you have to consider when you're starting a business from competitive analysis to industry analysis to how you're going to brand your business and what distribution channel you might use, what types of operations plan or marketing plan might be required for your business.   We kick off on day one talking about that.

At a high level, we'll talk about the policy process that occurs within ICANN, how the multi-stakeholder process works and how they might want to participate in that process.

Day two we get into the industry overview itself. Who are all the various players within the supply chain of the DNS industry? So not just

registries and registrars, but what web hosting companies, DNS providers, [SSL cert] providers, all the various players.

Any one of our attendees might be interested in just serving one particular role in that supply chain, so we want to give them a good overview of all the different opportunities that do exist in terms of starting a business in this space.

On that day, we'll also just discuss a little bit about the technical infrastructure of such a business, where all these different vendors in the industry pretty much need to work together to deliver the service to the end user.

Day three we talk about the sales and marketing of the business. This is your choice of a business model. Do you want to be a registry/registrar? Do you want to be vertically integrated? Do you want to a ccTLD and IDN, a geoname? A lot of different options in terms of what type of service you provide in the industry. Will you go through a distribution channel such as resellers or will you become a reseller or do you want to become vertically integrated and so on?

Day four is more about operations, day-to-day management of a business. This gets into what kind of staff you need to run the business and it gets into legal issues, how to address abuse and law enforcement types of complaints. It talks about your financial forecasting and accounting requirements for running such a business.

Then day five we try to wrap it up and try to bring this all together with perhaps some brainstorming about what type of business they think would be right for their territory where they come from.

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So the basic idea of the business track is that obviously it's going to evolve over time. We wanted to design it so that it wasn't just one person standing up in front of the group and talking for five days. The idea is that we're interspersed, some of this theoretical textbook type of content with subject matter experts who can come in and give real-life examples of, say, what a technical infrastructure looks like in their business, be it a registry or registrar or what have you, a web hosting company. What a typical sales and marketing plan might look like to promote a new service, how they staff up an organization, what kind of skills are required in their organization, what kind of legal issues they're addressing.

Then, finally, we want to give them an idea of some sample business plans for a registry, for a registrar. The idea here is we're going to approach the existing companies in the industry and solicit from them content that they can contribute to this workshop, as well as volunteering to give talks as well in these different [inaudible] study areas, so that the attendees can really hear from people in the industry how to actually start and run a particular business.

The other element of this business track is we realize that the attendees are showing up, some are ready to start a business, some are maybe months away from starting a business. So how can we help them in their journey after the business track is over?

The idea is that we would set up an online business mentoring service. Again, recruit from existing service providers, from the registries, the registrars, who agree to be volunteer mentors, electronically essentially. During the workshop, we'll have all the attendees create profiles, really

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describe what kind of business space they're interested in being in and that the business mentoring service will then do some match-making and let them reach out to some subject matter experts from anywhere in the world and continue to interact with those people long after this workshop is over.

We love to get more suggestions on this business track. We are talking to several people about being the subject matter experts and presenting many case studies, be it about their business plan or marketing plan or technology plan, or talking about how they deal with legal issues and so on. So if you're interested, come up and talk to any one of us. If you're interested in providing content and/or speaking, we'd love to hear from folks.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, Tom. Maybe also just to note that as part of the business track, the European Registry (.EU) are also offering to provide a four-day course on registry best practice more from a cc sort of perspective, building on the experience on running one of the leading registries and trying to share their experience in terms of operating a registry, in terms of policies, in terms of relationships with registrars and so forth.

As Tom said, we're looking for more partners and more experts to join the effort, and I hope that during this week, we'll be able to talk to more people about this project.

So that I think I'm going to turn it over to Fahd. Fahd is going to walk us quickly through the plan for FY16, which is year three of the strategy.

FAHD BATAYNEH: Thank you, Baher. Good morning, everybody. I'll be really quick. Just before I start flipping my slide – it's only one slide actually – I just want to mention that actually these implementation plans are developed in agreement with the Middle East Strategy Working Group. So what I'll be presenting actually in my slide is just some thoughts on what will be implemented during the third year of the Middle East strategy.

We have a couple of items that we are thinking of for the third year. One of the things we'll be continuing to work on is the DNS Entrepreneurship Center. We will be working with our partners, the NTRA, on seeking partnership with industry leaders.

Another item we are targeting for the third year is actually issuing the DNS study report. We hope we can have this out before the end of the year. We will be holding workshops probably around DNS threats, mitigation, and investigation, and prepare certs.

Last November we did a two-day workshop for the law enforcement agencies in Lebanon. We plan on doing more of these workshops for other law enforcement agencies, probably on security firms in the region. Of course we will be continuing the support of the work of the taskforce on Arabic script IDNs.

As my friend Meikal mentioned, the next steps actually for the taskforce is to focus on two topics. One is LGR at the second level and the other is universal acceptance.

Finally, we will be holding the third edition of both the Middle East DNS Forum and the Middle East and adjoining countries School on Internet Governance.

That's quickly. I'll hand over the mic to Baher.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you, Fahd. Of course, in addition to those activities, our outreach activities will continue as usual. We're trying to focus more on countries and communities who are not well-represented at ICANN. Just by way of example, next week we're going to head to Pakistan to [inaudible] together with folks from the Internet Society and APNIC. We're having three-day outreach activities, including a one-day workshop with local stakeholders in Pakistan and we will continue to do these efforts as we go. And also with help from community members.

I'm reminded that last year we had a similar activity in Yemen with help with our friends from ISOC Yemen. Fahd was there, together with ISOC and RIPE NCC. So these kinds of activities we are taking them seriously, because reaching out to the broader community who simply can't be at each and every ICANN meeting is part of our duty.

That I think we can stop here and open the floor for Q&A. I see Adrian in the back of the room. Do we have a mic somewhere? Go ahead.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

Good morning. I don't know, it's something. My name is Adrian Kinderis. I am the CEO of the dotShabaka Registry. I had a few comments first, and then potentially some questions.

First of all, my commendation to the work that's being done with respect to the Arabic script and getting the IDN tables aligned. That's fantastic. It's important work. I would ask you to move quickly onto

universal acceptance. As the owner of a registry with an IDN, it seems to be one of the major problems that faces us going forward, so I urge you to continue that work as quickly as possible. Certainly any way my organization can assist, we'd be happy to.

However, I have been going through the Middle Eastern strategy final document here with respect to the domain name industry. You have a number of metrics that you will measure your performance on. On the last page of these metrics, it says, "Increase the number of ASCII ccTLD registrations, increase the number of IDN ccTLD registrations," and so on and so forth. There is a whole part dedicated to the increasing of registrations, as a metric for your success.

I am deeply concerned that all your focus is going on to the supply chain and not the demand side of the operation. Launching a new gTLD, it has been our experience that registrars that are existing now do not even see the opportunity. So creating more registrars will not create a buoyant domain name industry in the Middle East region. You need demand. Supply will respond to demand. Registrars will build themselves once there are more people registering domain names.

From the presentation I saw today, there was very little – if nothing – that addressed the fact that we need to go out there and raise the awareness of domain names to those that are going to be potential registrants. I urge you to put a lot more focus into that area.

Having workshops is great for potential registrars, and setting up a coordination center and training people in the technical side of running a registrar is one thing. But ultimately, those registrars will be set up and fail shortly thereafter if there is no business there. There needs to

be a commercial reality that needs to go through this working group very, very quickly.

We are more than happy to step up to the plate. I have invested millions of dollars into the regional already and will continue to invest more. I believe if ICANN can help, and it's in raising the awareness of domain names and the opportunity that they give people in getting online and having a presence. Registrars will come. Registries will come. You will solve a lot more of your problems and your metrics by focusing on demand. I cannot stress that enough.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, Adrian, for your comments. On your second comment, I can't agree more whether on your observation about the metrics and its focus on increasing numbers. That was quite a lengthy discussion back then within the Middle East Strategy Group. I agree that this could be revisited. I agree that more work needs to be done on the demand side of things. I'd be more than happy to continue this conversation with you and your team, especially now you have a team in the Middle East which is very good news. I'd be happy to work with you and discuss how we could do this together, because I think it's to our benefit as ICANN, as registries, as a community. So let's take this on. Thank you for that.

On universal acceptance, I'm not sure whether either Sarmad or Meikal can say something about universal acceptance. I know it's something that ICANN is looking at. I know the taskforce itself is considering something on universal acceptance for next year, but I'm not sure if you want to add anything to that.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Well, obviously thank you for comments on our work. I can only pass them on to the group. We will be looking at universal acceptability and universal acceptance. We have been discussing it a bit and it will probably become more of a focus of our future work.

The only thing I can mention right now is I think there is a workshop today or a meeting today which looks at universal acceptability. Maybe that would be interesting also on that context. Otherwise, if you have specific questions, always feel free to address me or any member of the group.

ADRIAN KINDERIS: Sorry, this will be my last comment. I'm very good with a microphone. Can I also do a plug here for the Doman Name Association? Because I think there can be some coordination work here with respect to ICANN, and particular in the Middle East. The Domain Name Association of which I am the chair, given the role of trying to ensure that domain names generally are the most intuitive and authoritative way that we navigate Internet, and our work will be to promote domain names as that source throughout the globe. Potentially there is some work we can do, and I know that universal acceptance is very high on our agenda as well and we're certainly working in coordination with ICANN there. So expect to see more from us on that.

So, any way we can support you, please come and talk to us.

BAHER ESMAT: Thanks, Adrian. [inaudible], you're next.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: [inaudible] from Yemen. First of all, I'd like to applaud ICANN for the outreach efforts in Yemen. I have just recently realized that without of the ISPs have, because of these outreach efforts, have been able to get a couple of thousand IP addresses already and they're now having their autonomous system number first time for a decade. So just a short visit had contributed a lot.

Another thing is what Adrian has been mentioning. From the perspective of Yemen, a country that's been really been the least in terms of use of domain names, we've come to see that it has been really a complex problem to address when it comes to registering domain names. One of the biggest issues perhaps is awareness, as he rightly mentioned. There are many people who believe that having a local domain is actually too complicated and goes through a bureaucratic process that is also legally more binding and restrictive as well as, in terms of hardware, less, let's say, optimized and proficient.

So there is this perception. I am not sure if one can say that all of it is wrong, but there is this issue that makes many in the country unwilling to go for their local domains.

On the other hand, we also have another serious issue which is a conflict between to major operators in Yemen – TeleYemen and YemenNet – and that has also led to not having the WHOIS service operational in the country. So any .YE domain does not have a WHOIS server yet.

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I wonder how could ICANN help push forward with efforts. And I understand that the ecosystem as we heard earlier today is not only ICANN. It has many other partners involved, including ISOC and others. So what could ICANN's role be in promoting a faster resolution to this crisis?

And as for the awareness campaign, whether, for example, trainings or conferences or the like, is ICANN also willing to continue in supporting chapters such as the Yemen chapter and promoting activities and raising awareness of the value of local domains?

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, [inaudible]. I think Fahd can add something to that and can respond to your questions.

FAHD BATAYNEH: Thank you. As a first note to mention, ccTLDs are usually national sovereignty. So we at ICANN don't interfere directly in how a ccTLD is run. We do provide advice if seeked to provide any advice.

In the case of .YE, actually both operators contacted me back a couple of months ago requesting some kind of technical assistance, and we actually got them in touch with the right people. We can advise you in whatever policies you want to make. We can advise you on what is the best practice, but we can't interfere directly in how the ccTLD is run or in all the problems a ccTLD could face.

BAHER ESMAT: If I may add something to that as well. I know the cc issue. I'm aware of it. I'm not going to discuss the details here, but as Fahd said, it's something that ICANN would be willing to help with if needed, but in the end, the solution – and I'm not talking about technical solution; I'm talking about holistic solution – it must come from those who are running it.

But on your other comment about the awareness and perception and the fact that people would normally go and register global domains as you call them, I think this is one of the reasons why this whole effort of the Middle East strategy started in the first place. It was very obvious that we lack a lot of knowledge, expertise, awareness in this area.

Initiatives like the Middle East Forum or the study or even the DNS center are all meant to support efforts in developing this ecosystem.

There is no one thing or one action that anyone could do, and then we will see the issue resolved, whether in Yemen or in Egypt or in anyplace. It's something that needs to evolve and develop. ICANN has a role to play. Other community members and other stakeholders also have a role to play.

We're seriously open to any suggestions. If we do something wrong or if we do something that is not very effective, we would like to get your feedback, because that's how we can get [inaudible] back to the right track.

We will continue our efforts towards not only raising awareness, to be honest. There is much beyond that. The DNS Center aims at developing expertise in the field. People started to ask when is ICANN going to have

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this next round of gTLDs. Of course, we don't know the answer. We don't know when. But if and when this will happen, I personally would like to see experts from this region not only applying, or not necessarily applying for TLDs, but maybe helping applicants with their applications, helping applicants developing business plans and so forth. This is the aim of the center. It's much more than workshops or trainings or awareness raising.

[inaudible], I can see you. Then there's another request. Tom, go ahead. Okay, Victor, then [inaudible] and then the gentleman. Can you please, just for the record, introduce yourself? Because we have remote participants. Go ahead.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: In the name of God, [inaudible] organization Sudan. Thanks Baher and thanks to all the speakers. Special thanks to Fadi for continuous updating us on the e-mails about what is going on in the [inaudible] ICANN. We are very happy about that.

First, I would like to congratulate [inaudible] for this strong partnership for the [inaudible] of domain name system. I'm sure it will have a very good impact on [that opinion], because most of the applicants, they speak English, but for the others, it's very important and very essential. I'm sure it will increase the [inaudible] content on the Internet by the next year or two years.

I want to confirm that the importance of the strong win/win multi-stakeholder partnership, this is very important and very essential for improving this partnership.

Also, I would like to [inaudible] part of this partnership or this center or the civil society, most of the people, they are talking about companies, business and individuals, but they have to have specific roles in the civil society because they are the end users, because they are very close to the community. So we would like to see that.

Also, since I have attended the School of Internet in Kuwait last year, I have wrote more than 20 blogs. Unfortunately, all of them are in English, but starting today, I will try to write in Arabic, because we have to disseminate all this information to our community in Arabic to increase the Arabic content on the website. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, [inaudible]. Thank you very much. We were glad to have you last year at the School of Internet Governance program. I'm following your e-mails as well and I'm very pleased to see you becoming more active, not only in ICANN, but in the global Internet governance space. Thank you very much. [inaudible]?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Thanks, Baher. My name is [inaudible]. I'm from Egypt. I'm a member of this strategy working group. There was something I wanted to say and I think Adrian kind of opened the door with his earlier intervention, so I'm going to use that about driving demand in local Middle Eastern, African markets.

I wouldn't say that there is no demand now. I mean, there is a demand. There is a market for domain name registrations. In Egypt, for example, there's a significant market when it comes to commercial registrants,

businesses that register domain names, and particular in the gTLD space, the Egyptian country code top-level domain is not an ideal example of a ccTLD that sells well. So there is a market that is over there. I'm not sure if it is the sole responsibility of this working group or this strategy for this region to drive the demand so much as encourage the businesses that would market themselves and themselves drive the demand for the services that they will sell. So I'd like to sort of see a balance between those.

But what I really want to say is if this demand does increase as a result of this strategy or as a result of the businesses that drive it once they are created, I think there's another important question that the strategy needs to address, and that is how is this group going to help the local businesses capture this demand as opposed to this demand going to the service providers that are already out there?

You have registrants in Egypt, for example. I'm sure there are tens of thousands, if not more, and they all register domain names with registrars in North America and Europe. So what is it that is going to make local registrars more appealing? Registrars in Europe and North America have access to more sophisticated and more reliable infrastructure. They have access to local policies and laws that may provide more stable environment for domain name registrants.

There are so many factors that need to be considered when talking about creating this demand and hoping that the local supply is going to cater to it, and these are all factors that I am hoping will be included in the baseline study that is going to come up.

And that takes me to another point. We did provide input to what we think should be included in that RFP, but if I recall correctly, we were promised a sneak-peek of the RFP and a chance to comment on it before it is published. I think this is something that would be really helpful just to make sure that – I mean, if the study is going to happen, we want to get it done as right as possible. So we need to just make sure that everything we can think of is included before the study is actually done.

One last comment. It's a question, actually, for Tom when he was talking about getting European and North American registrars and registries to help with transfer of knowledge and mentoring up and coming service providers, contracted parties in the Middle East. That's really great and this was something I was really hoping would happen ever since the Middle East Strategy Working Group was created.

My question, though – and it's out of pure curiosity – what incentive do European and North American registrars and registries have in helping develop a market that will effectively compete with them? I'm just curious about that. Thanks.

TOM BARRETT: It's a fair point. I don't think that – there may be some folks who are threatened by the idea. Frankly, I'm not one of them. I'm not threatened by helping out follow registrars. I don't think we necessarily compete for the same customer.

So I think you'll be able to find enough people willing to volunteer their time who don't feel threatened by helping a startup registrar or registry in a different region.

To your other point, I think Adrian made a great point about driving demand. There's also, as you pointed out, because there's not a local infrastructure, folks are forced to use registrars in Europe and North America.

It might be initially that local businesses and consumers simply prefer working with a local registry or registrar. The demand might be the same, but it's transferred from overseas, basically – from Europe and North America – into the local market because they want someone who speaks the language and is in the same time zone, etc. It helps build the infrastructure and capacity within the region.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: If I could follow-up on that for a second. You said there might not be a sense of threat from local competition, but you still didn't tell me what the incentive is. I'd be curious about that.

To the other point, having worked in Egypt for a few years, the impression I get . . . Well, first of all, domain name registrations typically happen through web developers. So you have a company that is not necessarily even in the technology field. It's just a random company that wants a website. So the contract a web development company, and this web developer sort of acts as a privacy or proxy service provider, sort of a de facto proxy service provider where they registrar the domain name for the company and they develop the website.

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What you usually have is these web development companies hosting the website with hosting providers in North America or Europe. This case already does exist where the majority of these providers prefer to host in locations where they think the service is reliable, the infrastructure is reliable, there won't be any down time, they won't get complaints as a result from their customers.

It's just complete prediction on my part. The same challenges may be faced by local registrars. Thanks.

TOM BARRETT: And just so I get to answer your question, I think in terms of incentive, it doesn't take a lot of capital to start up some of these businesses, which obviously entrepreneurs are always short on capital.

So the fastest route to starting up a business many times is using someone else's infrastructure. You'll see registrars, for example, who have reseller networks say, "Look, don't start a registrar. Just become a reseller. I've already got the infrastructure in place." That might be the fastest, easiest way to start up a business because it requires very little capital.

There's a clear incentive for European and North American providers to figure out how to get into this marketspace by supporting, for example, the reseller market or white label market. I definitely think they can grow their business that way, too.

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BAHER ESMAT: Okay. We have one last question here, the gentleman. Please introduce yourself.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Thank you. I'm from Houghton Richards. A number of questions, but I had the same question for Tom. Thank you for the answer. Appreciate it.

We're investors in IDNs, so we're part of the demand of the market, so we're out buying them on behalf of clients and on behalf of trademark groups and such, and private investors. In fact, we represent the largest holding of IDNs across the board. Obviously this particular sector is of interest to us in its synergy moving forward.

What I see, from an investor point of view, the demand point of view, is where the Chinese IDNs seem to have a flow between the registries and registrars, and obviously that feedback to ICANN. I don't quite see it in this sector. Am I missing something in that regard? Where does ICANN see its role in promoting these IDNs, is the first question. Then, obviously, from the registry and registrar's point of view, there seems to be this back and forth in regards to whose obligation of it is to get public awareness up? Does ICANN think it's its obligation to help get public awareness up or does it feel it's the registry and registrar's involvement?

BAHER ESMAT: On the first question, the promotion of IDNs, I'm not sure I'm the right person to address that. We have an IDN within ICANN, but I'm not sure if our role as ICANN is to promote IDNs per se. I believe ICANN's role is

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to make IDNs available by means of, as you know, working from the early days with the technical community on ensuring that standards are in place, and today they're working on the variants and all this.

So making sure that it's there from the policy side, from the technical side, process side, the fast track. This is I guess our role, then. How IDNs are progressing in the different regions in China as opposed to the Middle East.

I am not sure if there is something there that ICANN can do, other than our normal engagement effort that we do as an engagement team within ICANN. IDNs have always had space in all our workshops and presentations and all this. This is on the first point.

I'm not exactly sure about your second point. I either have missed it or misunderstood. Can you repeat the second point, the registry/registrar point?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: This crossover and the push. I haven't read the document in detail, but the push to put more registrars on ground. It's about the consumer. Where do we see whose role, registry or registrar – obviously, [inaudible] answered that. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT: Okay. Again, as far as the Middle East strategy is concerned, with all the work that has been taking place whether the workshop forums, the DNS study, the DNS center, or objective from all this is not to increase the number of registries or registrars. Our key objective is to make sure that

people – community at large – have access to the knowledge, whatever that knowledge is on the technical side, on the policy side, the business side.

After that, how and what are they going to do with this knowledge? That's their call. But we're not aiming – this is not the objective, to increase registries or registrars.

We're just on time. It's 12:00 PM sharp and I think we need to allow the next session or panel to get prepared. I'd like to thank you very much for coming today and staying with us to the end. I look forward to continuing working with you and updating you on our Middle East strategy work. Thank you. And of course, many thanks to our panelists today and the interpreter. Thank you very much.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]

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