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BASIS

Business Action to Support
the Information Society

ICC/BASIS preliminary contribution regarding “Taking stock and way forward” session at the IGF in Rio, advisory group, and preparations for Rio

Members of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and its initiative, Business Action to Support the Information Society (BASIS), companies and business associations from around the world and from all sectors, submit this preliminary contribution ahead of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (12-15 November 2007) to contribute to the multi-stakeholder discussions regarding the IGF during the “Taking stock and way forward” session and after Rio, and other preparatory matters.

In his invitation to all stakeholders to participate in the second Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the UN Secretary General stated that: “The Forum is modest in its means but not in its aspirations. Its hallmark is multi-stakeholder collaboration, based on the exchange of information and the sharing of best practices. This new form of international cooperation is both **inclusive and egalitarian**. And it presents governments, the private sector and civil society, including academic and technical communities, with the opportunity to work together towards a sustainable, robust, secure and stable Internet, as envisioned by the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.” [emphasis added]

In keeping with this vision, the Secretary General provided the following guidance on appointment of the IGF Advisory Group: “As part of its mandate, the Advisory Group has been asked to enhance the transparency of the preparatory process by ensuring a continuous flow of information between its members and the various interested groups. It has also been requested to make proposals on a suitable rotation among its members, based on recommendations from the various interested groups. Any decision on how to prepare subsequent meetings will be taken **after** the Rio de Janeiro meeting **in an open, inclusive and transparent consultative process**, taking into account the proposals of the Advisory Group.” [emphasis added]

ICC and BASIS members support the IGF because it provides a unique opportunity to exchange views and best practices on a wide variety of important policy issues that affect continued development of the Internet, and can help bring its economic and social benefits to more people around the world. The strength of this new model in international cooperation is that it joins together governmental and non-governmental actors through a multi-stakeholder approach, with all participants on an equal footing. This exact model was the result of much discussion at the WSIS in Geneva and Tunis, and remains the essential basis for any future meetings.

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The private sector around the world has a fundamental role in the continued development of the Internet, investment in infrastructure, and innovative applications and services. Business participation and support for the IGF is based on the continued adherence to the multi-stakeholder equal footing approach in all aspects of the IGF.

“Taking stock and way forward session”

To support the UN Secretary General’s vision and help the Advisory Group with its task, ICC/BASIS members believe that the “Taking stock and way forward” session at the IGF in Rio is a chance to reflect on the unique opportunity presented by the IGF for all stakeholders to come together to discuss Internet governance related issues in a non-negotiating setting with all participants on an equal footing.

We support the participation of advisory group members in this session as panelists along with others from the IGF community.

We believe it is premature to attempt to ‘evaluate’ the IGF and its mandate when only one full meeting out of the five planned meetings has concluded. To attempt to do so in Rio would not be a productive use of limited resources and time.

On the contrary, a productive discussion should focus on the following:

- What has been the substantive added value of the IGF for all participants?
- How well has the meeting provided for a full sharing of experience and best practices?
- Do participants feel they gained new information and ideas that will help them address challenges in their home countries?
- Has increased dialogue on Internet governance issues led to more participation at the national, regional and international levels ?
- What can the IGF do to support these goals in preparation for the next IGF in India in 2008?
- How well were the critical cross-cutting themes of capacity building and development integrated into the exchanges in Rio, and how can we draw more attention to them next year?
- Has the IGF provided a unique opportunity for stakeholders involved in the WSIS processes to discuss issues with other stakeholders, for example those involved in APEC, OECD, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, ITU, ICANN and ISOC?
- How can the IGF continue to contribute to ensuring meaningful multi-stakeholder cooperation and community building?
- Have the host governments performed their role in a neutral, impartial manner, both prior to and throughout the meetings in Athens and Rio?



As the UN Secretary General specified, any decision on how to prepare subsequent meetings must be taken after the IGF in Rio in an open, inclusive and transparent consultative process, taking into account the proposals of the Advisory Group. Thus, the discussions during this session in Rio are meant to capture initial thoughts from stakeholders.

IGF advisory group leadership

The Tunis agenda states in Paragraph 73. **“The Internet Governance Forum, in its working and function, will be multilateral, multi-stakeholder, democratic and transparent.”** [emphasis added]

ICC/BASIS members believe that these principles also extend to the selection process of participants in the IGF and the advisory group’s inner functions.

Indeed, ICC/BASIS was surprised to learn that the government hosting the IGF was suddenly appointed as a Co-Chair, purportedly equal in its role to Mr Desai. Mr Desai’s impartiality and neutrality, leadership skills and unwavering commitment to the equality of all stakeholders, combined with strong support from the Executive Coordinator of the IGF secretariat, were responsible for getting the IGF off to a promising start. While we are comfortable with the host country playing a leading role on logistical issues, we are concerned that giving the host government a leading substantive role upsets the careful balance that underpins the IGF. It can also call into question the traditionally neutral role that the host of an international meeting is supposed to play, and would lead to a very different selection process.

The Greek government understood this important distinction well, and sent a representative to the advisory group whose role was limited to logistical issues without influencing the substantive agenda or issues beyond those related to the venue. Changing the role of the host government is inconsistent with the principles of the multi-stakeholder approach that are so important for a balanced and impartial process and the continued success of the IGF. There should be no confusion that the role of the host country is to provide logistical and organizational support for the event.

We hope the current configuration of having two “Co-chairs” is a temporary measure. There should be careful evaluation of how it worked, during the IGF in Rio and after, before a decision is taken on how best to integrate the host next year into planning for the next IGF, in consultation with all stakeholders. It should be clear that the new Co-chair’s role concludes with the end of the IGF in Rio. The Advisory Group and the open consultation in early 2008 should review the concept and provide advice to the UN Secretary General before any decision is made regarding the 2008 IGF.

Advisory group composition

ICC/BASIS believes that the advisory group is a valuable resource for advice for preparation of the programme for the IGF secretariat. We do not support changing its role. A formal bureau structure, for example, would not be appropriate for the IGF.



Indeed, the IGF's strength lies precisely in its ability to create a working dialogue *among* different participants and stakeholder groups.

We note that competition, open markets and the business sector in general are major foundational building blocks in the rapid and continued development of the Internet. Without them, the Internet would not have had the investment, diversity of applications and creative adaptation to different markets that have established this form of communication as a fundamental element of any thriving economy. Other stakeholders have important roles to play in the governance of the Internet. It would be counter-productive to lose sight of the continuing, basic importance of the private sector to the achievement of the Tunis commitments, and the important involvement of other stakeholders such as the technical community and civil society.

The balance of stakeholder representatives is already in the favor of governments. As a result, the number of advisory group members from the other stakeholder groups must not decrease in any way. We do support a renewal and rotation process for the advisory group and believe that active participation and attendance could be part of the criteria applied to determine the renewal or rotation of members. ICC/BASIS welcomes discussions regarding increasing the transparency of the advisory group, and looks forward to further work on this issue at the group's next meeting in late January/early February 2008.

Remote participation

We appreciated the efforts that were made at the IGF in Athens to provide facilities for remote participation by stakeholders around the world in the IGF discussions. ICC/BASIS encourages the preparations for this important and novel feature of the IGF in Rio to ensure that stakeholders who cannot be present can easily contribute to the interactive discussions in Rio, and that the logistical facilities can efficiently support remote participation.

Summaries

ICC/BASIS has consistently supported the reporting back sessions by the IGF secretariat, and Mr Desai at the IGF in Athens. We believe that the comprehensive reports prepared by the IGF secretariat, and the real-time transcripts provide helpful and neutral summaries that capture the rich discussions and various viewpoints that are a key strength of the IGF.

We are confident our 2007 hosts will ensure that any Chairman's summary is a balanced summation of these reporting sessions that occur each day, and that they work with Mr. Desai and the IGF secretariat to continue the important practice of providing neutral and balanced summaries of all discussions.



What is Business Action to Support the Information Society (BASIS)?

ICC created BASIS to serve as the voice of business in the global dialogue on the Information Society, following the two World Summits on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005). BASIS participates in UN-linked forums set up to continue the dialogue, such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), Global Alliance for ICT and Development (GAID), and the WSIS follow-up and implementation processes.

BASIS builds on the activities and network of the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI), which ICC formed to coordinate participation by world business in the processes leading up to and at the Summits in Geneva and Tunis.

To promote the environment in which global business will continue to thrive as an innovator of these technologies, BASIS will mobilize business to help shape the agenda and participate in these global discussions. The initiative aims to unite the business community, to raise awareness among the public, governments, civil society, intergovernmental organizations and technical authorities of what business requires to continue contributing to the development of the Information Society. BASIS relies on policies developed in ICC's Commission on E-business, IT and Telecoms (EBITT) as the foundation for its efforts.

For further information regarding BASIS, the founding partners, members and activities, please consult the BASIS website at: <http://www.iccwbo.org/basis>.

About ICC

The International Chamber of Commerce is the largest, most representative business organization in the world. Its thousands of member companies in over 130 countries have interests spanning every sector of private enterprise.

A world network of national committees keeps the ICC International Secretariat in Paris informed about national and regional business priorities. More than 2000 experts drawn from ICC's member companies feed their knowledge and experience into crafting the ICC stance on specific business issues. The United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and many other intergovernmental bodies, both international and regional, are kept in touch with the views of international business through ICC.

For more information please visit: www.iccwbo.org