

Fourth Meeting of the UK Internet Governance Forum: Report and Summary

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CRUNCH TIME FOR THE IGF – AN APPEAL FOR SUPPORT

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was set up by the United Nations 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis to provide a framework for all stakeholders – including governments, business, Parliamentarians and civil society – to discuss Internet policy and governance issues.

It was recognised that the traditional approaches of intergovernmental treaties would not be able to respond to the challenges of such a rapidly-changing environment, and the format of the IGF recognises the importance of multi-stakeholder co-operation to address Internet issues, Nominet Deputy Chairman Gordon Dick told the February meeting of the UK IGF.

The global IGF meets annually, with the fourth meeting taking place in November 2009 in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, attended by participants from 112 countries.

As in previous years, the UK had a good attendance in Egypt, said Dick. “The UK has strongly supported the IGF process, and has been taking the lead in showing the importance of constructive and positive engagement through the UK Internet Governance Forum, our own national partnership formed in the co-operative, multi-stakeholder mould of the global IGF.”

Nominet has been involved in the UK IGF from the start, he said, as it believes the self-regulatory model is an effective way of addressing Internet issues. “It is a lightweight model, and can therefore be quick to respond to changing demands.”

But self-regulation doesn’t mean doing nothing, said Dick, and the UK IGF needs to actively identify the areas of concern, and understand what others are doing in these areas, to find where the best solutions might lie as we work towards the fifth IGF meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania in September 2010.

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, Financial Secretary to the Treasury and BIS Minister responsible for Digital Britain, told the UK meeting: “The discussion today comes at an important time for Internet governance”.

The UK fully supports the ‘Affirmation of Commitments’ made by the Internet’s technical co-ordination body ICANN and the US government to ensure Internet governance remains open and accountable and facilitates international participation, Timms said. “We are pleased that work is progressing to establish the first review of ICANN’s accountability and transparency, but I do think it’s important that this work is accelerated, and that it does clearly show the importance of the multi-stakeholder approach in Internet governance,” he said.

“I think it isn’t always sufficiently well understood how this process relates both to the renewal of the IGF mandate, and building confidence in the IGF...I think we have to be able to show how we are delivering with the arrangements as they currently stand.”

One of the main possible alternatives to the IGF as a means of governing the Internet would be an expansion of the remit of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a UN agency which oversees global co-ordination of telecommunications, the February meeting heard. The ITU will be holding its four-yearly ‘Plenipotentiary Conference’ in Mexico this October, said Timms, and member governments were sure to debate the body’s potential role in Internet governance.

“The ITU is a very venerable institution, it has very many strengths, and vast experience,” Timms said. “But I don’t think the management of the Internet as an appropriate role for it to take on. For one thing, public policy issues, [such as] child protection...cannot be resolved simply by a discussion between governments, any more than they can be resolved in a discussion just between businesses. Wider views are needed.”

Sole responsibility for Internet governance should not be handed to a purely intergovernmental organisation, he said, “and for that reason alone the ITU is not the appropriate body to take this on.”

Looking ahead to Vilnius, Timms said: “I think it’s essential that it remains a forum where everybody can come together and exchange views, where no country is considered more important than any other country.”



The IGF has been a considerable success over the last four years, Timms said. But the UN process is underway to review IGF achievements, and to decide whether the mandate should be renewed. Over the coming year discussions in various UN bodies such as the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and in the Economic and Social Council will lead to recommendations to the UN General Assembly in December, on whether and in what form the IGF should continue.

The UK government; the UK IGF; and consultations held in Sharm el Sheikh all strongly support a further five-year renewal of the IGF mandate, Timms said. "So my appeal today is for everybody to work together, in this grouping but also in other fora where people here are members, to highlight the importance and value of this unique multi-stakeholder discussion on the Internet."

LAUNCH OF NOMINET INTERNET AWARDS 2010: PROMOTING BEST PRACTICE

Part of the Internet Governance Forum's mandate is to facilitate the exchange of information about best practice 'to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet', Lesley Cowley, Nominet Chief Executive, told the UK IGF.

The Nominet Internet Awards were devised to further this practical approach, she said.

The awards were launched in 2007 as the Best Practice Challenge, and in their new incarnation, the 2010 Nominet Internet Awards, still aimed "to provide an opportunity to celebrate all of the good things that are happening on the Internet, and the work of so many organisations and individuals, who often go unrecognised, but who really help to make the Internet safer, more open, more accessible and more diverse," Cowley said.

This year there were fewer award categories, to make the process more accessible, she said. The five new categories are 'Getting people online', for digital inclusion; 'Making the Internet safer', about helping people protect themselves and increasing trust in the Internet; 'Opening the world of knowledge', about sharing knowledge, access to knowledge, and the use of compelling content; 'Empowering young people and citizens', about providing different channels to make voices heard, including young people, marginalised communities, and isolated individuals; and 'Nurturing powerful local partnerships', about finding examples of 'thinking globally and acting locally'.

"When people talk about Internet governance it's very easy to talk about barriers, concerns or dangers, and get very negative," Cowley said. "This is about a refocus on creativity, achievements, innovation and opportunities that have allowed us to draw so much benefit from the Internet, and will allow us to draw that from the Internet in the future too."

Applicants can find out more about the awards and enter online at:
www.nominet.org.uk/go/internetawards/

Rt Hon Alun Michael MP, who chairs the awards' judging panel, said the judges look for both quality and innovation. They also seek "exemplification": "Successful entries must demonstrate an outcome, not just an aspiration that it would be nice to be able to produce a particular type of outcome."

Size of a project is not only unimportant, "it's almost totally irrelevant", Michael said: past winners had ranged from major multinationals such as Barclays Bank which won for its home bank-card authentication device; to Screenreader.net, a company run by two people making text-to-speech software for people with impaired vision.

Representative from four past winners – Childnet, Internet Watch Foundation, MySociety and YouthNet – told the meeting that winning an award had many benefits including awareness-raising helping raise new funds. Will Gardner, chief executive of Childnet International which won an award last year for personal safety online for its KidSMART website (www.kidsmart.org.uk), said: "It is useful to have that external validation, to be recognised as good practice. Childnet is a charity, and we need to raise funds, and it is definitely an asset to be a Nominet award-winner when we go out to find that external support." Adam McGregor of MySociety (<http://www.mysociety.org/>) said: "We don't have a huge advertising budget, so picking up these awards is a really useful way of us achieving silent promotion, and we notice that there is suddenly interest in what we do in the run-up to awards and afterwards."

MESSAGES FROM SHARM EL SHEIKH

Four UK Parliamentarians who attended the 2009 IGF meeting in Sharm el Sheikh – Andrew Miller MP, Derek Wyatt MP; Ian Taylor MBE MP; Rt Hon Alun Michael MP – reported back on workstreams in which they had taken an active role. These were Children and young people; Green ICT; Internet as a force for good; and Security and e-crime.

1: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Andrew Miller MP said he had been asked to act a panellist for the Youth IGF project in Sharm el Sheikh by UK charity Childnet, in partnership with the Egyptian organisation Net Amman.

“I made a pitch that young people ought to be brought to the centre of the stakeholder process”, Miller said. “The technologies are moving so fast that people in the youngest age group who are using and applying the technologies really ought to be at the heart of the process.

“I think there is a recognition by the organisers that what happened was hugely successful. All the issues over which lawyers have crawled [such as] privacy policy for social networking...were expressed succinctly in very pertinent terms by these young people. They pushed aside all the mumbo jumbo and homed in on the way it affects them.”

2: GREEN ICT

Derek Wyatt MP said UK representation on issues relating to ICT and environmental sustainability had been “outstanding”, but overall, “there was a paucity of debate, and a lack of real understanding”.

“For instance, when you go and buy your mobile, do you know how much carbon it costs to make that mobile? When the iPhone first came out, nearly 80 % of it wasn’t recyclable. It took a pounding from Greenpeace to change this, but now just over 90 % is recyclable, so good on Apple, but bad on Apple’s great designers for not thinking this through from the start. We’ve got to start to think, how you do it to begin with?” A mechanism must be found to draw up a guide to best practice ahead of the next IGF meeting, he said.

Mark Carvell of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills said one of the key mechanisms for raising the green agenda ahead of Vilnius was through the dynamic coalition on internet and climate change (DICCC), which involves government agencies, industry and other stakeholders worldwide. “Those who are really interested should engage with it.”

Philip Sheldrake of ICT industry body Intellect, said Intellect had published a report in 2008 called ‘High Tech: Low Carbon’. “It’s difficult to assess the impact on our carbon footprint of what we do, so actually one of the things we need to do is invest further in technology, particularly in the ‘Internet of things’... distributed sensors so we can understand where our carbon footprint lies,” Sheldrake said. “What we should possibly look at doing is increasing the percentage the ICT industry is responsible for in the globe’s carbon footprint...which may actually help us drastically reduce the footprints of other sectors.”

David Evans of British Computer Society said the biggest problem was energy use. “Datacentres are incredibly complex environments, and if you are talking about spreading loads between a datacentre and a laptop that’s being remotely worked on, trying to understand where the energy use is ... is very difficult. The BCS has created a simulator for datacentres to help understand where energy is used, he said. “So as a country we have actually been playing a leadership role in this area. Perhaps what we really need to do is have a greater awareness and understanding of where we are.”

Concluding, Derek Wyatt proposed the creation of a web portal to collate all relevant reports and projects to help present key messages to the IGF at Vilnius and be offered as an internationally valuable resource.

3: INTERNET AS A FORCE FOR GOOD

For Internet to be a force for good, first of all people need access to it, and access is a problem in many areas, Ian Taylor MBE MP said. The fact that the Internet is growing in parts of the world where they don't have normal power sources is driving use of photovoltaic cells and other means of getting power to these locations, and increasing use of broadband from satellites. So desire for access is driving a leapfrog in technologies in some parts of the world.

The Internet also has the power to bring together disparate communities, Taylor said. "Access can bring together people in schools in different countries, and offer information sources at your finger-tips. But the confidence factor is the key, and the underlying theme at the IGF was the question of how much confidence people have in using the Internet."

One of the main reasons for promoting digital inclusion is the desire to provide government services online, Taylor said, "and therefore governments do have an interest in trying to drive it out. You can't tell people they have to do it, so education is a big part."

However, Internet access is not just a problem because of power, or connectivity, he said. "One of the paradoxes of the IGF is that some of the countries that participate very noisily are also ones that try and restrict access to their people, for political reasons." Ultimately, different countries have different attitudes to the ability of their citizens to have free speech on the Internet, he said. "There are still elements within the IGF that want to get much more regulated, much more organised to provide filters for openness. I think that's the wrong way forward, and I think we should be careful about some of the institutions that would like to tell us how openness should be best handled."

4: SECURITY AND E-CRIME

"Unless we can tackle some of the most difficult issues in relation to the 'bad' things on the Internet, we are not going to have credibility for the concept of free and co-operative approach to Internet governance", said Rt Hon Alun Michael MP. "Because sooner or later people will do what they always do when they see things they don't like, which is to say there ought to be a law against it, and that someone ought to have responsibility for stopping it. This takes us back to the idea of a UN agency to own and control the Internet, and I think that way lies madness."

So how do we increase security? "I would suggest that only a small element of crime and nuisance activity in the online world is dealt with either by individual protection or investigation by law enforcement agencies. An awful lot on the Internet is regulated by the communities that use the Internet."

There would always be some dangers which can only be dealt with by governments, by legislation and structural approaches, said Michael, "but there are many other things which if we want the strength and the freedom of the Internet we have to find different ways of governing. If we can't deal with the bad stuff though, how will be able to maintain the freedom? As an Internet community we have to ask the questions about how we create a safer community for the future, and how we, in the UK, produce exemplars to inform the debate internationally. "This is what the IGF process is all about."

Sue Daley of Symantec said she had been to Sharm el Sheikh and "security and privacy came up in every session". But there was no single, 'silver bullet' solution: "There is a technology role here, but there is also an education and awareness issue and a skills issue that needs to be addressed, and also making sure organisations, governments and businesses, have the policies and procedures in place to make sure that their networks and their part of the Internet is working."

THE FUTURE OF THE IGF, A ROADMAP – AND HOW TO MAKE YOUR VOICE COUNT

Markus Kummer, Executive Co-ordinator, IGF, said the outcome of the meeting in Sharm el Sheikh had been overwhelming support for an extension of the IGF's mandate. However, a few voices had called for the forum to become a formal intergovernmental negotiating body, with greater funding from the General Assembly, not voluntary contributions.

"Ultimately, the question of what kind of Internet Governance Forum we want is also one of what kind of Internet do we want?" said Kummer. "Do we want a government-controlled Internet, or do we want a bottom-up, multi-stakeholder Internet?" The paradox is that the process has been a multi-stakeholder process up until now, but the decision on extending the IGF's mandate rests with governments, he said. "If you want to make your voice count, you have to talk to your government. And whether [all] governments share the assessments of participants at the IGF will be another story."

Nick Thorne, International Relations Adviser, ICANN and former British Ambassador to the UN, said the multi-stakeholder approach is what is special about the IGF, but "if it is going to be multi-stakeholder, it is absolutely vital that all of those stakeholders speak up, and make their voices heard. Otherwise one group, possibly government, will monopolise the debate."

He said that while most people agreed an emphasis on best practice was the best way to go, "we do need to make sure that we are not seen to be preaching." And he warned strongly against any moves to remove the IGF's non-decision-making status. "If a body like the IGF starts making decisions, it wastes 90 % of its time on those decisions, and it loses its purpose. So if we want to maintain a forum where we can usefully exchange best practice and good ideas, then let's not start having it take decisions."

The Internet is too important to be left to governments, said Rt Hon Alun Michael MP. "We know that it's international by nature, therefore it can't just be left to an individual government, and if you're not careful you end up in the international machinery."

"But you also can't just leave it to industry, or business, and assume everything is going to be OK. And that's where Parliamentarians and non-governmental organisations come in. If you have Parliamentarians across the parties then the implication is it's not just the government of the time, but those involved in politics across the board. And the voices of civil society can express those things that have not quite got onto the top of the agenda of political decision-making. In this respect, the IGF process "is achieving far more than we ever had any right to expect," he said. "We need to develop a theory of Internet governance, just as people are reinventing company governance, and governments and Parliamentarians are having to reinvent the activity of representing people. I don't think we're anywhere near the conclusions."

Ian Taylor MBE MP said the bottom-up IGF process was working but "If I have one worry, I think it's underestimated by business, and I thought business was grossly under-represented [in Egypt]. Multi-stakeholders mean all the stakeholders need to be there. "Let us make sure that the IGF process is what it is supposed to be: dynamic, interesting, bottom-up, showcasing ideas."

Derek Wyatt MP said the IGF is successful in bringing people together, but it needed to be more than a meeting place. "Why don't we think about the IGF regional groups and country groups as a think-tank? So [we could] agree that the three biggest issues we will face in the next six months are x, y and z, and we focus all our attention on those three issues. And other groups like the US could look at another three issues."

Andrew Miller MP said the trigger for the IGF debate "the day that any one of us could sit in our living rooms, press a button and transfer money across international frontiers without the interference of the state. At that point, the shape of the world changed, and we need a new machinery. We don't know what that new machinery is, and we're still working on it. At the moment we call it the IGF, and there are tensions that pull from on the one extreme those who say we need a duplicate ITU, and on the other extreme it has got to be a completely anarchic operation."

“Neither of those extremes are the truth. The reality is that there have to be controls about criminality, child safety and so on, so we do need mechanisms, but at the same time we want the structure to be driven by people who are the genuine stakeholders. That tension will remain, and we’ve got to move it gently along the right road.

“But I think we’re on the way towards a new model which is going to continue to be challenging, because by definition it is running at a supra-national level, and we are inevitably going to have little collisions from time to time with countries that have not developed liberal democracies.”

Malcolm Hutton of the London Internet Exchange (LINX), said: “I understand those who [see the IGF] it as a non-decision-making body, that just meets once a year for a talk, and they think, what [does] that really achieve? But I think that would profoundly misunderstand the value of the IGF, if you take it out of the context of progress over time, and if you take it out of the context of the alternatives.

For our own engagement, we have been promoting the role of Internet exchanges in driving down the costs of deploying Internet infrastructure, particularly in the developing world. We’ve been promoting direct interconnection of traffic locally as a means to achieving that. Now when we started with this message in the first IGF it was very much in the context of raising awareness of the idea, and over time it’s been talking with the regulators about, would this really apply to my country? And at the most recent IGF, it was about OK, we’ve got an Internet exchange in our country now, but how do we make a success of it?

I would say that is real progress. So it is that process over time that has raised awareness. But it is also about what the alternative is. Because the alternative is... a power grab by the ITU. And the people promoting that often are doing that from some quite harmful attitudes and objectives.

China in the ITU has been actively trying to change the whole payment structure of the Internet onto a count every bit and charge for every bit basis, and ours is the alternative, much more free approach, that doesn’t play into the fragmentation of the Internet that that policy would achieve. So I think we should be very scared of the alternative and we should work to make the IGF a success... if we go for the alternative of a negotiating forum, that would do real harm to the basis on which the Internet is constituted, both for the business community and for society more generally.”

Dr Louise Bennett of the British Computer Society (BCS) said if progress on cutting e-crime was to be made at Vilnius, “a really important thing for the IGF to focus on is the electronic identity of the websites of companies and individuals. It is because we are uncertain about the identity of those we are communicating with, transacting with, that we have lack of security.”

Khaled Fattal of The Multilingual Internet Group said the current format of the IGF “has served very well in bringing people together”, but it was inevitable that some kind of more regulatory format would have to be developed to tackle some serious issues. “Child pornography online is something that you will get everyone ... to say we need to do something about. But despite the global desire to address this issue, we still have not been able to come up with a format that can actually address this issue.

“So it is inevitable that we will need to have some kind of regulation. Whether the format of the IGF can deliver that now, or in the future, I’m not so sure.”

Nick Thorne said he did not agree a move towards regulation was inevitable, “and I sense the majority in this room is not going in that direction, but you’re absolutely right, there are a series of huge questions out there that need to be addressed.”

Summing up, he said, “I didn’t hear anybody who was not in favour of working for a renewal of the mandate of the IGF, which has turned out to be probably a considerably more useful forum than any of us expected.

“But we do need to remember that the decision to renew it will be taken by governments, not by the multi-stakeholder community of the IGF itself. It will be taken in the General Assembly in New York, and so it is very



important that we all do everything we can to persuade our colleagues from other countries to ensure the message gets through to their government representatives that we want to see the mandate renewed.”

Closing the session Lesley Cowley, Chief Executive of Nominet, said there are three key components to the way ahead: “A need for everyone to have their say in Internet governance; a need to build on previous successes; and a need for UK support for the multi-stakeholder approach that is at the very heart of the IGF.”

NOTE: This report was written for Nominet and the UK IGF by Dan Jellinek of technology and social policy analysts Headstar (www.headstar.com). It is based on the sessions which took place at the Fourth Meeting of the UK Internet Governance Forum in Westminster on 3 February 2010. A separate fuller edited transcript of the meeting is available from Nominet. Videos and transcripts of sessions from the fourth IGF meeting in Sharm el Sheikh can also be found at:
<http://www.un.org/webcast/igf/ondemand.asp>