



2 February 2007

### **From Athens to Rio de Janeiro:**

#### **Building on the success of the first Internet Governance Forum.**

The Internet Society is pleased to provide the following contribution to the Internet Governance Forum secretariat's call for input on the IGF Athens stock-taking and on the way forward (to IGF Rio).

The Internet Society has been a central supporter of the IGF since its inception during the final Tunis round of the World Summit on the Information Society. We believe that the IGF can serve a useful role by providing a forum for discussion on a range of issues of importance in the realm of ICTs, the Internet and economic development. The discussions held in Athens began to touch upon the fundamental issue the World Summit on the Information Society was seeking to address, specifically how to harness the power of ICTs for development and for meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

The IGF and its multi-stakeholder dialogue have proven to be a valuable space for bringing together diverse stakeholders to compare experience and best practices, to appreciate the spectrum of views on issues of clear importance to developed and developing countries alike, and to facilitate community-building. The various initiatives – dynamic coalitions – that have sprung from the IGF are a good indicator of the importance of this event to catalyzing groups of stakeholders in key issue areas.

Central to the IGF's relevance and purpose is the common understanding and agreement that it is not a decision-making body, that it is multistakeholder and that it is a meeting of equals. These fundamental principles underpin the IGF and have contributed to its uniqueness and to its success to date.

IGF Athens provided the secretariat and the Advisory Group with significant experience that should contribute to ensuring that IGF Rio will build upon the successes to date. The following brief comments highlight the learnings from Athens and provide some suggestions for Rio.

- Focus

In early 2006, the Internet Society, along with other stakeholder representatives, suggested that the IGF have a development and capacity building focus. We were pleased to see this important focus as a cross-cutting theme for IGF Athens. Given its importance and given its support among IGF participants, this thread should be retained and built upon for Rio.

The four areas discussed in Athens – openness, diversity, security and access – clearly embraced some of the most important and pressing issues facing stakeholders in the area of Internet governance. However, what became clear in Athens was that the breadth of discussion and expertise meant that the discussion could not necessarily reach the depth and detail that the audience might have wanted.

The IGF has an opportunity to explore the broad issues covered in Athens in more detail in Rio. The IGF should focus more specifically and in more detail on, for example:

- Within diversity: local content development and how it contributes to promoting multilingualism,
- Within security: security concerns in developing countries
- Within access: the importance of skills development and human and institutional capacity building in the access space, and
- Policy, regulatory, and economic environments that facilitate greater access to the Internet and ICTs.

The opportunity to discuss these more specific issues at the next level of detail would be extremely useful and would ensure that the output of the IGF contributes to the development of more concrete plans when participants return home to their country/organization.

This will of course necessitate the development and agreement of the agenda as soon as possible so that the structuring of the sessions, securing speakers and other critical steps are undertaken as far ahead of the Rio meeting as possible.

- Expertise

The IGF's success is dependent on a number of factors and securing expert speakers is one of the most critical. Clearly the invitation process needs to start earlier than it did for IGF Athens: with greater lead time the IGF should be able to entice a complement of experts to Rio to enrich the discussion and facilitate better interaction.

We would also note that it will be important to have relevant experts from different geographies and communities so as to ensure that the discussion is pertinent to all stakeholders, and particularly those from developing countries. An ongoing focus on expertise that contributes to spurring the deployment and use of the Internet around the globe is essential.

The other element that was not sufficiently explored in Athens due to the time constraints and the wide ranging debate were best practices related to the focus areas. The Internet Society would like to see a much greater focus on best practices sharing, during the expert panel sessions and in the workshops and plaza (see below).

- Format

The overall structure of IGF Athens worked well, with the opening and emerging issues sessions, the four panels and the workshops. However, we do feel that some improvements could be made that would drive greater value from the event.

We found the larger, opening sessions good for setting the scene and having a full range of participants from across the stakeholders was useful, however, we believe that having smaller panels with more targeted agenda items will lend themselves to more focused discussion. We believe smaller panel sessions would also be more conducive to interaction, allow panelists and the audience to explore issues more in depth, and facilitate a better exchange of views and sharing of experience. Smaller panels and a more defined subject matter will provide even greater value for the participants.

The workshops in Athens were important and useful; however, overlapping the workshops with main sessions on similar topics was problematic. Not only was this difficult to manage from a participant point of view it was also difficult to manage from an administrative and logistical perspective. We believe that there should be increased linkages between the panel sessions and the proposed workshops, and that the workshops should follow their related main session panel – not held simultaneously. This does not mean that all workshops must be session-related but that those that are should be held after the main sessions, not simultaneously.

The format of IGF Rio should ensure that stakeholders can truly share their expertise and build communities of interest. We encourage the IGF and the Advisory group to consider how these might be furthered through providing additional meeting space in Rio. The concept of the “plaza” should be revisited in this context: it should play a more central role and have a more central location in the event, allowing for further collaborative efforts to spawn.

- Participation

Participation in Athens was wide-ranging both in terms of expertise and geography. However, more can and should be done to ensure developing country representation. As others, the Internet Society facilitated the participation of a number of developing country speakers and workshop panelists and will do so again for Rio. However, we would suggest that the IGF and its Advisory Group consider additional ways and means to ensure that the fullest developing country participation is encouraged. Stakeholder and geographic diversity is essential to the IGF’s success.

- Advisory Group

The Internet Society has had the pleasure of participating in the Advisory Group (AG) of the IGF and looks forward to continuing in that role. The AG has played a very important role in a number of respects: providing guidance as to the areas of focus for the IGF; ensuring the balance of interests were represented in the IGF; assisting in the myriad of logistical issues; and, providing a “hands-on” resource during the Athens event itself.

The AG worked well, was truly multistakeholder in its composition and brought value and direction to the IGF. Given the significant experience gathered through the process of preparing for Athens we support the continuation of the AG in its current format through IGF Rio.

In conclusion, the Internet Society believes that the IGF provides stakeholders with an unparalleled opportunity to look at some of the opportunities and challenges that impact the Internet in a unique collaborative and best practices sharing environment. The Internet Society looks forward to its continued participation in the IGF process and to a very successful IGF meeting in Rio.

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Internet Governance Forum related materials and commentary can be found on the Internet Society website at <http://www.isoc.org/pubpolpillar/athens.shtml>

More general information on Internet governance can also be found on the Internet Society website here <http://www.isoc.org/pubpolpillar/faq.shtml>.