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BARCELONA – Middle East Strategy: The Way Forward  
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WALID ALSAQAF: Hello, Michael. Hello, everyone.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, hi, Walid. Good morning. We can hear you.

WALID ALSAQAF: Okay, very good. As long as it works, I guess.

BAHER ESMAT: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the Middle East Regional Strategy session. Just a couple of housekeeping notes. We have interpretation in English, Arabic, and French. So those who would like to speak in any of the three languages, you have the option. And also we have some coffee if you want to still warm up.

So today we're going to talk about the ICANN Regional Strategy in the Middle East. We're going to give a quick recap of where we currently are and then we're going to have an open discussion on a way forward. Just for those who are not following the work of the Regional Strategy Group closely, there has been discussion on the mailing list with regard to the way forward because the current strategy ends in June 2019. So the community should probably start thinking about a

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way forward and how they want to proceed with the ICANN regional work.

So before getting directly to the agenda, I would like to welcome Nick Tomasso. Nick Tomasso is the ICANN Vice-President for meetings, but is also the General Manager of the ICANN Regional Office for Middle East and Africa in Istanbul. Nick.

NICK TOMASSO:

Thank you, Baher. And good morning, everyone. It's good to be here with all of you today and thanks for taking the time out of your busy schedules to do that. I know it's not easy. As Baher mentioned, I'm heading up the Middle East and Africa Regional Office which is headquartered in Istanbul. We set up this office five years ago, but it was really set up primarily to manage a timezone from Scandinavia to South Africa. And what we did about 15 months ago, is to repurpose the office to focus on the Middle East and Africa solely, no longer developing strategy for Europe. I have a counterpart up in Brussels who handles the Europe office.

So our focus is to determine and execute on better serving the community in the Middle East. And Baher, Fahd, and I work very closely together to do that. I know we have an upcoming Middle East DNS Forum in conjunction with APTLD in Dubai in February. I hope to see and be able to meet with many of you there. And I look forward to engaging with you further. And please do not hesitate to reach out to me. We are certainly in very capable hands with Baher and Fahd, but

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never hesitate to reach out to me directly if you would like to. And I hope I can do the same occasionally with you. So thank you very much.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you, Nick. So moving on to our first agenda item. Just a quick introduction. So the work of the Regional Strategy started back in 2012 when a group of community members came together to form the first Regional Strategy Working Group to work on a three-year strategy for ICANN in the Middle East.

So they started their work at the beginning of 2013. And the strategy lasted for three years. It ended in June 2016. And, of course, during the three-year term of the strategy, there was an annual implementation plan being developed based on the strategy and in close coordination with the community. And during the implementation of the strategy, ICANN staff, Fahd, and myself would provide a quarterly update to the community on what has been achieved and get feedback on anything in relation to the implementation.

So this process actually has been ongoing since 2013. And with the renewal of the strategy in 2016, the community agreed on another three-year timeframe for the second strategy. Yet they introduced some key improvements to the work modalities, basically the Strategy Working Group, the way it works, and they also developed a charter for the Working Group.

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So the current term of the strategy has been in effect for a couple of years now and we are approaching the end of the term by June 2019. And therefore, a month or so ago we started the discussion with the Strategy Working Group online on the mailing list on the way forward and how they want to proceed with the next phase. And this is the discussion I actually want to continue with you today. And then the Working Group will sort of plan accordingly for what is coming next.

So with that, I'd like actually to hand it over to Walid Alsaqaf. Walid Alsaqaf is the Chair of the Middle East Strategy Working Group. Walid couldn't be with us physically, but is joining us remotely. And Walid is going to provide an update on the strategy and the work of the strategy in the region so far. Walid, you have the floor.

WALID ASLAQAF:

Thank you, Baher. Thank you, everyone in the room. My apologies for not being there in person, but thanks to the internet it is possible to continue to be involved. Let me first say, the idea behind this event is to engage you as members of the community in the discussion.

So let's start with basically reflecting on what we have done as an objective and what we are striving to do as an objective. And the basic idea is to attract more active and engaged participants from the Middle East and the North Africa region to contribute to the ICANN Policy Development Processes. And, of course, to acquire leading roles in the ICANN community.

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Since the time I've took over as the Chair, we've tried to do that through active participation of the members through the mailing list, through the activities, through consultations with the staff. And we've been able to achieve that through a number of focus areas that we have as you can see on the slide. These involve the actual support to achieve support for the secure, stable, and resilient domain name system. That's in terms of infrastructure. Then the second focus area was to promote a healthy and competitive domain name marketplace in the region and the adjoining countries region. And, of course, to clarify ICANN's role in an evolving internet ecosystem through engagement with the MEAC community.

So the idea behind this effort is to support the staff. It's not to replace the staff in any way. And make sure that the staff gets the optimal or more comprehensive -- we find those who are experienced in the region. I must say that I was impressed by the activity throughout this period, particularly in regards to key issues that the members have been really interested in such as supporting resources and making sure activities in the region are promoted and given priority in ICANN, implementing a more focused attention to the domain name system because there has been a lot of discussions about various topics about the internet, but there wasn't enough focus on the DNS.

And so the idea here is to ensure that with the solid presence we have here, over 58 members, in fact, 58 members and 18 observers, we are able to pull together these resources, these expertise and have them communicate to the ICANN staff, mainly through the internet mailing list but also through activities, online and offline activities, whether in

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the region or at ICANN meetings, to be open for new members and observers.

If I would say a few words about what we have obtained in terms of view from the members so far through the mailing list, we have seen that there has been interest in continuing the Working Group as we go on in the final year of this Strategy Working Group. And there has been also interest in ensuring that leadership has more support in terms of providing more alternative positions or senior positions so that we carry out the work since this is all voluntary work. And my situation was more or less occupied with many things since I am a full-time lecturer at the university. It's not always easy to engage in all sorts of tasks that the Working Group requires.

And also to ensure that there is more activity by members, engaging members more actively, having them provide critical feedback in time and not to have to wait too long for the cycle. And also to ensure that the allocated resources are given at critical and important times for ICANN staff to move forward. And so the idea of allocating resources, allocating of time, and in particular regards to the period where the staff needs the most, needs the group the most. And because in the first three-year period it starts often with consultation and then moves on to implementation and furthermore giving feedback on cemented projects.

That being said, I would like to convey my regards and appreciation to members who have already contributed such as [inaudible] and others in the group. Apologies for missing any names. And I'd like this

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opportunity to be exploited tremendously by everyone here so that we have an opportunity to present a very solid view of what to do next. So with that, I give it back to Fahd.

FAHD BATAYNEH:

Okay, thank you, Walid. So we'll be talking very briefly about the key outcomes of the current strategy. So one of the things that we've been working a lot with is more dedicated engagement with CERTs and law enforcement agencies. We've been doing media roundtables just to educate media and at the same time flag to them the latest trends that are happening at ICANN; new gTLDs, KSK rollover, IANA Stewardship Transition, you name it.

We have regional specific webinars for supporting organizations and advisory committees. We've been doing regular GAC webinars. We've been doing regular ccNSO webinars. We are actually exploring doing more GNSO-related webinars. And, of course, we have an online readout session after each and every ICANN meeting. It started, actually, after the ICANN meeting in Panama.

We do a lot of remote engagement with communities or countries that we are unable to travel to. So, unfortunately, Middle East is in a turmoil more or less, wars in some places, conflicts in other places. So we are doing some remote engagement in Yemen with an organization there that is also an At-Large structure, YODET, the Yemeni Organization for Development and Enhanced Technologies. We are also working in Afghanistan on some remote engagement. And these

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are really more of one hour, two-hour webinars where we explain to the local community about our work.

And actually, one of the things that is worth mentioning in our engagement with YODET in that we were actually -- in Yemen, sorry, is that we were educating and working with the YODET team to actually raise their awareness so that they can actually deliver these workshops to their local community rather than having us as ICANN staff joining remotely to do these sessions.

We have a Middle East Space at each and every ICANN meeting. We just held our space at this ICANN meeting on Monday. Some of you were there. Of course, we don't do these spaces at the policy forum. And I mentioned a while ago our readout sessions.

Nick mentioned earlier about our annual Middle East DNS Forum. So after the DNS Forum in Ankara in April, which was the fifth forum, we did a review and assessment of the forum, how it went, what went well, what didn't, what would the community like to see. And the results, actually, of that survey were published as part of a blog that my colleague Baher wrote. I'm not going to delve deep. We have listed the URL here. So if you are interested in reading what that assessment had to have in terms of summarizing the community needs and demands, just go to the URL mentioned.

Last, but not least, we did a review of our engagement in the Middle East, of course, for FY18. Just a note here that ICANN's fiscal year starts on 1 July and ends on 30 June of the next year, so now we are in



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FY19. So the previous ICANN fiscal year we did a lot of engagement in the Middle East. And again, we did a review of that. We sent out a survey to our regional community asking them about how it went, what went well, what didn't, and, of course, suggestions for improvement.

Now, whether this survey, the engagement survey or even the Middle East DNS Forum survey, we are currently working on actually implementing the findings of both survey results. I'm hoping that this year we can see much improved engagement or a much improved DNS Forum, at least in the view of our regional community.

This slide gives a really quick glimpse of our engagement at the end of FY16 versus at the end of FY18. And this is really more of a best effort. So at the end of the first Middle East Strategy, that was on 30 June 2016, the region had literally nine community members participating in different ICANN working groups. When we did this exercise for the end of FY18, literally that number was 65, so that's around seven times more.

And that shows actually that the engagement and, of course, the engagement strategy had a key role in actually increasing the participation. And actually, that's the key objective behind these regional strategies, whether they are in the Middle East or in other regions, to have more community members from the regions active in ICANN's work.

I'll hand it over back to Baher for the way forward.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you, Fahd, and thank you, Walid. Maybe on Fahd's last note about engagement and the numbers. Of course, the numbers are not fully unique individuals. So when we say 65 members, this also means that some members might be participating in more than one working group. So they're not unique.

Yet, I think the numbers and the growth from 2016 to today is significant and this fulfills the key objective or the strategic objective that we have which is to engage more community members to become more active in ICANN policy development work. And, of course, the credit here goes to you, to the community for their dedication, engagement, and commitment. So we would like to thank you for that.

So perhaps one other thing I want to mention on what has been achieved so far is that we as staff have been working on improving existing programs and existing initiatives. For example, DNS Forum, we conducted the survey to be able to improve it moving forward.

Also, the other program that we've implemented as part of the strategy was the Middle East School on Internet Governance. So this actually started as a sort of ICANN project with support from internet organizations like ISOC and RIPE NCC. Last year, we joined with other entities like IGP, the Internet Governance Project, and the Arab World Internet Institute. Both contributed to the initiative, so now we have a group of partners, ICANN, ISOC, RIPE NCC, IGP, and AWII.

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And I'm glad that we're joined today by Khaled Koubaa. Khaled is an ICANN Board member, but is also the President of the Arab World Internet Institute. So trying to have those events sort of led by the community rather than ICANN. I think this is one of our objectives. Because in the end, we would like to see the community taking lead on those activities.

So with that, I think we can move to the next part of this session which is, in my view, the most important part. It's about a way forward, what we should do next in terms of the ICANN Regional Strategy. As I mentioned at the beginning, we started this discussion with the Strategy Working Group online in the past few weeks. So far, there seems to be consensus about the need for a regional strategy, for continuing the regional strategy. There also seems to be consensus about community engagement in the regional strategy work. So the community believes that they should take a part in the development of the strategy. There has been discussion around the modalities in terms of the Strategy Working Group, the structure of the group, how it works, and so forth, the size of the group.

One of the things that some group members noted is the size of the Strategy Working Group. As mentioned earlier, currently we have close to 60 Working Group members, whereas the previous Strategy Working Group had about 20 or 25 members. So the question is about effectiveness given the large number of members. Of course, also taking into consideration other aspects in relation to openness, diversity, etcetera. So the notion when we decided, when the

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community decided to have this working group open, was to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to be included in the process.

Another point where there is still more discussion is the term of the strategy. Some believe that a three-year term is reasonable. Some suggested making it a two-year instead of three. What we would like to highlight here in this regard is to consider the time of the ICANN Strategic Plan. So the current -- and the reason I'm saying this is that when the Regional Strategy was developed, its objectives were developed in line with the overall Strategic Plan of ICANN whose current terms ends in June 2021.

Okay, so it was a five-year plan. It started in 2016 and ends in 2021. So the next ICANN Strategic Plan would be 2021 to 2025. And currently, as you know, the ICANN community is working on this and, I think, the timeline is for this strategy is to be published by end of this fiscal year to give it one year for implementation and so forth. I mean, operational plan.

So I'm just mentioning this for you to keep in mind, the timing of the ICANN Strategic Plan, and whether you want to align the timeline of this Regional Strategy with that or not. This is also something we would like to discuss.

So with that, I would like to see first if there are any questions or comments on what has been presented so far, and then we would like to open the floor for discussion on the way forward. So let me ask if there are any questions or comments? Khaled, please. And please

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make sure to say your name because we have remote participants as well. Thank you.

KHALED KOUBAA:

First I would like to thank you, Baher, and your team about the work that has been done already. I think the role that ICANN has been doing in our region was capital for the community to be working around that Strategy Working Group and also other initiatives. I would like also to thank all the members of the Strategy Working Group including Walid Alsaqaf as the Chair, who has been instrumental as well in defining this strategy.

And I will probably encourage ourselves to continue this community work and effort around this group and working group, maybe in a different way. But the importance of the community role is capital for us, so I personally, as a community member, I would love to see us involved in defining and also following up with you and helping ICANN and its work. So thank you for that.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you, Khaled. Fahd.

FAHD BATAYNEH:

Yes, so we have a couple of notes from remote participation. Said Zazai from Afghanistan says, I also agree that the group needs to continue working. Local communities/countries need the support that we have been receiving and this needs to continue. And he goes

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on to say, I also believe that we need to expand the level of engagement. A domain marketplace certainly needs a lot of attention, particularly in Afghanistan, and also with our trending social media use. Research in DNS and internet security and standards is another area where we need the involvement of local communities at a greater depth.

So one thing, actually, I just want to reiterate here. So I remember we had these discussions in the early days of the strategy. One thing we need to keep in mind is that the strategy needs to revolve around ICANN's mandate, and that's the unique identifiers system. And so sometimes we got into these discussions where we had to step into other territories that wasn't part ICANN's direct mandate. So I think this is also one thing we need to keep in mind while planning for the next strategy. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you, Fahd. Any comments or question so far?

HADIA ELMINIAWI:

So first of all, of course, I would like to thank Baher and Fahd for all their hard work, and certainly our Chair, Walid Alsaqaf. I actually find this group is very important because it has given the opportunity to all of us to discuss, engage, and cooperate on matters related to the domain name system or to the domain name space and to ICANN.

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So I'm happy that consensus was reached that this group would continue. And I certainly think that we should align our strategy with ICANN's strategy. The timings, I mean. But it doesn't necessarily have to be the same period. It doesn't have to be -- ICANN's strategy, I think it's four years, it is? Five years. So we could split ours into two maybe. But certainly, aligning strategies is a must.

The other thing I was thinking, we have this Middle East and Adjoining Countries list. I think it's just a mailing list. And as I understand, the ICANN working groups are mandated with a certain topic and they have a start and a finish timeline. And I was thinking that maybe we could have also or change this Middle East and Adjoining Countries mailing list into an engagement group rather than a working group.

And in that sense, I think, it will be a platform for us, regardless the Strategy Working Group is there or not, to engage and discuss and collaborate on different matters, not necessarily strategy related matters. Of course, matters in relation to domain names and ICANN.

So that's just a thought. And I'm happy that the group is continuing. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you, Hadia. So the Strategy Working Group, I mean irrespective of the name, its main purpose was to develop the Regional Strategy and then to coordinate with ICANN Org on the implementation of the strategy. So I mean, indeed, we can have the sort of group called the engagement group etcetera, but I think it's also important that we are

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clear on the role of the Working Group. As well as, as you mentioned, the sort of term of the Working Group, whether it's again, a three-year term, which is the current term of the strategy, or something else. So I think this is also important to discuss. Khaled.

KAHLED KOUBAA:

Just to add that I really like the engagement part of it. We have been doing already the same thing in ICANN where there was a group called the Internet Governance Working Group that now changed it completely with a new charter to Internet Governance Engagement Group. So there is precedent in the ICANN community to use that kind of language defining a group. And it would be good for us, as well, to mention what you just said about defining the term and all of this in a new charter that would define the role of the engagement group.

Also, I'm going to suggest to probably limit ourselves to a limited number of members of the group. I'm not saying that we need not be inclusive. We need to have a sort of inclusive mechanism that would allow anyone to express himself, either a mailing list or any other things. But the number of those who would be involved with day to day, or let's say more involved in the work and the development of the strategy implementation, all of this, needs to be less in number because it will help them to coordinate in an easy way and work together in an easier way than having a large number where it's difficult to get them all in line. So that's my thought.



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BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you, Khaled. And on your point about the group being small, I mean, again, as I mentioned, this has been discussed on the mailing list and there have been different views. While some share the same view as yours about having a smaller group to be more focused, effective, while also maintaining diversity and so forth. Others saw merit in the openness of the group.

One thing I personally have noticed with the current group, which is currently of a size of like 60 members, the group started two years ago very active. They did great work in starting with setting the key objectives of the strategy all the way to having the strategy document ready. They used to have regular calls once every month. And then as we went through the implementation of the strategy, ICANN staff took lead on the implementation which was sort of agreed to. But the involvement of the Strategy Working Group, in my view, has been sort of decreasing a little bit. And when we send, for example, we do send reviews every quarter and the number of comments that we get or even questions that we get from the Strategy Working Group has been decreasing as well.

So I just wanted to note that somehow the group started with energy and enthusiasm, but then this sort of decayed over time. Maybe that is normal. But I am not sure if reducing the number of members would address this issue or not. But I'm just saying what I have observed. Fahd.

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FAHD BATAYNEH: Okay, so we have two comments from Chokri from Tunisia and he says, I think that the group did a lot for the community, but I also think that we have to have two separate groups, one for the development of the strategy and the other for monitoring the implementation of the strategy. Then he goes on to say, I also think that we should have a based community entity, council or advisory, that governs the community activities.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, Chokri. Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: I would just like, Chokri, if possible to elaborate on this governing community that he's referring to. I am not sure why we need to do that. If he can just elaborate. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT: So until we get clarification any --

RAFIK DAMMAK: So I think the separation, its usual practice is to avoid a situation that the people who are working on recommendations or developing ideas to be also the same who get involved on the implementation. And also I think it can help to involve more participants in the process.

Maybe it doesn't need to be two different working groups, but to separate the two phases I think is important. We can have the phase

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to work on the strategy, but then to do the oversight in a small team that can pay attention and that allows others to maybe participate if need. So it's something we should explore and it's not unusual.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, Rafik.

FAHD BATAYNEH: So Walid has something to say. Walid, the floor is yours.

WALID ALSAQAF: Yes, thank you, Fahd. I'd like to appreciate the views presented regarding the idea of separating the two let's say mandates of the Strategy Working Group. We do know that the phases of the implementation itself, the strategy itself, require that. On the one hand, we provide first the ideas for developing the strategy itself regarding objectives, focus etcetera.

And then once that is set, is more or less set in stone, then it's part of the implementation, we can't reverse it, we can't go back and change it. So in the next phase the only thing that one can do, the Strategy Working Group, is to provide support for ICANN to implement and give feedback, or last month as [inaudible] put it.

That being said, each one does require a different mindset, a different way of thinking and a different approach. And I agree that we need to actually shift gears in this process. And that's what I felt because the

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enthusiasm that started at the beginning faded away when it came to looking into how to support ICANN.

Because there was the notion here, and I'm talking on behalf of myself, it's not on behalf of the whole group, the notion that we end up being involved in implementation was not let's say part of our mandate to start with. For example, we must be interfering in the actual room, for example, in attending activities, what sessions are involved. So each have their own way of being implemented.

But when asked by ICANN staff to provide an opinion, that's where we try to provide that feedback. And that's reactionary if you know what I mean. It's not taking initiative, it's more whenever we are asked, we can give an opinion. That's [inaudible] she can elaborate. Otherwise, the idea was when there is a need for such a thing, there are experts in the Strategy Group that could be the ones involved, those who are engaged for example at the DNS Forum or the School of Internet Governance.

And these are the ones that might be the more appropriate individuals who could give support. And this is how the idea of setting up an ad hoc support group or advisory group based on the implemented strategy came along if I understand correctly. And just to put the context here, that there need-based sub-group you may call them or advisory groups can be a way forward. That's just one of the views that came about. Thank you.

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BAHER ESMAT: So, Walid, am I hearing you correctly saying -- I'm not sure I heard the intervention clearly, but I hear you refer to incidents where the Strategy Working Group needed to sort of set up an ad hoc group to work on one implementation, one or more implementation items and so forth. So are you suggesting that the future working group could follow the same path? Or are you also sort of okay with the suggestion to have to separate groups? One for strategy development, one for implementation. Just want to clarify that. Thank you.

WALID ALSAQAF: To be honest, we haven't really done that before let's say full-fledged. We had a number of subgroups initiated. We didn't really fulfill their mandate. It was more of an ideas phase that didn't really see the light fully. But what I'm suggesting that in the future, as we go forward or move forward, this might be a way to motivate the individuals.

Because if they have a very strong interest in one area, for example, we have five members that are deeply involved in the School of Internet Governance, for example, in this Strategy Working Group and the rest are not. So maybe these can form the subgroup or entity that would support ICANN moving forward in implementation. So these are simply ideas to put forth, just using my time as a member to contribute ideas.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, Walid. Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI:

So I'm thinking about Chokri's and Rafik's point of having two separate groups, one for implementation and the other for strategy, and it sort of makes sense. It does make sense, but my only concern, I'm not sure that having too many groups is quite a good idea. But also, I think Rafik said that it doesn't have to be necessarily a separate group. It could maybe be two separate subgroups within the same group, for example. But yeah, the idea seems okay and seems reasonable.

And again, as I understand, this is different than the other suggestion that is talking about some sort of governance, right? Which is the part that I did not get.

BAHER ESMAT:

Okay, let's hear from Rafik.

RAFIK DAMMAK:

So, I mean, it's not necessarily to group or to subgroup. I think it's more about phases. So we have a phase that we would work on strategy. I'm not sure for how long. It depends. It's for two or three years. But then in the next phase, we can kind have kind of the implementation and/or oversight role. So it can be then a smaller group of people working on that.

And my thinking is just to avoid a situation that those people working on the oversight or implementation phase, they just try to do that

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oversight role, that allows other to maybe be involved within the process on some project. It's just to avoid any kind of conflict and to have that separation. I mean, maybe it's not a big deal, but we should avoid any kind of situation to be in both sides.

So also I heard about maybe engagement, engagement roles. So maybe we can back a little bit here to think and maybe to lists some bullet points what we are expecting from this strategy group to do exactly. So if we are thinking just not about making some proposal in terms of strategy, in terms of planning, or we want to have also that role in terms of maybe some outreach or some engagement or to encourage people to participate in policy discussion as well.

So it's better maybe to outline those ideas in terms of task or basically maybe the mission we want from the strategy. So after we can do a kind of an ad hoc basis organization within the group to get maybe a few members who are interested in the few areas that they want to participate in instead of having a big group of people and then at the end we don't get that much traction when we have discussion or work or something.

I mean, there are a lot of possibilities, but maybe just to instead of kind of getting stuck to the structure, we need to think about the mission, what we want to achieve. So if we can list all these different objectives, goals, tasks, and so on, that can help. And also people then can identify which area they want to focus. So I don't think when you have a diverse group, even within our region, we all have the same focus.

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Some people want just to work in ccTLD area and others maybe in security, others just to work in gTLD policy and so on. So if we can go with that maybe it will help us. Maybe I am missing something, but I think that should be the kind of how we should do. I mean, structure we can figure out. And the same also about the number and so on.

BAHER ESMAT:

Right. And just to emphasize that discussion, as you mentioned, Rafik, should not only be about the structure. It's more about the modalities. You mentioned also the mandate of the working group, and I think this was outlined in the charter. So perhaps one of the things that the current working group should do is to revisit the charter or maybe also call for a community input on this charter moving forward. And once that is sort of settled, then a discussion on the future working modalities could be finalized.

Okay. So, are there any further comments on this point? Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI:

So definitely revisiting the charter, which actually our charter permits, and redefining it is a good idea. And in that sense, I figure we'll be putting two main points which is the strategy in itself and the implementation. But then again, the topic has to be strategy because that's a strategy working group.

So going back to the engagement part that I was suggesting, we already have a Middle East and Adjoining Countries mailing list. And



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my suggestion was to take this one step forward and make it an engagement group if the people in there actually would like to be in this engagement group. And in that sense, people will jump in on topics of their interest.

So to Rafik's point, not everyone would like to discuss gTLDs, not everyone would like to discuss ccTLDs or multistakeholder model or whatever. So people will be discussing, coordinating together, and jumping in on topics of their interest through this group. That's just an idea. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT:

Okay, Hadia, just to clarify and also for the sake of those who are not familiar with our mailing lists and our terms, so we've got several mailing lists. One of them is the ICANN Middle East and Adjoining Countries list. And this is an open list. This is a community-based list where we send updates, people can comment, and so forth.

And then one other mailing list we have is the Strategy Working Group, the Middle East and Adjoining Countries Strategy Working Group mailing list. And this is a mailing list for the Strategy Working Group. So when you say we develop or evolve the Middle East and Adjoining Countries mailing list into an engagement list, which mailing list are you referring to?

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HADIA ELMINIAWI: I'm referring to the one that's not related to the strategy because I'm under the impression that if it's a strategy mailing list or a strategy working group, it has to be dealing with strategy related items, whether it is implementation or whatever.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you. Fahd.

FAHD BATAYNEH: Okay, Chokri from Tunisia says, during the last three years the MEAC Strategy Working Group has a double role to develop the strategy and tries to support the community. The MEAC-SWG has a limiting role in time so it is better to create an entity that manages and supports the community. He then goes on to say, during the implementation phase, we need more specialized members so the profile of members differ. So that's from Chokri.

Walid says, as for syncing the Strategy Working Group with ICANN's upcoming five-year plan, which I believe is the 2021 to 2025, it seems reasonable to extend the current mandate another year and have that agreed upon by members.

BAHER ESMAT: Okay, thank you, Walid. And I think this is a good segue to the next and last agenda item in the discussion about the term of the Regional Strategy and the link with the ICANN Strategic Plan. So, Walid, I noted your suggestion about extending the current term for one year. There

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was also a suggestion that came on the mailing list regarding the term of the strategy, and instead of making it a three-year as the current one, making it two years instead.

So again, I'd like to get your views on that. So there is the term of the strategy and then how we should sort of sync the timeline of the Regional Strategy with the five-year ICANN Strategic Plan. Any comments? Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: I'm just not clear on this. So Walid is suggesting to extend the Strategy Working Group for one more year? That's what's on the table now, right?

BAHER ESMAT: Yeah, this is the suggestion. I think the rationale there is to start the new term of the Regional Strategy exactly with the new ICANN Strategic Plan, like 2021.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: I find this a reasonable suggestion, yeah. Unless you want to dissolve and then reconvene the group again. But yes, I find this is a good suggestion.

BAHER ESMAT: Fahd.

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FAHD BATAYNEH: Okay, so Walid raises his hand and, Walid, the floor is yours.

WALID ALSAQAF: Yes, I mean, my intention is to reduce the administrative work required. Because if you recall, it was really hectic to put forth the Strategy Working Group in motion at the very start. You remember, I mean, the case of trying to leverage connections to find candidates. So what I thought might be useful if it is extended based on the communities input, of course, then we can use the last year to formulate a very good thorough plan to renew the whole structure of the Strategy Working Group to coincide with the plan as well as to introduce fresh blood to the group.

And we can use that year for getting new people around us and improving the charter and doing all the work that would be required. So it would be a win-win situation. My position will be more of a lame duck Chair. But the idea there is that it would be used to transition properly and take the time to ensure that the new plan and the new strategy work are in sync.

FAHD BATAYNEH: Chokri actually agrees with Walid's comment on extending the current mandate by another year.

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BAHER ESMAT: Okay, thank you. Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: I totally agree as well.

BAHER ESMAT: Thanks. Okay. And the other question is -- and it might be too early to address this question, but the term of the strategy, should we continue with three years? Should it be more? Should it be less? Or should we address this when the group starts looking at the charter and review of the charter and maybe review of the whole structure of the working group? Given that there seems to be consensus on the extension, then the group will have plenty of time to address other questions.

Okay, it seems that we've run out of energy. Okay, go ahead.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: I think it's very difficult to come up with a decision now because there is a few of us in here and I don't know how many are on the Adobe Connect, so maybe taking it -- your second suggestion was to continue this on the list? Yeah, so I would go with that.

FAHD BATAYNEH: So Walid says that we can have that discussed with members on the mailing list.

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BAHER ESMAT: Okay, sounds good. So what we can do actually is, of course, we will summarize this discussion, share it on the mailing list, both the Strategy Working Group mailing list but also the ICANN Middle East mailing list. And perhaps as the Working Group continues to discuss a way forward, they will be seeking input from the larger community on some of the specifics of the next term of the strategy. And also, if needed, we can organize a community webinar on the topic to sort of have further discussion and hopefully better view of what we can do next.

Any other comments before we adjourn the session?

WALID ALSAQAF: Baher, it is Walid again. I don't know, sorry of interrupting.

BAHER ESMAT: Please, Walid, go ahead.

WALID ALSAQAF: I think that what we can do now is to take a seat, a laid-back approach just looking into the implementation of ICANN throughout the last phase and wonder how can we do better, looking at problems or mistakes. I've looked at the implementation. Many of these tasks that are pending, some are still within early progress such as 25 percent, 50 percent.

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So use this time optimally to review and work closely with ICANN staff to identify loopholes or weaknesses that we can help address, whether it's an awareness issue, whether it's engagement related, etcetera. Then use the transition period also to plan ahead and put into the strategy in the future points that make it stronger going forward and eliminate as much as possible the mistakes of the past or the weaknesses of the past. It's like a trial and error. Our region is dynamic. As we can see, it has many challenges, different approaches. So we need to be elastic so to speak, and accommodate these changes.

And so, of course, when it comes to the discussion about the term, of course, I lean towards a shorter term for various reasons, but I'll leave that to the discussion. But the time now is for us to look back to the past, to propose ideas moving forward, and then transition. So I think that would be the best approach in terms of using time and resources.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you, Walid. And as you can see on the screen, you can always reach out to us at [meac.swg@icann.org](mailto:meac.swg@icann.org) if you have any suggestions in relation to the Regional Strategy in general, whether in terms of the implementation or any other future aspects.

And I see no further hands. Are there any comments? Okay, so with that I think we can conclude the session. Once again, thank you very much for joining us and thank you for your work and for supporting our engagement work in the region. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:      And one thing, we're going to have a group photo taken here, so if you can stay around here we'll have a photographer here in a bit.

**[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]**