
ICANN80 | HLGM – Welcome and Introductory Remarks
Sunday, June 9, 2024 – 8:45 to 9:05 KGL

BAHER ESMAT:

Good morning. And welcome to today's High-Level Government Meeting. My name is Baher Esmat. I'm the ICANN Managing Director for the Middle East and Africa region. Let us please begin with a moment of silence to honor and remember the victims of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.

Thank you. Your Excellency and Chair of the High-Level Government Meeting, Minister Paula Ingabire, distinguished ministers, heads of delegations, ladies and gentlemen.

It's an honor to have such a distinguished assembly gathered here to discuss the future of Internet governance and cooperation. Holding this meeting in Rwanda underscores our commitment to addressing the unique challenges and opportunities on the continent. One of our goals is to ensure that Africa's digital transformation is inclusive, sustainable, and drives socioeconomic growth.

The objective of the High-Level Government Meeting is to create political awareness of ICANN's pivotal role in the important technical aspects of Internet governance and its direct impact on crucial ICT issues, such as cybersecurity and achieving meaningful digital connectivity. We have an exciting day ahead with insightful sessions and esteemed speakers. To start our meeting, I'd like to invite our first keynote speaker. Please join me in welcoming to the stage Her

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Excellency, Miss Paula Ingabire, Minister of Information and Communications Technology and Innovation for the Republic of Rwanda and the Chair of the High-Level Government Meeting.

PAULA INGABIRE:

Honorable Ministers, here present, Secretaries General and Executive Secretary of Intergovernmental Organizations, Sally Costerton, Interim CEO and the President of ICANN, ICANN Board Directors, the UNECA Executive Secretary, ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed. Good morning. It's my great pleasure to welcome you to Kigali for the fifth ICANN meeting and the High-Level Government Meeting this morning. We are honored to be represented here with over 50 government delegations in this room, convening here to discuss the future of the Internet and the role of governments and intergovernmental organizations in keeping the Internet secure, safe, and interoperable. Internet governance cannot exist without multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Everyone in this room here today, from governments, intergovernmental organizations, businesses, civil society, and academia, play a pivotal role in the future of Internet governance. This is why we are here together today and why the work of such organizations as ICANN is critical for bringing everyone together and getting all the perspectives to ensure that the right decisions, be it frameworks, strategies, policies, are taken to maintain a robust and transparent Internet. This work is important now more than ever at a time where digital technology is rapidly evolving and actors must act

quickly to ensure that the Internet regulations keep up with the demand and keep up with the emerging technological trends and increasing sophisticated threats present online.

This is the second High-Level Government Meeting held on the African continent. And given the broad participation of African governments, as well as other emerging economies here today, this meeting also presents a perfect opportunity to highlight the importance of universal digital inclusion and tackling the digital divide.

The internet is a valuable resource, it's the engine of the economies today, and it actually unlocks countless resources and opportunities for users in an increasingly digitized economy. This makes it essential to ensure that everyone, no matter where they are and their background, has access to this resource, the Internet. Closing the digital divide will require concerted efforts not only to expand access to Internet infrastructure and the digital enablers, but also driving universal usage through relevant digital content, affordable devices, and the right skills.

I would like to recognize some of the efforts which are ongoing already in different countries, whether it's at a national level or regional coalitions that are creating meaningful impact. And I'm sure we will get to hear more of that from the speakers in the different sessions throughout today. The exchange of perspectives and experience on this subject is itself meaningful in order to borrow valuable use cases that can be replicated and spotlight the successes and impact stories

from around the world. And I'm sure each one of us in this room has a story to share and a success to share.

Finally, I'd also like to highlight the significance of this meeting happening on the continent of Africa, the representation of voices and perspectives from this continent as well as other regions is very important to ensure that no one's voice is left behind. To the organizations and governments here present, it's through your commitment to policies and frameworks that foster digital inclusion and that will pave the way for an inclusive global digital economy.

And it is your ability to respond involving technological trends and threats in part through active participation in the global Internet decision-making forum that will keep the Internet safe, stable and interoperable for all. I look forward to positive discussions and outcomes of this meeting as well as the ICANN80 policy forum that kicks off tomorrow. And as I hope that you'll also be able to take advantage of different activities outside the meeting schedules to enjoy what we have to offer you here in Kigali. I thank you for your kind attention.

BAHERESMAT:

Thank you, your excellency. Next, we are honored to present a message from Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Secretary General of the ITU.

DOREEN BOGDAN-MARTIN: Over the past 25 years, ICANN has played a crucial role in the global digital landscape by helping to ensure a secure, stable and unified Internet. ITU and ICANN have a strong mutual commitment to digital inclusion. It's our shared belief that the benefits of the Internet must be accessible to everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic background, gender or geographic location.

And it's also our joint efforts to preserve the open nature of the internet, making sure its technical functioning remains resilient, even amid challenges like a global pandemic. Resilience forms the core of our great partnership. It also drives ITU's mandate and my top priorities as Secretary General to promote universal connectivity and enable sustainable digital transformation globally. The challenge before us is to bring the third of humanity who are still unconnected online by 2030.

Achieving this will take a concerted effort across all stakeholders. The good news is we're not starting from scratch. The multi-stakeholder approach in which the technical community plays an integral role has proven an effective model for Internet governance for decades. We saw it at the WSIS+20 Forum high-level event, 2024 in Geneva, just two weeks ago, where I urged participants to bridge digital divides and help get the UN Sustainable Development Goals back on track.

The same collaborative spirit sparked the first global conversation on the then nascent digital era in 2003 and 2005, when ITU organized the two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society. Two decades later, WSIS still stands as our strongest and most resilient

mechanism for digital cooperation in action. As we gear up for the Global Digital Compact, WSIS+20 review process and beyond, WSIS+20 review process and beyond, let's ensure that all processes are aligned and complement each other.

Let's leverage existing mechanisms, drawing from our deep expertise and experience and know-how to drive our shared vision of the road ahead. Ladies and gentlemen, 2024 marks 50 years since Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn first proposed the design of a transmission control protocol, structuring and governing how information is shared between networks. When merged with the network layer Internet protocol, this would become the backbone for the data transfers that now power the Internet known as TCP-IP. ITU looks forward to strengthening our partnership with ICANN through initiatives such as the Coalition for Digital Africa and Partner to Connect.

I wish you a productive discussion at this year's High-Level Government Meeting. Together, ladies and gentlemen, let's continue harnessing one of humanity's most powerful resources as a force for good, building the resilient internet we want for everyone everywhere for centuries to come. Thank you.

CLAVER GATETE:

Thank you very much, Honorable Minister Paula Ingabire, Minister of ICT and Innovation, Honorable Ministers present, my good sister Doreen Bogdan, Secretary General of ITU in absentia, Tripti Sinha, Chair of the ICANN Board, Nicolas Caballero, the Chair of the Governmental Advisory Committee, Excellencies, distinguished

guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor for me to address you today on the margins of this very important event. I just want to start by giving you a background and I'm sorry you'll bear with me in terms of numbers. I want to just to give the background of the situation that we are in at the moment before I go to the ICT. Our deliberation today is happening when we are confronted with the complex global multidimensional challenges, especially on African continent.

For Africa, finance, climate and energy crisis are leading to unavailable policy choices with far reaching consequences. The stark reality is that the Africa's share of poverty currently is nearly seven times higher than the global average. With 476 million people expected to live in poverty in 2024. This is happening at the same time when countries continue to face shrinking fiscal space and declining long-term concessional resources. Hence the need for Africa to increase the revenue base. The current average of 15.8% of tax to GDP ratio is the lowest in the world and it's not sustainable. We need to invest heavily in domestic resource mobilization.

Additionally, debt level in Africa has increased by over 180% of GDP, over 180% since 2010. And the public debt now stands at over 65% of GDP with 21 countries in or at risk of this distress. With spending of more than 163 billion US dollars expected on debt repayments just this year alone and losing 86 billion US dollars through the illicit financial flows, African governments have little room of expenditures on health, education, technology and the climate initiatives.

Furthermore, Africa is losing 5% on average of GDP to climate change on the annual basis. Yet received only 2% of the 10 trillion global investments in clean energy between 2015 and 2022. In addition, low credit ratings and unfair risk perceptions are also stifling access to markets for governments and the private sector alike. As you understand, this new status quo cannot continue. We have to do business differently and the reform of the global financial architecture is necessary, especially for the African continent.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, with this background, we cannot leapfrog the development without technological advancement. The potential of the digital economy in Africa projected at 712 billion US dollars or 8.5% of GDP by 2050, underscores the importance of intentional investments in the technological capabilities. Access to information, communication, and technology is not just crucial, it is a cornerstone for sustainable development. Yet Africa remains the least digitally inclusive region with only 37% of the people connected compared to a global average of 67%. Therefore, the outcomes of this dialogue, on the global digital compact are very important for Africa. I want to highlight a few points on how we can achieve a meaningful progress.

First, we cannot talk about increasing internet penetration without addressing the fundamental issue of energy access. This must go hand in hand. Currently, Africa is the least energized and accounts for the 80% of the 733 million people worldwide without access to electricity. Second, we must invest in our broadband and satellite

infrastructure. We know that countries with the highest fixed broadband penetration rates also have the highest GDP per capita.

But this is not the job of government alone. Public-private partnerships underpinned by the right incentives and risking mechanisms will be critical. Third, we need to get our tax priorities right. We are seeing the same trend of high taxes and sector-specific taxes on technology which is constraining broadband penetration. It does not make sense to tax the handsets, air time, and still have ICT sector-specific taxes given the contribution of technology to development. Taxation must strike the right balance that also enables investments in digital infrastructure development.

This is a study in selected African countries and we are still going on, show that reducing taxes on the ICT sector enhances broadband penetration, increases revenues, and widens the tax base. Fourth is the importance of joint resource mobilization for investment in technology. We need a mechanism where governments and international partners jointly mobilize resources at scale to invest specifically in technology so as to have a sustained impact. A good example is the GIGA Initiative, a collaboration between UNICEF, ITU, ECA, governments, and private partners that bridges the digital divide by connecting schools globally. Such initiatives must be supported and scaled up.

Finally, we should not underestimate the importance of national vision and strategy. This is an imperative for successful implementation. This should be accompanied by governance and

regulatory frameworks that foster effective competition, safeguard its consumer rights, and ensures integrity in data privacy and security. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, this year is of particular importance. The upcoming summit of the future is a pivotal moment for the global digital compact.

Together with organizations like ICANN, we have a unique opportunity to ensure that our digital transformation reaches the last mile. Commitments must be made with scalable actions that deliver meaningful connectivity. Thus, our collective responsibility is clear. Now is the time to redouble efforts to harness technology as a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable development. I thank you very much.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you, Mr. Gatete. Now let's welcome Ms. Tripti Sinha, Chair of the ICANN Board of Directors.

TRIPTI SINHA:

Good morning. Good morning. Your Excellency and Chair of the High-Level Government Meeting, Minister Paula Ingabire, Secretary General Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Executive Secretary Claver Gatete, Distinguished Ministers, Heads of Delegation, GAC Chair, Nico Caballero, Excellencies, dear GAC members, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the ICANN Board, I would like to express our gratitude to our gracious hosts and Chair of the meeting, her Excellency Paula Ingabire, Minister of Information and Communications, Technology and Innovation.

We are deeply honored to be here and warmly welcome all of the distinguished participants who have gathered for this very important event. Welcome to the High-Level Government Meeting. The Internet is the engine of today's societies, economies and cultures, as it facilitates global commerce, bridges divides and offers unparalleled opportunities for growth and connection. It drives business and provides access to education.

At the heart of our discussions today is the principle of multi-stakeholderism and internet governance. The active involvement of a diverse set of stakeholders, such as governments, the technical community, businesses, civil society, academia and others is essential for the technical operation of a single interoperable Internet. ICANN is an essential part of the technical community. The inclusive multi-stakeholder approach ensures that the internet remains equitable, transparent and adaptable to the evolving challenges of our digital age.

By working together, we can address these challenges with a collaborative spirit and innovative thinking they demand. ICANN has always been paying special attention to the African continent. And one of the many signs of our engagement is the successful Coalition for Digital Africa. This High-Level Government Meeting serves as an excellent opportunity for the participating governments to discuss important issues related to the development of the Internet.

The High-Level Government Meetings are a forum for direct dialogue with ICANN's board and senior executives, as well as a broader ICANN

community on important policy issues, allowing governments to address pressing concerns and collaborate on solutions that benefit all people. These interactions guarantee that the decisions taken at ICANN reflect the needs and interests of all countries, thus promoting a more inclusive and efficient model directly affecting and benefiting the people they serve. Once again, I deeply appreciate your attendance and involvement. I look forward to our discussions today and the valuable insights that will emerge from this meeting. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you, Tripti. Lastly, please welcome Mr. Nicolas Caballero, Chair of the Governmental Advisory Committee.

NICOLAS CABALLERO:

Thank you, Baher. Ladies and gentlemen, honorable ministers, distinguished delegates, and esteemed colleagues, as we convene in the spirited city of Kigali for this High-Level Government Meeting, it is my privilege to welcome you on behalf of the GAC and the ICANN community. We gather here under the auspices of ICANN's enduring commitment to the development of the Internet. We are also here under the auspices of ICANN's enduring commitment to a unified and secure global internet to build upon the foundations laid at our last HLG meeting in Barcelona back in 2018. There, we affirmed our dedication to a multi-stakeholder model that champions inclusivity, transparency, and collaboration.

Today, we stand at the Pivotal Juncture where the digital landscape is rapidly evolving and our resolve is tested. Our agenda for this HLG is ambitious, reflecting the urgency of the tasks at hand and the complexity of the challenges we face. Our first session will delve into the essence of ICANN and the multi-stakeholder model. This model, unique in its structure, has been the bedrock of our success, fostering an environment where diverse voices of the domain name system.

It is imperative that we continue to enhance its effectiveness, ensuring that it remains relevant, adaptive, and resilient in the face of emerging global trends. In our second session, we will explore cooperation and governance within the ICANN ecosystem. The integrity of our operation hinges on robust cooperation among governments, private sector entities, and civil society.

We must reinforce our commitment to a governance structure that is equitable and accountable, one that upholds the public interest while navigating the intricacies of Internet governance. The third session will address the critical issue of digital inclusion. As stewards of the Internet, it is our responsibility to bridge the digital divide to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to access and benefit from the digital economy. This is not merely an aspiration, but a necessity for fostering global economic growth and social equity.

Our fourth and final session will focus on supporting the development of meaningful connectivity in Africa. Connectivity is not just about access, it is about empowering individuals with the tools and skills to participate fully in the digital world. We must work collaboratively to

advance the pillars of meaningful connectivity, speed, affordability, and digital literacy, thus unlocking the immense potential of Africa's vibrant economies.

As we embark on these discussions, let us be guided by the spirit of cooperation that has always been the hallmark of our community. Let us be bold in our vision, steadfast in our purpose, and collaborative in our approach. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the local hosts, the Rwandan government, Mr. Charles Gahungu, Rwanda GAC representative, the honorable Minister Paula Ingabire, Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, and Innovation of the Republic of Rwanda, and their teams for their gracious hospitality and commendable efforts in organizing this meeting.

I also wish to express my profound appreciation to all of you, distinguished secretaries, ministers, and vice ministers who have traveled from near and far to lend your voice and expertise to these critical deliberations. In closing, I reiterate my warm welcome to each of you. Together, let us forge a path towards a more inclusive, secure, and prosperous digital future for all. Thank you very much.

BAHERESMAT:

Thank you, Nicholas. Thank you to all our speakers for your enlightening perspectives. Before we move to the first session of the day, we would like to take this opportunity to capture a couple of group photos. So first, I'd like to invite the ministers, the GAC chair, the ICANN chair of the board, and the ICANN interim president and CEO to the stage for a group photo. Okay, please remain on the stage.

I'd like now to invite all speakers and heads of delegations to join us on the stage. Speakers and heads of delegations. Thank you.

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