ICANN81 | AGM – Middle East Space
Thursday, November 14, 2024 – 13:15 to 14:30 TRT

SEHER SAGIROGLU: Hello and welcome to Middle East Space Session. My name is Seher Sagiroglu Ayhan and I am the participation manager for this session. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior and ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy.

During the session, questions or comments will only be read aloud if submitted within the Q&A part. Interpretation for this session will include English, Arabic. If you'd like to speak during this session, please raise your hand in Zoom. When called upon, virtual participants will be given permission to unmute in Zoom. On-site participants will use a physical microphone to speak. Please state your name for the record and the language you will speak. If speaking language other than English, speak at a reasonable pace. I will now hand the floor over to Middle East Space Chair, Amine Hasha.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you, Seher. This is Amine for the record. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the ICANN Middle East Space session. It's a privilege for me to join the session with you where we gather to connect, collaborate, and shape the future of the digital landscape in our region. I would like to extend my thanks to our Middle East regional staff for their support. Thank you, Seher. Thank you, Baher. Thank you, Fahad,

for your support. I want thank everyone joining us remotely. My sincere gratitude to my fellow co-chair, Layal Jebran. Thanks for her for collaborating all the time with me. It's essential to have a dedicated space like this where our voice, idea, and input can be shared. We are grateful to ICANN for providing this additional platform for us. We'll continue on our agenda. Suppose that Layal will be online with us. Is she online? She joined us? Not yet. We will come back to Layal when she joins us online. I will give now the speech to Baher, please.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you, Amine, and welcome, everyone. I'm Bahar Esmat, for the record. Welcome to our Middle East space in Istanbul. This is our first in-person space session since ICANN resumed in-person meetings post-COVID. So, it's very nice to have this first session in Istanbul as part of our Middle East region. So I'd like to start by thanking our co-chairs, Amine and Layal, for the incredible work they have been doing, not only for this session, but over the past almost year and a half.

We've held at least a couple of space sessions online and I'd like to acknowledge their efforts. I would also like to acknowledge efforts made by all community members from the Middle East who made contributions, very valuable contributions over the past year or so, including the preparation for this session. I know there will be a statement to be discussed and I know that many of you have contributed to this statement.

So, the two topics we have on the agenda today are extremely important, important for ICANN, important for our region. As you know,

we're going to discuss the Applicant Support Program and the DNS Abuse Mitigation. Both topics are highlighted, like the next round of New gTLDs as well as DNS abuse are both highlighted as part of the ICANN strategic plan. So, it's both our priorities for the organization as well as for our engagement efforts here in the Middle East. So, we do look forward to the discussion on both topics and I would encourage everyone to engage in the discussion. Feel free to express your views.

I would also like to acknowledge that we do have participants online as well and I would encourage them as well to take part in our discussion today. Also to note that we have English and Arabic interpretation. So, anyone would like to speak in Arabic, please feel free to do so. So, without further ado, I think I'm going to hand it over back to Amine. I'm not sure if, is Layal online?

AMINE HACHA: Yes, I think she's now online.

BAHER ESMAT: Okay, so back to you, Amine.

AMINE HACHA: Okay, thank you, Baher. Is Layal now online? Okay, Layal, the floor is for you.

LAYAL JEBRAN: Hi, everyone, can you hear me?

SEHER SAGIROGLU: Yes, Layal, please proceed, thank you.

LAYAL JEBRAN: Hi, first of all, I wish I was there. I'm pretty sure Amine, Baher, Seher and Fahad are doing a great job with the ME space and everybody else attending. I want to thank you for being there. I also want to thank everyone for the support we've been getting as co-chairs for the last two years from the ICANN Middle East team and from the space itself. And for everybody who's been helping us organize these sessions and contributing to the content, to the agendas and everything else. That being said, and I'm not going to repeat what Bahar just mentioned, we have an agenda today that we're going to discuss.

I want everyone to take into consideration that this agenda will not just be discussed here, this agenda will be taken forward. So I want everyone from the start to think in a way where what is it that you feel you can contribute to, you can be part of a working group on to start contacting me and Amine and the Middle East ICANN team and sign up for, let's say, working groups as we are aiming at expanding the work, not just into the sessions in the ICANN meetings and the usual webinars, but into a more actively working group, working groups of Middle East spaces where we can actually get some stuff done and at some point get recommendations out from the region. Amine, back to you.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you, Layal. I would like to, in the name of the Middle East space to welcome Sally between us. And I will give her the floor. Sally, you don't need to be introduced. You are our ICANN president and so I would like to welcome you.

SALLY COSTERTON: Thank you very much. And thank you very much for inviting me to this session. This group has always done such important work and I know you're continuing that at this meeting. I wanted to just briefly reflect on the work in relation to the Applicant Support Program. And I know that you are talking about this in this particular meeting and you're also discussing DNS abuse. So, I'm just going to specifically focus on the first one in my brief comments. But I want you to know that these are both critical topics at ICANN. They are taking up quite rightly so, a great deal of time and energy from our staff team as well as the community. And I think that they will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Now, we understand that applying to operate a top-level domain to become a registry can be expensive and feel out of reach for many organizations. And the Applicant Support Program is designed to make this process easier. And the fees involve more accessible to entities, to organizations who may want to operate a new top-level domain, a gTLD, but they feel they can't because of either financial or other barriers, other restraints.

And just to give you, I think you probably know this, but I'll just touch on some of the key criteria. So, supported applicants will be eligible to receive access to pro bono. This is a very, this is a Latin term. But of

course, it means free. Pro bono means that the time is given free. So, I don't want there to be any confusion about what pro bono means.

They do not pay for it. And the people providing it are not paid. They are, it is voluntary contribution. Training and other resources and a 75 to 85% reduction in the fees. So, we will do everything we can, and I'm looking at my colleagues here and they're spending an enormous amount of time on this, to make sure that those services are as broad as possible. So, that those applicants feel that we're helping them, that we're supporting them, and that we're doing everything we can to get them to the point where they can make a decision about what they want to do, and that they have a good chance of being successful if they apply.

And this, Tajani, I can see you in the room and I'm thinking about what you said in the public forum, if anybody else probably was there and heard it. You talked about the criticality of making sure that not just people apply, but that they apply successfully, because you talked about the first round.

And our thinking has been driven very strongly by the learnings that we had 10 years ago, 12 years ago, and trying to do everything we can to focus on the early stages of bringing applicants into the system, so that they've really had a proper chance to understand what's involved and whether they really want to do this. Because even if you provide resourcing to get people through an application, they've got to be successful, and that's a long-term commitment.

And it isn't in anybody's interests, least of all them, to kind of create a false encouragement, if you like, that people should apply, and then actually on the other side, they discover that being a registry is not what they thought, and that they, what we say in ICANN, they hand the keys back. They come back to us and say, I don't want to do this anymore.

This is not the purpose of this, and that's not what we're trying to do. Now, we're going to open the application window. We're expecting to open it on, that means we'll announce that it is now open on the 19th of November, so next week, and ASP applicants will be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

The first applicants to apply will be the first to take advantage of the available resources, but the Board has said multiple times, including in the dialogue with the GAC, that they will continue to evaluate as the applications come in, whether they feel there are sufficient applications coming from underrepresented groups and underrepresented geographies, and if all, there are many, many applications, and of course, we have no way of knowing how many there will be.

But if we feel like we're hitting the ceiling on the funding resources, the Board will find additional resources, and they've been consistent about that for the last two or three months in terms of the messaging, so I think in this group in particular, I know you will want to know that, and you will want to feel confident, and I know that that's very genuine, and I anticipate, I mean, it was a nice problem to have, should we put it that way around. It does allow more entrepreneurs, more businesses, communities around the world to apply.

Engagement and Outreach are very, very high tempo now, including through our regional team here, led for your region by Behar, but through the world, we have global communication starting next month, we have a lot of regional outreaches, and as many of you will know, because many of you have been involved, this is very tactical as well. I mean, we are reaching country by country to lots of stakeholder groups that don't know us. They don't know anything, maybe even about a domain name, like can I be at Registry? Why would I even want this?

So, this is a big lift to get out to people who don't know what they don't know, and we have to use all our networks, all our relationships, all our partners with the GAC members, with the at-large to make sure that where possible, we are really addressing the opportunity to talk to those underrepresented groups and try and bring them in.

So the handbook and engagement materials are now available, and they will be translated into our core languages, and as I said in my comments in the public forum, if anybody would like them to be in other languages and you have a volunteer in the community who would like to translate those materials, then let us know, the promotional materials, and we've talked about the fund having up to $5 million from the 2012 auction proceeds fund following the Board resolution. So hopefully you have everything you need, and of course, we are always here to answer any questions.

If there's anything you're not comfortable with, if there's anything that you're concerned about, please keep talking to us about that. We're all trying to do the same thing, and this is such a big opportunity for us, but

I was going to say it takes a village. I think it takes a bit more than a village, but it's going to take all of us to be really focused on how do we bring those people in, how do we feel proud as we get through the next two or three years that we see those come to fruition, and those people are at ICANN meetings even maybe, and they're new members in our contracted party's house.

That would be wonderful. Thank you. I'm sorry I'm afraid I have to leave because this is the downside about this job. These schedules get packed, but I wish you a very fruitful meeting, and I hope to see some of you before the end of today. Thank you very much.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you, Sally, for your attendance and your speech, and now we'll move forward, and we'll start with the first topics, which will be about New gTLD Applicant Support Program for diversity in the domain name industry. I will give now the speech to Tijani to lead this part of the session.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Thank you. Thank you, Amine. You know, the 2012 round Applicant Support Program failed 100% despite the fact that we had $2 million to help up to 14 applicants, but we received only three and none were supported. So, this round was intended to be a remedial one for this reason, so that we will have diversity in the DNS industry. What happened is that in the Applicant Support Program this time, we have noticed two main issues. The first one is that this Applicant Support

Program will not bring geographic diversity, or even if it will bring it, it will be very few new applicants from these underserved regions, because the program was made in this way.

The entries, I spoke about that in the public forum, the entries don't speak about regions at all, but I was told that they can apply through here or through here, but everyone can apply for any entry. So, there is one community which was given a full entry, and otherwise there is no other entries, specific entries for the underserved regions and underserved communities. So, the program will not, in our point of view, give the regional diversity inside the DNS industry.

The second main point is that the program will be launched next week, and the outreach is just beginning. We feel that it is too late for that. We should, we had to do it earlier, much earlier, so that people will be aware of the program and will be able to apply. Since the program is made on the, the evaluation will be made on the first come, first served.

So you have better to apply from the beginning, and if we didn't do the outreach earlier, most of the underserved regions, underserved communities will not be aware of it and will not apply, and when they will be aware that there will be Applicant Support Program, it will be, they will apply, but perhaps it will be too late because we already had the number that will exhaust the fund that we have dedicated for it. So, these are the two main issues that we saw. You will see it in our statement. Hadia, if you want, if you have something to add to what I said.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: Thank you, Tijani. I think you covered almost everything. I would just like to maybe point out, focus more on awareness and outreach prior to the launch of the program, and the program is about to launch in a week, and the other thing that I would like also to highlight is long-term operational or financial support. So, I don't know how much this is possible, but maybe through the grant program. So, one of the things we discussed was some kind of long-term operational or financial support for applicants, for successful applicants.

So, for example, we could introduce mechanisms for continued financial support beyond the initial application phase, especially for applicants from less developed economies, such as a phased funding model where financial support is provided at some key milestones. For example, additional grants could be provided during initial operation setup or for promotional activities. This could happen through opening up the grant program to support subsequent operational costs for successful applicants.

One more thing, also we discussed, two more things we discussed was, I think Sally covered already one of them, where she said that if we have more successful applicants then the Board could raise the figure that's put for the, that's allocated for support. I think that's it. Thank you.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: One more thing, if I may, we also discussed, I think the pro bono and the pro bono services. And this is more of an invitation to people from our region to apply to become pro bono providers because we think it is important to have local pro bono service providers. Thank you.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Thank you. We have among us Kristy, who is in charge of the sub-track, IRT sub-track on ASP. I would like to commend her because she did everything to make the program successful, but she's bound by the policy that was developed before and the implementation cannot go out of the policies. So, I will give her the floor to explain more. Thank you.

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Thank you so much Tijani and thank you everyone for inviting me here today to speak. As Tijani mentions, my name is Kristy Buckley and I serve as the lead for the Next Rounds Applicant Support Program. I apologize for the 20 or so links that I've already put in the chat as the conversation has been going on. I realize that it's a lot of information to digest. So maybe I'll just speak to some of those resources that are available. So, the first one, actually just picking up on Hadia's comments there, I just posted recently is the announcement. Actually, maybe I'll just pull these up. I think I have sharing capabilities. Am I able to share screen? Oh, there we go.

So, this just shows you the recent announcement, which I put in the chat that ICANN is in fact seeking pro bono service providers. That just

means volunteer or free professional service providers, as well as mentors to help support applicants. These will be available to all gTLD applicants, but we are asking pro bono service providers to prioritize applicants that qualify for support. And they will have a letter that shows that indeed they qualified for support. You can see here in the announcement that we have broken down into the types of services that we're seeking from general business services to application services, technical services, as well as mentorship. So, this is for individuals that want to more informally guide or mentor applicants.

So, this registration is already up. I'm really pleased to say that we have already seen as of yesterday, 158 clicks to register and 33 providers have already registered to provide support. So, this is fantastic because this has only been open for about a week. We've been socializing it more here at ICANN 81, and we would very much appreciate any additional support that you can do in sharing this with your networks. The next piece that I wanted to follow up on is just what Sally mentioned. Let me just see, I've got the right window here.

So, as you might recall, during ICANN80, the GAC issued advice about the Applicant Support Program. There were concerns about the sort of first come, first serve nature of the program. The reason why it's designed in this way is a couple of things. So, one, it opens next Tuesday to receive applications for support. The application submission period will be open for 12 months. And so even though some of the communications, outreach and engagement efforts have just recently started, the idea is that that awareness raising will continue over the

applicant support submission period so that more people, they don't find out about it and they realize that the window has already closed.

There's still more time for them to apply. So, we have a very long runway for people to apply to the program. And the reason why we've opened it 18 months prior to the gTLD application submission period is to allow applicants plenty of time to access all of the available supports, the pro bono service providers, mentors, as well as the capacity development program and training that ICANN.org will offer. So, we are encouraging all applicants to apply as early as they can because as soon as they qualify, they will have access to these additional materials that can then inform a strong gTLD application.

So, you'll see here that there was a compromise between the Board and the GAC just saying that ICANN.org will share monthly reporting on the geographic distribution of ASP applications that we're receiving so that everyone can monitor where our application's coming from. And we'll also be monitoring which applicants are qualifying from which regions.

The Board and the GAC have also agreed to at the 20 marks, so after 20 applicants qualify for support, that they will take a look back and see what was the geographic distribution of those 20 applicants and do we need to do anything differently for the communications outreach and engagement or is there additional funding that may be needed because the demand for this program is higher than we originally anticipated.

So, just wanted to point you to this agreement between the Board and the GAC. This was the compromise and I did paste this link in the chat earlier. I also wanted to share a little bit more about the funding

program. So, with the ASP IRT, which Tijani you are a member of, a few months ago we shared a slide deck about the package of support and the applicant support funding plan. So, our total budget for ASP is between 10 to $16 million.

The reason why it's a range is because the volume of ASP applicants is unknown, the exact costs of the gTLD program evaluation fees were unknown at the time. Also, we want to maintain flexibility around the negotiations that we might have with vendors. But what you'll see here in regards to the comment, I think it's in the draft statement around long-term operational or financial support is that ICANN has proposed that for supported applicants that become registry operators, there is a reduced base registry agreement fee for the first three years that they are in operation.

And you see here on the slide, a graduated scale over which the base registry agreement fee would increase over time. So, this is in keeping with the supplemental policy recommendation 17.2, which was issued by the GNSO Small team Plus, indicating that they wanted to see an expanded scope of support for ASP applicants that become registry operators.

I wanted to see if there's anything else. Ah, so very exciting news. I don't know how many of you might have caught this before traveling to Istanbul, but we also recently issued a blog about additional resources that are available to help ASP applicants prepare their application. So, I'll just quickly touch upon some of these resources so you can have a look, one of which is the ASP Quick Start Guide. These materials were

presented during the Sunday GAC session on the next round. I don't think the slide deck is posted yet, but hopefully soon so you can see those slides.

In those slides, you'll see that we include mention of this Quick Start Guide. This is really intended to be an easy entry point for people that want to learn more about the program, because we know that even though the ASP handbook is published and it's been approved by the Board and it's available in all of the ICANN languages, it's still a handbook and it's still 70 pages long, which is maybe not the easiest entry point for a lot of people. So, this Quick Start Guide is really intended to provide answers to very high-level questions of what's the purpose of this program? What are the benefits? Which organizations are eligible? How do I apply?

It also links to an applicant checklist, which provides a line-by-line items of all of the documentation that applicants will need to prepare their application. We also have published an ASP application system user guide. So, recognizing that the ASP application is online and it is an online portal in a system, we created this user guide to help people understand how to access the system. It provides screenshots on how to log in, how to register, how to answer the questions. It provides more detailed instructions of that system.

This system user guide is available in all of the ICANN languages. Following the conversation with the GAC earlier this week, we are working on translating the applicant checklist as well as the quick start guide as well. So, I think that covers all of the main things I wanted to

tell you about. Oh, one last thing. I'm not joined here, but we do have an amazing applicant readiness team as part of ICANN. And they have been extremely instrumental in developing some of these applicant readiness materials for the Applicant Support Program.

We're working very closely with that team because they're focused on all sort of gTLD applicant readiness materials, including what does it take to become a registry operator? How do you negotiate with an RSP? How do you determine how to work that relationship? What do I need to know to apply for a gTLD? What can I expect when I do apply? What is a contention set? You know, just sort of helping people understand what this process is about and providing very accessible materials for them to learn more.

So, I just wanted to let you know that that team is working with us, and we hope that they'll continue to help us develop ASP applicant readiness materials as well. Happy to answer any questions that you might have, but I just wanted to share those additional materials. Thank you so much.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Thank you, Kristy. Any questions for Kristy? If there is no question, we'll pass to the second part of this meeting, and I hand the floor to the chair, Mr. Amine.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you, Tijani. Thank you, Kristy. I want to mention that the statement we already shared in the mailing list ten days ago, and we

distributed some copies around the table, and it will be open for the coming week if anyone of the community wants to put any input before we publish the final copy online. I want to thank the working group who helped us state this draft. We have Tijani, we have Adiel, we have Wafa and Omar. And now we will move to the second topics, and it will be about DNS abuse mitigation.

I want to thank the chair of the Security and Stability Advisory Committee to be with us. I know how you are dedicated and very helpful when we need you. You have at the same time a closed meeting of SSAC, and you left them as a chair and come to deliver your speech between us. The floor for you. Thank you, Ram.

RAM MOHAN: Thank you so much, thank you for inviting me here. I had originally had some slides, but instead I'll just chat a little bit and perhaps have a conversation with you, so we don't need these slides at all. So, the Security and Stability Advisory Committee, most of you know who we are and what we do. You can forget the slides. You can go back. We don't need the slides at all.

So, we come from a technical background. We come from a technical perspective, and when we speak on a lot of these topics, our focus attempts to be driven by data and by analysis of the data. In some cases where we don't have data, but we do have the power of experience, we will provide our opinions, but we will generally say these are the opinions of the experts who are in the Security and Stability Advisory Committee.

The committee itself consists of experts pulled from around the world. At the start of this year, it was mostly experts who came from North America and Europe. We are in the process of expanding that. We now have two members who are from Africa. We still have nobody from the Latin American region, but from the Middle Eastern region, we are also pleased to have several members join us this year in the SSAC, so that's a very positive thing.

AMINE HACHA: Including the co-chair of this group.

RAM MOHAN: That's correct. There are five topics that the SSAC really not only cares about, but wants to be a very clear voice in our community. Of those five topics, topic number one is DNS abuse. Topic number two is new GTLDs, and in the new gTLDs, we've already provided some advice with respect to name collisions. Again, our focus is on the technical security stability aspects of it.

The third topic is DNSSEC. We have been longstanding proponents of DNSSEC, and so we're focused in that area. The fourth topic that we care about are emerging and alternate namespaces. There's a lot of development that is happening in this area, and it's not just namespaces, but evolving technologies. There's development happening in the blockchain space, there's been some discussions here. There are also some developments happening with respect to

artificial intelligence, especially as it intersects with the DNS and the infrastructure systems that we have.

Finally, we are also engaged and want to remain engaged with the security, stability, and resiliency aspects of internet governance. In that final area, our desire is to help inform policymakers as they go about making policy. One of the things that we have observed is that sometimes policymakers feel a strong desire to create rules, to create regulations, but sometimes the desire to create it is not well informed by technical information, by technical data. Our desire is to help them provide that technical grounding and give them the background that allows them to make good policy.

Now, back to DNS abuse. At this meeting, we were presenting in a few forums, we were presenting not the views of the SSAC itself, but some of our expert members who have started to look at the impact of AI on DNS abuse. Let me spend just five minutes speaking to that. Unlike other areas of technology and the social world that we are in, where AI is being heavily hyped and everybody is saying AI is going to change everything, what so far, we are finding with respect to DNS abuse is that AI has not actually changed the nature of the threats, the nature of the foundation, the core of the problem. The core of the motivations behind DNS abuse are still, generally you can categorize them into a few areas. The biggest area is money.

The people who are engaging in criminality and abusing the DNS for bad purposes, the biggest reason they're doing it is because it makes them a lot of money. An anecdotal example for you, a domain name that is

used successfully in phishing. What do you imagine that domain name costs? Anybody have a guess? What does a domain name that is used in phishing, what do you think it costs? Someone venture a guess? $10. Yeah, that's fair.

Let's say it's an expensive domain, let's say it's $100. The value of a phish that is successful, the value of one phish is $20,000. If you look at the imbalance between the impact of the abuse and the cost of the abuse, it's huge. That is a foundational core of the DNS abuse place. There's a lot of money to be made if you know how to abuse the system properly. Good criminals make good money. The second evolving reason inside of DNS abuse is geopolitics.

There's shifting geopolitics and you have various reasons for which you can mount a DDoS attack or you can mount some kind of attack that focuses on the DNS as an attack vector. One of our members in his research has found, Lauren Weisinger, what he has found is that the kind of threats that come from DNS abuse have not significantly changed because of AI, but what has changed is AI is now allowing for the phishes, the emails that come to you, to be beautifully done.

They look just like the real thing. Before, when you got a phish, you could look at it and say, oh, there's a spelling mistake, some grammar is wrong, the logo is not loading correctly. There are problems like that. With AI, it is absolutely identical.

It's very hard as a human being to differentiate between an AI-generated phish versus the real email. That's one thing that is changing. The other thing that is changing is security researchers, when

they were fighting abuse, especially with domain names being used for abuse, they would look at patent recognition. They would say, are there 10,000 names that have been registered by the same registrant? Are there a lot of names that come from the same IP address? Do they have the same technical details and name servers, things like that? Are they identical? Those types of information used to be provided as clues to say, this is probably suspicious.

These names should probably be flagged and taken down. With AI, it is now possible to automate it in such a way that you can create 10,000 names, each one to a different registrant, each one at a different registrar, each one with a different IP address, each one with different host names, each one with even the phish being individualized. What's really happening with AI and DNS abuse is the scale and the volume and the frequency of it is really dramatically increasing. That's one of the things that has been noticed.

The other positive thing with AI is that researchers are seeing that you can deploy AI to actually catch the AI-generated phish. It's good AI to catch bad AI. That's early evolving, but that's what's happening. The real takeaway on DNS abuse is, as SSAC, we are keenly interested. In terms of emerging technologies, what one of our members is noticing is that AI is poised to really increase volume and frequency. What it means for us here in the ICANN community is that we have to really focus on taking these names down as soon as you find them, because the volume and the frequency is very high.

That's the job that has to be really focused on and worked with, because humans are going to find it more and more difficult to distinguish between something aimed specifically at them versus the real thing. Those really are my comments. I'll hand it back to you.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you, Ram. I will give now the speech to Adiel, Vice President of Technical Engagement at ICANN. Please.

ADIEL AKPLOGAN: Thank you very much. I'm happy to be here representing the Technical Engagement and Technical Research part of ICANN, the office of the CTO. The office of the CTO actually looks into researching different aspects of the security stability of the DNS as a service when it comes to ICANN mission, but also look at the identifier system in general.

We have the research that look at those aspects, but we also have the engagement part that takes some of the finding of those work out there to the community, but also provide capacity building, outreach, and support to the community in terms of implementing some of the best practices important for keeping and maintaining a stable global DNS infrastructure. I think that in the request, there are two points that you are interested in from what we are doing in Octo. The first one is about INFERMAL, and the second one is about the SIFT.

We'll touch on INFERMAL a little bit, which is one of the research projects that has been committed by the office of the CTO to an external researcher to look at and analyze the future of malicious domain

registration. Ram mentioned some aspect of that. What are the common futures that we can see in domain names that are registered to commit abuse, to commit attack? Is there anything that is common on the characteristic or the future behind the registration of those domain names? That is what INFERMAL is about, mainly. So, the researcher tried to identify some of the attributes that they can search for, like the price of the registration.

Is there a discount when it's bought at bulk, because more they have and they want to build their infrastructure, it costs them less. The payment methods that registrants use for registering the domain, if they have API access for registration or creating the account that is used, if the services behind the domain name is free, and so on and so forth. So, those different attributes were analyzed using some of the information about domain names that are used for malicious activities or could be used for malicious activities.

So, that's what INFERMAL is. They have completed their work and published their report. At this point, there is no really actionable action from what they have done, but it is an information that is put out there for the community. And most of the work that we do at OCTO actually meant to inform the community in general in the process of developing policy, improving policy, or looking at some of the issues in depth. So, this report has been published. There has been a presentation about that yesterday by the researcher, was very well received.

Unfortunately, there was not much time to have interaction after the presentation, but you can go back and listen to the presentation behind

this. Some findings were very interesting there, like the method of payment, cryptocurrency has been highlighted in some aspect of this, which favor some malicious registration of domain name. But what is also interesting is that it's not black and white.

It's not that all those features can be categorized automatically as maliciously used domain names. There are genuinely used of some of those features to register normal domain names. So, that's why the output and the outcome of this research is not to be taken in the absolute. So the report just came out, and the team is going to look at that. The community, we're expecting feedback from the community as well about all of these, and if there is anything that needs to be actionable based on that, that will be looked into. So, that's about INFERMAL.

I'll touch on SIFT quickly. So, SIFT is another initiative that we have launched about two years ago. It was based on a request from several people after our emerging identifier technology session we have at ICANN meeting to have a platform where the community can continue those discussions beyond the ICANN meeting, to be able to take some of those topics and dig them and discuss among them, so to come up with either subjects for research within OCTO or other avenue there.

So, it is an open platform. So, SIFT is for special interest forum for technology. We have launched it. It is actually a tool available for the community. It's not run by ICANN per se, but anyone can subscribe or request to open a specific SIFT on a specific topic. It can be on

measurement. It can be on blockchain naming system. It can be on abuse. Why not?

So, it is a platform that is there. If you are interested in starting a SIFT, a special interest forum, and have a mailing list to discuss that, you just need to contact us and we will put the infrastructure that is needed, which is mainly mailing lists. The goal here is not to create another event or such, but a mailing list that allow people who have interest on the topic to continue the discussion beyond the meeting that we have. So, that is it for the SIFT. If you want to hear more or follow what we do in OCTO, we have now revamped our page on ICANN website with more information. You can go down there and see area that you are interested in or contact us directly at OCTO@ICANN.org. That's it. Thank you.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you, Adiel. I will now ask, before I want to mention that we are lucky in the Middle East that we have in the SSAC a very energetic member from our region, the Middle East, like Hadia, Layal, and Nabil. I will give now to Hadia for two minutes.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: Thank you, Amine. This is Hadia for the record, and today I would like to highlight quickly two things. The first, the importance of differentiating between maliciously registered domain names and compromised domain names, and the second is the importance of differentiating between technical abuse and content abuse of domain

names. So, in mitigating DNS abuse, we need to ask ourselves, is the domain registered maliciously? So, to answer this question, you could visit the website and see if valuable and trustworthy content is available. You could also check the WHOIS database.

If the domain was registered only a few days before it was recognized as a harmful site, then a red flag should be going up. The other type of DNS abuse comes from domains that have been hacked. Domain names might have been registered legitimately. The website gets compromised to serve illegal content and phishing campaigns. The legitimate domain names are usually registered many years before, and the domain name is valid. The importance of actually making this differentiation is in actually tackling the abuse itself.

You do not want to victimize users that have already been victims to DNS abuse and that have been hacked. You also need to understand the level at which you are going to address this abuse, and research might say that percentage of abuses at the DNS level is much, much smaller than the number of abuses because of domains being abused at the website level. The second thing I would like to talk about is the differentiating between technical abuse and content abuse of domain names.

There could be some kind of difficulty in making a clear distinction between technical security and content-related security, and this is because, for example, phishing attacks often involve the use of both malicious domain registrations and harmful website content. Malware can take advantage of DNS vulnerabilities. Anyway, my point here, it is

important to identify the level at which the abuse has taken place in order to know the level at which you are going to address this abuse.

The other thing also we need to think about is who will be responsible for taking action. This is also another important thing that we need to think of. With that, I think I finished my two minutes. I thank you and give it back to you, Amine.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you, Hadia. Please, Layal.

LAYAL JEBRAN: So, we're wrapping up. I would like to thank everyone who has attended this and the speakers. Hadia, thank you very much.

AMINE HACHA: Layal, sorry, now we are listening to you to talk to us about the SSAC.

LAYAL JEBRAN: Oh, I'm sorry about that. I thought you sent me a message for the wrap-up.

AMINE HACHA: No problem. I know the connection is not very well in your space.

LAYAL JEBRAN: My connection is a bit off right now. Are you able to hear me also very well?

AMINE HACHA: Yes. Please, go on.

LAYAL JEBRAN: So I would first love to thank Hadia for mentioning this and Ram. One thing I would want to mention is not to add too much to what everyone has said is approach us in the Middle East. You have three representatives from the Middle East space who are in SSAC right now. Approach us, ask us questions, see if this is something that works for you, and let us know if we can help you identify whether this works for you or this is something you want to be part of and contribute to.

We would be more than willing to answer your questions and refer you to the right people within SSAC who can also answer your questions. I've been less than Hadia in SSAC just a few months now and I'm learning more than I thought I would. You go into SSAC and you find out there's so much you can learn and so much to know about and that's proven every day. So, just let us know how we can help and reach out and we're here to help.

AMINE HACHA: Okay, thank you Layal. And now we'll move to a question and answer. We will have around five, six, seven minutes related to anyone of you

who want to ask about the two topics or anything related to Middle East space. Also, if there are online question, we will listen to.

LAYAL JEBRAN: There is no online question. We can start in room and then we can continue.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you.

BASHAR AL-ABDULHADI: Thank you, Bashar Al-Abdulhadi from Kuwait. Touching base on the security topic about DNS abuse, I would like just to mention maybe, I mentioned it into the public forum today about the helping the registrants and protecting the abuse of the registrant details when it comes to our region. So, I'm not sure if it's part of the SSAC, but I just wanted to clarify if they would like to report such abuse for their domain name being stolen or their identity being forged, for example. Is it the right channel to go through SSAC or a different channel? Thank you.

AMINE HACHA: Please, Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: Okay, so I think the right, in my opinion, the right way to go through this is through ICANN complaints. And I do think also there are some

available abuse reporting sites, but I think you're talking about something different that needs to go through ICANN complaint. I'm not sure.

MERIKE KAEO: Hi, this is Merike Kaeo. I'm also a member of SSAC and Hadi is absolutely correct. Yeah, so the SSAC is more of we write advisories for how to handle things. But if you are experiencing abuse, then ICANN org has its own processes to where you complain to, or maybe even the registrar, right? Depending on whether or not you're a registrant or registrar.

I will also mention that the SSAC has created advisories. I mean, we have 127 of them or so. And some of them are also related to how, as somebody who is registering a domain name, you can protect yourself. So, I would recommend going through some of them and seeing which ones are relevant, or maybe Hadi and Leal can also help this community with that.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you. Layal, you want to modify?

LAYAL JEBRAN: No, there's nothing to add on ICANN's side when it comes to this kind of behavior online. But what I can say is first identify an identity. For example, let's say first identify what has been stolen. Has your identity been stolen, or is it the identity of a website that you created or a

product or whatever? And then decide which channels from there you need to go to. So, if it's something that ICANN can do, of course, Marika stated it very clearly. I can say it very well, and Hadia. Just go through the protocols and the standards that ICANN has. If it's something that is, let's say, your Facebook account has been compromised and your identity has been stolen and somebody's impersonating you, then that's something else completely, and you need to go through those entities' channels themselves if that helps.

AMINE HACHA: Please.

MERIKE KAEO: Yeah, just to say that actually the compliance department within ICANN are well-tooled to help you through that, and I think Jimmy mentioned this today during the public forum. So, feel free to contact him and his team. They will support in that case.

AMINE HACHA: Please, Tijani.

TIJANI BEN JEMAA: Yes, in my opinion, your contract as a registrant is with the registrar. So, the first thing to do is to go to the registrar and make complaint there. And the registrar, if he can solve the problem, if it is only a website of the domain who is doing this trouble, he can address that there. If it is

not, he has to go to the registry, and the registry can address things related to the domain.

The compliance service here in ICANN will help, of course, but it is not the faster way to solve the problem, in my opinion. Coming back to Adiel and Ram, they both spoke about malicious domain. But I am afraid there is sometimes not the domain who is malicious. There is perhaps one user of it, one website who is doing trouble. So, we don't have to run and cut, shut down the domain, because you are making trouble for other users of the domain. We have only to address the source of the problem. Thank you.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you, Tijani. Any more questions, please?

BASHAR AL-ABDULHADI: Thank you, Bashar Al-Abdulhadi, just for the record. Just to clarify, I'm not sure if this is the right space to mention, but we have reached to the registrar and the registry and ICANN, the three channels, and it wasn't resolved. That's why I'm trying maybe through SSAC or other supporting communities that helps with the policies to help to take down, maybe set a policy or enforcement, which I mentioned today in the forum, maybe an enforcement on the registrar's registries and maybe more proactive ICANN compliance team to take down these kinds of activities.

Just for the courtesy, I am an ICANN registrar myself and operator for the government of Kuwait for example. There are some activities that

are done from Kuwait that are just sitting next to me, that they are more proactive on ccTLD sometimes other than bigger registries. So, if you reach out to a multi-million domain names registry, they would not care about one domain.

That's why I thought mentioning this on a public space to push more the, let's say, security groups or the policy group to enforce some policies, or the policies could be there, because they are channels to submit the compliant, but it's not been actively taken down. I've been involved personally in one of the cases, and it's been almost six months, and the website's still there up and running. Not the registrar, nor the registry, nor ICANN has actually taken an action. That's why I wanted to mention it. I know the channels, I've been following the channels because I'm a registrar myself, but unfortunately, the larger the registrar becomes, the least they care about small minority community or country. Thank you.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you. We have a question online.

LAYAL JEBRAN: Yes, thank you. I mean, we have Hosein Badran. Hosein, please go ahead.

AMINE HACHA: Ah, he's here. Okay, sorry.

HOSEIN BADRAN: Yes, thank you so much. Raised my hand before, but wasn't seen. No problem, thank you. I had a question regarding the domain dispute issue, and then regarding the new gTLD program as well. Ram mentioned before he left that AI can be used really as a tool on the negative side to create malicious domains and domain abuse, but also on the positive side to mitigate, identify, then mitigate the issue.

My question is, would the decision be left only to the AI to take down domains immediately once the system has identified them, or be a human being in the loop to oversee what the machine learning algorithm has identified and then make a decision, take it down or not? That's my first question.

My second question regarding the new gTLD program and the support, particularly the support side. I was fortunate enough to be selected among the first SARP group to be part of the evaluation committee for the first gTLD program back in 2012. We had applications from emerging economies, from developing countries, but unfortunately, many of these, most of these actually, the applications themselves were either incomplete or lacked significant content to make them pass the examination to go to the next step of a financial evaluation.

So I think it's very critically that we, beyond the part of the financial support, that we help the people who are intended to apply or have the intention to apply, once they're encouraged and once, they see the value, help them really submit something that is robust, that is complete, and would act on a par level with those coming from developed countries. Otherwise, the effort will not be actually very

valuable and then they can share the sympathy that was raised in the forum earlier today that developing countries not have the right opportunity to get gTLDs in this round. So, supporting the applications to be on an adequate level is, I think, very, very critical. Thank you.

MERIKE KAEO: Hi, this is Merike Kaeo again. When you're dealing with DNS abuse, one of the challenges is always that you don't want to cause an issue with legitimate businesses and legitimate needs, and I think with AI, there's certainly challenges by making sure that you do things effectively, and so I think before AI is going to be utilized to automate any kind of takedown, there's going be an evolution, right, and understanding humans are going to be in the middle to make some decisions until you have a reasonable certainty that you meet 100% of the requirements.

I was going to say 99.999, but that's not really good enough, right, when you want to make sure that you don't impact legitimate businesses. So, it's going to be an evolution, but we have to recognize that because DNS abusers use AI, right, of course the tools that are going to be developed to mitigate are also going to be using machine learning and building AI tools that hopefully will automate so that you also don't have the false positives. So that is the hope for the future.

KRISTY BUCKLEY: Thanks very much for your question. This is Kristy Buckley for The Record. So, I think what you're speaking to is really focused on gTLD applicant readiness. So, we know that supported applicants will need

additional training, capacity development, and in fact, we're working on developing a program for supported applicants that qualify to build their capacity to apply for a gTLD.

In addition to that, the readiness team at ICANN is also working on materials and a sort of curriculum of what are the learning objectives and what are the materials that gTLD applicants and prospective registry operators will need to know and understand in order to effectively apply for and manage a registry operation. So, we are working on it. I don't know if that fully answers your question, but if you have additional ideas of what resources would be valuable or helpful, please don't hesitate to let us know. Thanks.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you. We will take the last question from Maysa, please.

MAYSSAM SABRA: Thank you, Amine. My name is Mayssam. Actually, it's my first time attending the Middle East Space Discussion, and I'm not aware of what has been discussed before in your previous sessions. However, I'm curious to know about what role education and awareness play in addressing DNS abuse in the Middle East region, and if there are some initiatives that are being implemented to inform stakeholders about best practices. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT: Thank you for the question. This is Baher Esmat for the record. So, from the ICANN org side, we have a team dedicated to developing education material about this topic, DNS abuse. They do share this material during public events, whether online events like webinars or in-person events. Here in the region, we've discussed the topic in different format. We held webinars.

We went to and met with regulators. We met with stakeholders from the business sector, from law enforcement, from academia on this topic. It was and it has been a topic on the Middle East DNS Forum agenda for quite some time. So, there are various channels to the materials there, and there are various channels to share the material. So, we'll be happy to maybe take this offline and discuss further with you how you want to take it from here. Thank you.

AMINE HACHA: Thank you, Baher. Before we move to the closing remark with Layal, I want to tell you that to invite you after the session for a photo group of the Middle East space. Please, Layal, you can make the closing remark.

LAYAL JEBRAN: Yes, thank you, Amine. Thank you, everyone, specifically the working groups, the ICANN Middle East staff, Kristy, Sally, Tijani, Adel, and Hadia also for your contributions. If I missed anyone, forgive me. I want to thank everyone for their efforts throughout the previous period for the ICANN meeting. And I hope that we all work together on making these meetings even more proactive, more beneficial for the Middle East.

And I look forward to everyone actually reaching out to us after this and initiating the conversation on what do you want us to discuss and take into consideration in the next meetings and the next sessions that we usually have online. If you know anyone who should join the Middle East space also reach out to them, let them subscribe to the mailing list and we're here to help. Thank you. Have a good day, everyone.

AMINE HACHA: Okay. Thank you, Layal. Just a few seconds to Baher, please.

BAHER ESMAT: Yeah, thank you. Just a quick announcement because Sammy reminded me, although it's not publicly announced yet, but the Middle East DNS Forum in 2025 will be in Bahrain towards end of April. Stay tuned for more details about the event, but Sammy, our local host, just reminded me to share the information with everyone here. Thank you, Sammy.

AMINE HACHA: Okay. Thank you again all for your attendance. Sorry if we didn't follow some question, but we'll continue our discussion. The Middle East space is open for all to share and to listen to each other. Thank you again. Let's have our photo group, please.

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